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Investigating cybercrime amongst female students in Saudi Arabia and identifying how social work can respond to the challenges

By

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Abstract

Existing literature has suggested that there is a need for Saudi Arabia's social work sector to address cybercrime against women as an emerging social issue. Cybercrime has been steadily rising in Saudi Arabia, and studies have shown that young women are more likely to be the victims. There are, however, this study is the first qualitative study that explore the issue of cybercrime in Saudi Arabia from the perspective of both social workers and the people that they support.

This study therefore offers a contribution to the existing literature by critically investigating the role social workers in the university context play, in supporting female students with cybercrime. The research used an interpretative qualitative approach, conducting 30 semi-structured interviews with 15 female social worker participants, and 15 female student participants. The results of the study found that cybercrime against young women was very common, yet few of the students had sought out the help of social workers. The research identified that one of the most significant barriers to young female students seeking out the help of social workers in cybercrime related issues, was a fear of shame or familial punishment. The study also explored how the nature of social work in Saudi Arabia is shaped by the culture and origins for the country This has implications for both young women encountering cybercrime and highlights limitations of ethical and effective social work practice as it is experienced in Saudi

Arabia at present. The study also sought to explore how these findings could be applied to wider Saudi Arabian society, particularly in relation to the topic of female agency and gender norms in Saudi Arabia. and how this information could be used to improve and solidify the social work profession in Saudi Arabia.

This study contributes to the emerging discourse on cybercrime in Saudi Arabia's cultural context and emphasises the importance of integrating social work perspectives and considering social differences in efforts to address this issue. Social work can have a crucial impact on protecting the welfare and rights of female students in today’s digital world.

I dedicate this thesis to my mother (Latifa Alduraibi), who has been my greatest inspiration and made countless sacrifices since my father died 20 years ago. Mom, your unwavering love, strength, and dedication have guided me through every step of this journey. Your support and encouragement mean the world to me.

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To the soul of my father. Dad, I miss you every day and wish you were here to share in this achievement. It is my hope that I have made you proud of your little daughter.

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List of Abbreviations

KSA – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

SA- Saudi Arabia

SW- Social workers

S- Female Students

CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION

1. Brief Overview of Cybercrime

1.1 Cybercrime on the Rise

Recent technological advancements have revolutionised societies multiple different levels, and according to recent statistics, from the beginning of April 2024, an estimated 5.44 billion people globally are using the internet, equivalent to 67.1% of the world's total population (Kemp, 2024). This represents an increase of almost 3 billion when compared with estimates from 2014, and an increase of 1 billion since 2020. Society's increased dependence on digital technologies has contributed to optimum conditions for the growth of cybercrime, which has evolved alongside digital technology (Tchweni-Buzzeo, et al., 2016). Cybercrime is an umbrella term that is generally used to refer to crimes that are carried out using the assistance of digital technologies and includes a wide range of activities such as hacking, fraud, piracy, cyberbullying, harassment and cyberstalking (Bossler and Berenblum, 2019). Beyond individuals who use smartphones for their own personal needs such as online shopping, governments, financial industries, and communication systems around the world are now dependent on digital technologies to function (Holt, 2016).

One area where this is particularly evident is how smartphones and social media have revolutionised how information is now shared between individuals. The messaging app WhatsApp is projected to

reach an estimated 3 billion unique users worldwide in 2024, which is an increase of around 1 billion since 2020 (Ceci, 2024). The social media platform Facebook has an estimated 3 billion users worldwide, and Instagram has around 2 billion users (Dixon, 2024). These statistics show how rapidly digital technology, and social media has been adopted into society, despite having only been introduced in the last 20 years. This rapid adoption, however, is precisely what has facilitated the evolution of a more complex cybercrime landscape, and increased vulnerability to cybercrime (World Economic Forum, 2022).

Although cybercrime incidents are increasing along with greater access to digital technologies, (Holt, 2016; Holt et al., 2016) have identified some core concerns with the existing academic literature on cybercrime. The main concern is that cybercrime studies have largely been conducted from either a technical computer science approach, or a human-centric approach, largely in the field of criminology (Holt, 2016). Where the former tends to remove the emphasis from human actors in cybercrime, the latter tends to place less of a focus on technical aspects of cybercrime. Holt (2016) argues that this, in turn, has influenced the development of policy and legislation, as cybersecurity research doesn't often consider day to day users of technological software, leading to continued conceptualisations of cybercrime as an issue of cybersecurity, and a failure to consider other psychosocial forms of cybercrime such as blackmail, cyberbullying, and revenge porn.

Studies (Marganski, 2020; Hutchings and Chua, 2016) have shown that the issue of cybercrime may be complicated further still by the fact that it is an overwhelmingly gendered crime. Cybercriminals are likely to be men (Taylor, 2003), and as Marganski (2020) has argued, women are much more likely to become victims of cybercrime. There are various reasons for this, yet the main argument is the fact that cyberspace replicates and mirrors the unequal gendered power dynamics of the offline world (Marganski, 2020; Hutchings and Chua, 2016). Cybercrime can also therefore be influenced by social and cultural factors. There is also evidence to suggest that young people are more likely to be victims of cybercrime due to their increased use of social media when compared with other age groups (Oksanen and Keipi, 2013). In their cross-sectional survey of internet users between the ages of 15-74, Oksanen and Keipi (2013) further found that for young female victims of cybercrime, healthy offline social and community networks were found to be an effective protective factor against cybercrime victimisation. A more recent report from the European Institute for Gender Equality (2024, p.10) argues that “cyber violence against women and girls (CVAWG) is an emerging new dimension of gender-based violence”, highlighting concerns that offline violence against women is seeping into the online sphere. The report further states that this a cross-cultural phenomenon, not existing solely in one specific context. The report highlights several specific areas of cybercrime that women and young women are most likely to

be exposed to: (1) cyber stalking, (2) cyber harassment, (3) cyber bullying, (4) online gender-based hate speech, and (5) non-consensual intimate image abuse (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2024, p.8). These domains of cybercrime have been identified as the types that are more likely to be experienced by women and young women, and with this in mind, these will be understood throughout the thesis to be gendered cybercrimes.

Thus, cybercrime incidence has increased as a result of increased connection to the online world, particularly through the proliferation of social media and smartphones. Where men are more likely to be the perpetrators of cybercrime, women are more likely to be victims. Due to greater engagement with the online world, young women (15-30) are even more likely to be victims.

This study aims to address this rising issue by exploring cybercrime as experienced by young women in Saudi Arabia, and how social workers can potentially play a core role in tackling cybercrime. To address the gaps in the existing literature, this study will take an approach that explores the social aspects of cybercrime, exploring how greater understanding of young female victim perspectives of cybercrime can enhance existing legislation and policies, as well as assist in the formulation of new ones. Saudi Arabia provides an interesting insight from a country that is undergoing cultural transition, as well as becoming more connected to the internet and the digital world. According to (Al-ruithe et al., 2018), the rapid transformation of

Saudi Arabian society is characterised by the increasingly prominent role social media is playing in the everyday lives of people in the country. Alongside this development, the social work sector in Saudi Arabia is beginning to gain more government attention, as attitudes shift away from a traditional family support system to a system with more state involvement (Albrithen and Yalli, 2012).

As studies on cybercrime in Saudi Arabia are still fairly limited, this study will therefore offer a contribution to the literature by arguing that an approach integrating social workers is the most effective way to tackle the growing incidence of cybercrime as experienced by young women in Saudi Arabia. Cybercrime is an issue that continues to evolve and develop, and as the results of this study demonstrate, many cybercriminals in Saudi Arabia take advantage of sociocultural factors and gendered stereotypes of young women to carry out cybercrimes. The structure of this introduction chapter is as follows. First, the chapter will provide a brief overview of definitions and frameworks for understanding cybercrime, including a discussion of how cybercrime has evolved in the age of social media. Next, the chapter will provide more contextual information on the Saudi Arabian perspective on cybercrime, detailing existing legislation and legal punishments for cybercriminals. This will be followed by a discussion of the sociocultural background of Saudi Arabia, with further discussion on social work in Saudi Arabia. Finally, the introduction will introduce the objective of the study and the specific research

questions.

2. Conceptualising Cybercrime

2.1 Cybercrime Taxonomy

According to (Phillips et al., 2022) the dichotomous nature of cybercrime studies (technical vs behavioural) has led to difficulty in providing a precise definition of cybercrime that can subsequently inform understanding of cybercrime and how to effectively tackle it. Indeed, there have been numerous attempts to provide a taxonomy of cybercrime. Early taxonomies of cybercrime tended to divide cybercrime into two distinct groups, cyber-enabled cybercrime, which refers to existing crimes that are enhanced by digital technology, and cyber-dependent cybercrime, which requires digital technology (Gordon and Ford, 2006). Another significant early taxonomy is the four-category taxonomy of (Wall, 2007) who divided cybercrime into four distinct categories: (1) cyber-trespass, (2) cyber- deception/theft, (3) cyber-pornography and obscenity, and (4) cyber-violence. Each category covers offences: cyber-trespass (hacking), cyber-pornography and obscenity (sex trade, sex trafficking, sex tourism), cyber-violence (online harassment, cyberbullying). Wall's (2007) taxonomy is notable for its delineation between sexual violence and online harassment. The delineation between sexual violence and online harassment is of importance as previously noted, there has been no recognition of cybercrimes that are typically perpetuated against women. Whilst there is recognition that men can also be

victims of cybercrime, as outlined in the report by the European Institute for Gender Equality (2024), women and young women are disproportionately impacted by these types of cybercrimes. Additionally, Wall's (2007) taxonomy recognises that cybercrime can go beyond ideas of security breaches and hacking, and can include forms of sexually-motivated harassment.

However, as is argued by Phillips et al., (2022) many of the existing taxonomies of cybercrime are insufficient in understanding such a complex issue. They propose their own taxonomy, first providing a spectrum of four different main types of cybercrime. These are as follows: 1. "Crimes against the machine" (attacks against data and systems), 2. "Crimes using the machine" (attacks against property or theft), 3. "Crimes in the machine" (interpersonal violence, sexual violence, violence against groups), and 4. "Cyber assisted" (incidental technology use). Individual cybercrimes are then placed under the relevant category. For example, interpersonal violence includes cybercrime acts such as harassment, cyberbullying, trolling, and coercion. Due to the exhaustive nature of Phillips et al., (2022) cybercrime taxonomy, this will be the taxonomical approach adopted in the present study. This is due to the fact that many previous taxonomies of cybercrime were developed in the decade preceding the widespread adoption of social media.

2.2 Women as Cybercrime Victims

Marganski (2020) and Phillips et al., (2022) both argue for greater inclusion of feminist perspectives on cybercrime, owing to the fact that the cybercrime and cyber security fields are largely male dominated, both in terms of cybercrime perpetrators, and decision makers. This has brought about some conflict when it comes to devising cybercrime legislation and policies. As argued by (Lazarus et al., 2022), women are disproportionately affected by cybercrime, particularly psychosocial crimes such as online abuse, harassment, and revenge porn, leading to a greater level amongst women of those kinds of cybercrime. As a result of this, they are critical of attempts to make cybercrime language more inclusive, citing the evidence base that firmly indicates that cybercrime is gendered. According to a study by (Tandon and Pritchard, 2015), 73% of their female participants experienced cybercrime as a direct result of their social media usage. The reasons for this are twofold and are related to behavioural characteristics of the stereotypical patterns of male cybercrime perpetrators and female victims. For Taylor (2003), the prevalence of the conceptualisation of cyberspace as a space dominated by masculinity. Taylor (2003) argues that as the technological world has largely been dominated by men, not just hackers and cybercriminals themselves but also those who draw up legislation and cybersecurity protections, cyberspace has become imbued with elements of toxic masculinity that are found in the offline world. The difference is that cyberspace offers anonymity, making it possible for cybercriminals to

act without repercussions. Taylor (2003) compares cyberspace to the ‘Wild West’, where there is little regulation, allowing young men in particular to attain a form of masculine power through their ability to dominate, control, and possess the logical world of online spaces to demonstrate ‘manliness’.

Marganski (2020) echoes this sentiment but delves much deeper into what this means for female victims of cybercrime. Marganski (2020) argues that as men have traditionally benefitted from being in a position of privilege in patriarchal societies, this may lead to a feeling of having more power or ‘privilege’ to enact sex-related offences (e.g., revenge porn, rape and death threats) on those who are more marginalised, in this case, young women. The prevalence of male perpetrated sex-related cybercrime offences has been explored in multiple studies. For example, (Hall and Hearn, 2019) found in a study that 90% of revenge porn was perpetrated by men. Marganski (2020) argues that the impacts of cybercrime on young women often go far beyond the act of the crime itself. After becoming victims of cybercrime, young women are likely to become victimised and subjected to further torment for becoming victims of cybercrime in the first place. In a study exploring the emotional impact of cybercrime on young female victims in Malaysia, (Ghani, Bakar and Rosli, 2023) found that the majority of the participants reported feeling cheated (21.4%), bullied (21.4%), and slandered (14.3%). Moreover, most (30.23%) felt sensitive to their environment after experiencing

cybercrime as victims. The aftereffects of cybercrime were far reaching for the participants, with significant impacts on the daily lives of victims. Victims no longer did online shopping, felt hesitant and fearful of meeting new people, and no longer wished to update their social media. Some participants were so affected they had to start taking anxiety medication (Ghani et al, 2023).

These studies speak for the need to adopt a feminist approach to methods to tackle cybercrime. Young women are disproportionately impacted by cybercrime that is for the most part perpetrated by men. Furthermore, as has been argued by Marganski (2020) and (Ghani et al., 2023), social media has offered cybercriminals new forms of exploiting the vulnerabilities of young women. A feminist approach to cybercrime is further necessary due to the fact that issues behind the gendered nature of cybercrime may also be further related to how different types of cybercrime are perceived by each sex. According to a qualitative study Lazarus et al.,(2022), male and female participants exhibited considerable differences in relation to how they rated the severity of certain types of cybercrime. The male and female participants felt similarly when it came in relation to socioeconomic cybercrime (e.g., fraud, scams), but the female participants were much more likely than the male participants to find psychosocial forms of cybercrime, particularly revenge porn, more harmful than male participants. Thus, a feminist approach could help ensure that female victims of cybercrime are better protected, especially against

gendered cybercrimes (e.g., cybercrimes that are specifically geared towards harming women) that can have serious ramifications that reach far beyond the act of the crime itself for female victims.

2.3 Cybercrime in Saudi Arabia

With respect to digital dependency, the situation in Saudi Arabia reflects trends that indicate that digital dependency is generally on the rise. This is especially clear in the high uptake ofsocial media in the country. One example is the increase in positive perceptions of social media as a healthcare tool for physicians after the COVID-19 pandemic (Hammad and Alqarni, 2021). This increase in social media usage has been argued in some studies (Alsulaiman and Rentner, 2021) to corollate with the easing of social restrictions on women in Saudi Arabia, increased presence in the workforce, and increased influence in the education sector (for more detail on social restrictions, please see section 3 below, Sociocultural Background on Saudi Arabia). Although the greater empowerment of women in Saudi Arabia has been largely regarded to be a positive step forward for a country that is embarking on a vast sociological transformation (Hoza, 2018) there are others who believe that the disruption to the traditional patriarchal values of Saudi Arabian society is facilitating an increased level of sex-related cybercrimes.

Khalil and Storie (2021) argue that social media has played an instrumental role in allowing women in Saudi Arabia to build social networks, market their businesses, and bolster their communitarian

influence. They further argue that it is thus seen as a threat to the dominant patriarchal societal structure, encouraging men to commit increased cybercrime as a result. Interestingly, however, existing studies on cybercrime in Saudi Arabia (Alotaibi et al., 2016) have indicated that men may experience cybercrime more than women; they are un-gendered. Ali (2019) notes that the male dominated business sector is the most targeted for cybercriminals in Saudi Arabia, however, the results of these studies may not be reflective of the wider situation in the country, as according to (Kshetri, 2013) high-profile business-related crimes are more likely to be reported and dealt with than other types of cybercrime, particularly those that occur on the interpersonal level.

Saudi Arabia has developed rapidly in the past few decades, particularly on the social and economic level, and as a result, the government of Saudi Arabia have invested heavily in improving cyber infrastructure to reduce cybercrime incidence rates (Ali, 2019). Saudi Arabia has developed economically and socially rapidly in the past few decades, with significant investments in improving its cyber infrastructure to reduce cybercrime incidence rates (Smith and Jones, 2020).

Although knowledge of cybercrime and cybersecurity is relatively high in Saudi Arabia when compared to other nations on the Arabian Peninsula, knowledge is still lacking when compared to other countries around the world (Gharieb, 2021). This suggests that there is more

work to be done in Saudi Arabia to inform users of how to stay safe online and avoid cybercrimes. Most worryingly, this lack of awareness is particularly pronounced in Saudi women who use social media, who demonstrate levels of awareness that are lower than the national, regional, and international average (Gharieb, 2021). Saudi Arabia is a country that has historically enacted policies of gender segregation in the social sphere. Women are not encouraged to communicate with unrelated men outside of the family sphere, and for these reasons, there is generally more stigma attached to women who use social media in Saudi Arabia than men, which can cause further complications. This stigmatisation can make it difficult for women to seek out information about cybercrime and get the support they need if it happens to them. When using social media, women in Saudi Arabia are expected not to 'cause trouble', an attitude that can potentially lead to victim blaming further down the line, as well as lower levels of case reporting (Albar, 2018). Thus, the sociocultural landscape of Saudi Arabia as well as the lack of awareness of cybercrime have played a contributing role in low cybercrime reporting, particularly amongst women.

2.4 Cybercrime Law in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has an Anti-Cyber Crime Law that consists of sixteen provisions that explain key definitions of cybercrime, objectives of the law, and fines and penalties for perpetrators. Additionally, there is the Electronic Transactions Law, which provides guidelines for the

regulation and control of electronic transactions (Council of Europe, n.d.). The Anti-Cyber Crime Law outlines six different groups of cybercrimes, along with their penalties. These are adapted below in (appendix I) accordance with their relevant article (Anti-Cyber Crime Law, 2007, p.4).

For a full list of each article (Articles 3-6), see Appendix I. What follows is a brief summary of the key points of the Anti-Cyber Crime Law. Each article includes a large financial punishment which ranges from up to 500,000 Riyals (approximately £105,000) for a breach of Article 3, to up to 3,000,000 Riyals (approximately £630,000) for a breach of Article 6. Breaching any of the articles can result in a prison term, ranging from up to one year for a breach of Article 3, and no longer than five years for a breach of Article 6. Article 3 includes crimes such as invasions of privacy using camera phones, unauthorised access (to a website/to data for blackmail), and defamation through the use of devices. Article 4 covers financial crimes such as illegal access of bank data, and Article 5 includes tampering with data and services. Article 6 has the harshest punishments and includes human trafficking and pornographic material.

Thus, where Saudi Arabia does provide harsh punishments for perpetrators of cybercrime, the Anti-Cyber Crime Law (ACCL) remains relatively outdated, having not been updated since 2015 (Council of Europe, n.d.) When compared to the detailed taxonomy discussed by Phillips et al. (2022) earlier in this section, the cybercrime law in Saudi

Arabia remains fairly limited in its description of each crime. Furthermore, there is no specific mention of sex-based cybercrime offences, with only vague mention of defamation and non-consensual sharing of data. Having last been updated in 2015, the law predates many recent developments in social media and digital technology. In providing a definition of cybercrime, the law simply states “any act which involves the use of computers or information networks, in violation of the provisions of this law” (Anti-Cyber Crime Law, 2007).

The definition provided in the law fails to mention social media or new digital technologies such as smartphones, despite the fact that many of the cybercrimes mentioned in the law (e.g., invasion of privacy through unauthorised filming, stealing data, false identity) have now been made more feasible through the use of smartphones and social media. This suggests that the legal protections afforded to cybercrime victims may make it difficult to persecute cybercrime perpetrators, due to a lack of a robust and updated understanding of what constitutes a cybercrime. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are the Gulf countries that experience the highest levels of cybercrime (Arab News, 2023). In response to this, Saudi Arabia has invested heavily in cybersecurity, with the country now having a reputation as a global leader in cybersecurity **(**Shestak and Tsyplakova, 2024). There are two specialist institutions in Saudi Arabia that deal with cybercrime. This includes the Communications and Information Technology Commission and the National Cybersecurity Authority.

Despite Saudi Arabia's commitment to cybersecurity, there are still significant gaps in cybercrime policy and legislation. As argued by (Alshammari and Singh, 2018) there is no inclusion of interpersonal or psychosocial cybercrime in the ACCL for cyberbullying, despite the prevalence of the crime in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, they argue that the ACCL predominantly focuses on identity theft in regards to financially-motivated cybercrimes, and does not make provisions for identity theft for other purposes and motivations, such as to damage the reputation or image of an individual. According to the National Cybersecurity Index, Saudi Arabia ranks highly in cybersecurity baseline indicators – protection of digital services, protection of essential services, e-identification and trust services, and protection of personal data – but ranks poorly in cyber security policy development and cyber crisis management (NCSI, n.d.). Alshammari and Singh (2018) additionally noted that Saudi Arabia's limited legislation lags behind other countries. For example, in the United Kingdom, there are multiple different cybersecurity laws and regulations in place, such as the Data Protection Act 2018, the UK General Data Protection Regulation, the Network and Information Security Regulations 2018, and the Computer Misuse Act 1990 (Chin, 2023) as well as the UK online safety Act (2023).

As has been explored in the existing literature on cybercrime, there is a lack of cohesion between academic thought on cybercrime and actual government policy and legislation. Many governments are now

under pressure to revise policy and legislation to make for greater inclusions for interpersonal crimes and crimes that are committed on social media. Given Saudi Arabia's high level of social media uptake, revising the ACCL to reflect cybercrimes committed on social media is a long overdue change. There is also an evident need for the inclusion of sex-related offences in Saudi Arabian cybercrime legislation, as according to a quantitative study by Zayid and Farah (2017) surveying 135 students at Bisha University at Saudi Arabia, respondents perceived sexual cybercrime as the most concerning type of cybercrime, with 57%of participants identifying it as the highest risk category. On top of this, the female student participants recognised that social media was the most common avenue for cybercrime perpetrators (69.6%) (Zayid and Farah, 2017). Thus, where multiple studies have identified issues with interpersonal cybercrimes in Saudi Arabia that are perpetrated on and related to the expansion of social media, there is still little legislative inclusion for these types of cybercrimes in Saudi Arabian law, with a much stronger focus on financial and business-related crimes. Sociocultural Background on Saudi Arabia.

3. Sociocultural Background on Saudi Arabia

3.1 Saudi Arabia Background

Saudi Arabia (also known as KSA – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), is a country located in the Middle East on the Arabian Peninsula, of which it occupies 80%. The capital city is Riyadh, and the population of the

country is mostly Saudi (58.4%), with a growing non-Saudi population (41.6%), mostly workers (Philby et al., 2024). Saudi Arabia has a desert climate, with an overwhelming majority of the population (82.1%) living in urban areas compared to rural ones (17.9%) (UN Habitat, 2016) According to data from the Saudi census, the Al Riyadh region had a population of over 8 million people in 2022, an increase of over 2 million people from 2010, reflecting the rapid development and urbanisation of the country (Saudi Census, 2022a). The most populous cities in Saudi Arabia – Riyadh, Jeddah, and Mecca – house a large majority of the 36 million strong population of Saudi Arabia, with a combined population of approximately 33 million. Of Saudi Arabia's population, the majority are under the age of 60 (Saudi Census, 2022b). The official language of the country is Arabic, and the official religion is Islam, of which Saudi Arabia is the birthplace.

The Kingdom is ruled by the Saud dynasty, who rose to prominence in the 18th century alongside conservative Islam. Saudi Arabia is currently de facto ruled by King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the crown prince (2017-present) and prime minister (2022-present) Philby et al., (2024)**.** Saudi Arabia is the home of two of the most significant monuments in Islam, Makkah the Blessed, the birthplace of the Islamic faith and the Prophet Muhammad, and Madinah, the burial place of the Prophet Muhammad (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019). Islam is, therefore, of fundamental importance in Saudi Arabia, where the Holy *Qu'ran,* guide

the constitution and the legal system based on Islamic *Shari'ah* law by prophet Muhammad (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

3.2 Saudi Arabian Society

As has been mentioned above, Saudi Arabian society has developed and progressed rapidly in the past century, largely in part due to the large deposits of petroleum in the country. The large non-Saudi population in Saudi Arabia can largely be explained by the economic boom from the late 1960s to 1980 that was sparked by the discovery of oil in the country. The prices of oil soared, and Saudi Arabia's economy experienced an exponential level of growth that rapidly transformed the country. Although Saudi Arabia was the richest country in the Middle East as of 2014 (Ministry of Finance, 2014), it has since slipped down to fifth place, surpassed in GDP (Gross Domestic Product) by Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Bahrain (Omran, 2022). Saudi Arabia continues to be the largest oil exporter in the world, with oil contributing to 45% of the country's GDP, as well as 90% of the country's total earnings from exportation (UN Habitat, 2016). Saudi Arabian infrastructure has been a benefactor of oil revenue, and has enabled the government to place significant investment in education, transport, and healthcare (Alkharashi and Nickerson, 2012).

Saudi Arabia is a large country, yet it is sparsely populated, with the majority of the population living in urban areas. Saudi Arabia has almost

complete internet penetration, with approximately 36.84 million internet users as of early 2024, accounting for a total of 99% of the population with internet access. The statistics also show that Saudi Arabia has very high levels of social media usage, with approximately 35.10 million social media users, accounting for 94.3% of the total population (Kemp, 2024). This is reflective of sweeping changes in Saudi Arabia's society of the past few decades aimed at increasing the country's influence on the global stage. As well as diversification of the economy away from dependency on oil revenue, which in recent years has encountered issues as countries around the world seek alternative renewable energy sources that are less polluting. Saudi Arabian society is deeply rooted in tradition, and Islam plays an extremely important role in how the country is structured. Many of the traditions in Saudi Arabia have been in place for centuries, and The Constitution of Saudi Arabia, introduced in 1992, states that Saudi Arabia is a "sovereign Arab Islamic state with Islam as its religion" (Saudi Arabia: The New Constitution, 1993) Besides being characterised with tradition and religious values, Saudi Arabian society is further very family oriented. The Constitution places emphasis on the family unit as the "kernel of Saudi society", further stating that "the state will aspire to strengthen family ties, maintain its Arab and Islamic values and care for all its members" (Saudi Arabia: The New Constitution, 1993). This emphasis on Arab and Islamic values in Saudi Arabia ensures that both have a greater impact on society than

laws do in many cases. As has also been seen in the ACCL, upholding these values is also of utmost importance in the Saudi Arabian legal system.

The adherence to conservative and traditional religious and societal values in Saudi Arabia has however at times been at odds with the needs and demands of a rapidly modernising world. Religion, culture, and society in Saudi Arabia are intertwined, and (Binsahl, Chang and Bosua, 2020, p.874) argue that cultural and religious elements are 'hard to distinguish'. (Alqahtani, 2015) defines this as a type of 'religious nationalism', where religious and national identities are woven together. Discussion of religion in Saudi Arabia has often been accompanied by a discussion of the historical subordination of women in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabian society has historically been a society with marked roles for men and women, previously enacting gender segregation in public spaces. Saudi Arabian women were 'expected to avoid talking to unrelated males' (Binsahl et al., 2020, p.874) and should Saudi women act otherwise, it could be seen as damaging the reputation and honour of not only her as an individual but the whole family unit.

Before moving on to the discussion of the role of religion in gender stereotypes and expectations in Saudi Arabia, it is essential to note that many critics are not blaming Islam for the position of women in Saudi Arabia; instead, they are critical of the state's conservative interpretation of Islam rules and Arabic culture traditions (Tønnessen,

2016).

One aspect of Saudi Arabian society that has been criticised heavily by both Saudi Arabian and international feminists is the male guardianship system. The legal situation in Saudi Arabia reflects trends that are common across the Middle East in that family law is often grounded within religious values and practices. Saudi Arabia adopts a guardianship system outlined in the Personal Status Law, which according to (Weiner, 2020, p.1) is based on a “unique interpretation of the Hanbali school of Sunni Islam” and is used to “justify restricting women’s ability to travel, attend university, marry, or obtain medical care without the position of a male guardian”. Should a woman choose to go against the restrictions of the religious guardianship system, she could be punished with fines, harassment, abuse, or arrest (Weiner, 2020). Guardianship is a concept in Islam that in its original sense carries the intention of protecting women from harm or exploitation. Historically, this guardianship was for life, however, as part of recent changes to the Personal Status Law by the Crown Prince, guardianship ends when the individual reaches 18 years of age (Weiner, 2020).

Alongside guardianship, there are other social restrictions that have historically been placed on women in Saudi Arabia on the basis of an interpretation of religious doctrine. Adherence to these restrictions is upheld by the Saudi Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (CPVPV), founded in the 1940s. After Saudi

Arabia's adoption of a hard-line approach to religion and the social life post-1979, the Saudi Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (sometimes referred to as the 'religious police') began to grow exponentially more powerful, with the intention of promoting and ensuring adherence to religious values. Prior to 1979, Saudi Arabia rejected extremist religious doctrines, and was characterised by an open-minded society, and optimism for the future. After the Iranian Revolution of 1979, extremist ideology began to infiltrate Saudi Arabia. This had particularly harmful consequences for women, who were then subject to restrictions on their dress and behaviour (Al-Muhaini, 2020).

Saudi Arabia therefore transformed from a country that was tolerant and moderately religious to one that was at the whims of the extremism and overzealous approach of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (Bashraheel, 2019).The CPVPV are responsible for upholding many of the restrictions placed on women, such as the requirement for women to wear modest clothing in the form of an *abaya* (robe-like body covering) and a *niqab* (a veil covering the face but not the eyes). The hard-line approach adopted by the CPVPV towards the dress of women is commonly cited as a prevailing factor in the 2002 Mecca girls' school fire tragedy, which drew significant national and international attention. In 2002, a fire broke out in a girl's school in Mecca, resulting in the deaths of 15 young women. According to eyewitness testimony from Mecca's Civil Defence

Department, the CPVPV intervened in the rescue efforts due to the fact that the students were not wearing the obligatory attire of the abaya and niqab. These dress restrictions were enforced by the state, thus allowing them to become part of Saudi Arabian culture. Officers stated that the CPVPV blocked their entrance to the school, despite their insistence that given the situation it was not the moment to press on religious matters (Megally, 2002). Although the situation became an international scandal and there were attempts to reform the CPVPV throughout the years, change did not arrive until 2016, when the Saudi Cabinet managed to strip them of their powers (Bashraheel, 2019). Thus, women in Saudi Arabia have traditionally endured a number of restrictions based on interpretations of Islam that have been adopted in Saudi Arabia. Where these restrictions have been met with alarm and criticism from commentators outside of Saudi Arabia and the Middle East, Hoza (2018) argues that this is a direct result of the unsuitability of applying West-centric feminist theory to Saudi Arabia. Many women in Saudi Arabia feel empowered through their Islamic faith, even if they do not necessarily agree with the way it is interpreted by the authorities (Hoza, 2018). Further, Islamic doctrine maintains spiritual equality between men and women, recognising that women be independent (Otaiba, 2020). This is often misunderstood by Western critics, who have wrongly based stereotypes of Saudi Arabian women as ‘powerless’ and ‘submissive’ on Islam, rather than understanding the complex sociocultural landscape of the country

(Hoza, 2018). In recent years, Saudi Arabia has made huge strides forward to bring a greater involvement of women in society as it undergoes a cultural transition, and this will be discussed briefly in the next section.

3.3 Saudi Arabia and Vision 2030

Although the discourse is that Saudi Arabia is a religiously conservative and strict country, there have been sweeping changes and reforms in the country in the past decade intending to rehabilitate its reputation, especially in regard to the treatment of women. In 2016, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman announced the ambitious Saudi 2030 project, with one of the key motivators being a switch to a more moderate form of Islam (Weiner, 2020).These changes have been felt on every level of society, including the removal of one of the most contentious restrictions placed on women in Saudi Arabia, which was the restriction on driving (Wheeler, 2020). Saudi Vision 2030 also aims to drastically increase the number of women in the workforce, and gender segregation in Saudi Arabia has since been lifted (Saudi Vision 2030, n.d.) These changes have not been met with open arms, and given the dominance of conservative thought among the older generation, there has been some resistance. However, Vision 2030 is already seen to be bearing fruit, with female participation in the labour force increasing to 34.5% among women, a significant increase from 23.2% when Vision 2030 was unveiled (The World Bank, 2023).

Despite many of these positive changes, there are still concerns with

legal protections for women in Saudi Arabia, particularly when it comes to young women. In 2022, Saudi Arabia introduced the Personal Status Law, which was touted as a progressive and comprehensive move forward to make a greater distinction between religion and the law. Positives include the ability for women to divorce, as well as affirming their status as default custodians of any shared children should they divorce. However, concerns remain over whether the law has made the necessary changes in regard to the status of women in the country. Women's rights activists in Saudi Arabia have long campaigned for a codification of family law in the country removed from religious influence, however, they argue that the Personal Status Law has not fully achieved this. The culture of male guardianship remains, and the father of a child remains the default guardian of children, limiting the level of influence the mother can have on the financial and social wellbeing of her child (Human Rights Watch, 2023). In addition to this, women are discouraged from remarrying should they already have children, on the basis that it may not be in the 'best interests' of the child should the mother marry somebody who is a stranger to her children.

Vision 2030's ambitious plans to transform Saudi Arabia have had specific ramifications for women in the country. In a quantitative study, Alharbi (2022) found that the lifting of travel restrictions (requiring permission from a male guardian to travel) and the lifting of the driving ban have been significant factors in the empowerment of women in

Saudi Arabia post-Vision 2030. From a total of 152 responses, the most important positive changes were travelling permission for women without guardian approval (78.9%), allowing women to drive (72.4%), increase in access to education (67.1%), increasing state support for women (67.1%), and empowering women to be able to take their own decisions in personal matters (67.1%) (Alharbi, 2022). These results show that although the government has placed a focus on elevating women to positions of power in the business and workforce sphere, this is less empowering to women in Saudi Arabia than having empowerment on the personal level.

Many women also felt that these positives were accompanied by negatives. The most pertinent of these were worries over increased rates of divorce, an increase in family disputes, and husbands depending on their wives to provide support (Alharbi, 2022). Concerns over the actual impact of reforms such as the Personal Status Law and Vision 2030 have been articulated in further studies. In a qualitative study looking at Saudi women's' perspectives on male guardianship, Alhajri (2020) found that despite the recent changes to the law and the lifting of restrictions on the movement of women, traditional social conventions of male guardianship presented significant barriers for the empowerment of women. Furthermore, Alhajri (2020) discovered that the participants were unclear about the legal, traditional, and religious aspects of the male guardianship system. The participants in the study reported that male guardianship was affecting them on multiple

different levels, including on the social and psychological level.

The results from Alhajri's (2020) study also pointed to the generational differences towards issues of tradition, religion, and female empowerment that are the result of the extensive changes that have been made in Saudi Arabian society. When asked about their attitudes towards advocacy for women's rights in Saudi Arabia, there was no general consensus amongst the participants, and the participants were divided between those who were hurt by the male guardianship system and those who had no problem with the system. In the latter group, some women adopted a conservative attitude, maintaining that they respected the existing system and that it should not be challenged as change could 'destroy moral and social values' (Alhajri, 2020, p.153). In the former group, women engaged in online advocacy discussions. Many of the younger participants in the study were more likely to be critical of the male guardianship system and express more desire for change in the gender structures of Saudi Arabian society.

4. Social Work and Saudi Arabia

4.1 Social Work Introduction

Social work is a term used for the practice-based profession that is designed to drive social change and development, by empowering communities and individuals and offering them support (Berg-Weger and Morley, 2020). The tenets of social work go hand in hand with from a theoretical perspective, this thesis posits that social work can be situated within the realm of systems theory, which denotes, which

posits that people are products of intricate systems that are shaped by intersecting factors such as an individual's home and social environment, family structure, economic class, and cultural and religious dynamics. Systems theory, as first defined by von Bertalanffy in 1940s as employing mathematical concepts, such as wholeness, finality, equifinality, to name but three, in order to describe general systems as subjects to 'the interdisciplinary nature of concepts, models, and principles [which] appl[ies] to systems provid[ing] a possible approach toward the unification of science' (von Bertalanffy, 1972, p.415). In the context of social work, the systems theory recognises that all of these factors must be considered as having contributing roles in the structures of communities, including how they behave. Systems theory is complementary with social work in that both acknowledge the role that the external environment can play in the behaviours and thought processes of individuals (Berg-Weger and Morley, 2020). In Saudi Arabia context, systems theory helps professionals navigate the delicate balance between traditional tribal structures, Islamic principal, and emerging social dynamics, enabling more holistic and culturally sensitive support for vulnerable populations. Generally speaking, the goal of social work is to enhance the wellbeing of groups that may be particularly vulnerable in a society that often leaves them behind in favour of others (Sheppard, 2021). Even if individuals do not directly work with social workers, the impact of social work is felt on all levels of society, advocating for a society where vulnerable groups are able to receive support, as social workers

are engaged on the micro level (e.g., individual support), the mezzo level (e.g., dealing with groups of individuals to address social issues and trends) and the macro level (e.g., informing policy and legislation) (Berg-Weger and Morley, 2020). Thus, social work plays an important role in ensuring that vulnerable individuals in society get support and help. A more detailed overview of social work is provided in the Literature Review chapter.

4.2 Social Work in Saudi Arabia

Social work in Saudi Arabia is a relatively new profession, and, in comparison to social work in other countries such as the UK, places a great emphasis on the involvement of the family and community in tackling issues faced by vulnerable individuals. The focus on family and community is reflective of the cultural landscape of Saudi Arabia, where the dual influence of Arab and Islamic culture has contributed to the way social work is structured in the country. Generally speaking, social work in Saudi Arabia shares characteristics with social work in other parts of the world, with an emphasis on supporting vulnerable groups in society. However, there are some differences. Unlike in countries such as the UK where social work is governed by regulatory bodies and institutions that are specialised in social work, social work in Saudi Arabia is dealt with by the Ministry of Health for hospital-based social work services, and the Ministry of Education for social work in social sectors (Albrithen and Briskman, 2015). Furthermore, unlike in other countries where social workers can choose to specialise in

accordance with the group they wish to work with (e.g., young people, older people, people with substance abuse issues etc), there is a more generalised approach to social work education and training in Saudi Arabia, with individuals able to train as social workers even if they have backgrounds in psychology or sociology (Alotaibi et al., 2020). This marks a contrast with the UK, where in such a circumstance, social workers are expected to complete additional training and practice to be able to qualify as social workers.

As social work outside of healthcare settings is overseen by the Ministry of Education, social workers in Saudi Arabia are expected to engage in research as part of their role. A study by Almaizar and Abdelhamed (2018) on the distribution of social work research in Saudi Arabia indicated that the most pressing concern was issues with the professional practice of social work, with a total of 25.9% of the studies discussing the topic. This highlights one of the major issues with social work in Saudi Arabia, as social workers face many professional barriers and a lack of training, practice, and educational opportunities. This is refuted in studies by (Alotaibi et al., 2020) and Alshakhs and Alanzi (2018) who have found that social workers in Saudi Arabia are not only faced with a lack of recognition for their role in benefiting Saudi Arabian society, but also issues of understaffing, administrative and bureaucratic barriers, and skills shortages. In this sense, the social work sector in Saudi Arabia reflects general global trends in social work.

Where the situation is different, is in the understanding of social work itself. Charity is a core tenet of the Islamic faith, and the family are seen as responsible for handling sensitive interpersonal issues (Albrithen and Yalli, 2012) in a similar vine; due to the emphasis on charitable behaviour, social workers may be regarded to be more akin to charity workers than healthcare professionals. These attitudes have contributed to the idea that the issues addressed by social workers are the responsibility of the family to resolve, and do not require specialised professional help. These attitudes are not just reflected on the societal level, but also on the managerial and administrative level, as social work is not seen as important to the development of Saudi Arabia as other sectors. Therefore, in the Saudi Arabian context, social work is not always seen as the most suitable solution for resolving social issues.

In Saudi Arabia, the social work profession is a sector dominated by women, who have increasingly found it as a successful avenue to enter the professional sphere, which has historically been male dominated (Alharbi, 2022). Women in Saudi Arabia have traditionally been excluded from engaging in professional formal work. While this has been positive for women entering the workforce, there are still significant barriers in the social work profession. (Elsayed, Yousif and Gad, 2022) have argued that as social work research has been dominated by Western philosophy and approaches, it is seen as incompatible with traditional Saudi societies values and morals. As

such, this may hinder attempts to move towards a more modernised social work system in Saudi Arabia. Aydin (2021, p.286) has likewise argued that due to the influence of Islam in the Arab world, Western approaches to social work are sometimes seen as a form of 're-colonisation'. This shows that social work in some cases may be viewed as incompatible with the sociocultural values of Saudi Arabia. Re-colonisation has described by Aydin (2021) the process where Western powers assert control and influence over previously colonized societies through indirect and subtle methods, rather than through direct political governance. This modern form of dominance operates through various cultural, economic, and ideological mechanisms that maintain power imbalances between Western and formerly colonized nations.

4.3 Barriers to Social Work Cybercrime Support for Young Women

According to Nguyen et al. (2022), social workers working in educational institutions in Saudi Arabia have been designated as the frontline support. Social workers have been involved in the design and implementation of measures to protect individuals often in collaboration with educators, which is generally considered beneficial (Nguyen et al., 2022). However, there are still a number of barriers that prevent young women specifically from seeking the help of social workers, not least given the predominance of gendered cybercrime and women's vulnerability in this regard generally (Baluynkeswari and Mishra, 2023) and in Saudi Arabia especially (Althumali,2021). One of these barriers is the male guardianship system, where a young woman

is under the guardianship of a male figure (usually the father or another close family member) until the age of 18 (Weiner, 2020). Alhajri's (2020) study found that even among the participants with more conservative beliefs, they understood the needs of their daughters to go out and socialise with friends and be outside the familial home. Conservative beliefs in the study refers to those participants who felt aligned with some of the more restrictive aspects of Saudi Arabian culture and society, for example, beliefs over the subordinate position of women to men. However, in stricter and traditional households, where these beliefs may be even more ingrained into the family structure and dynamic, this could lead to punishment. In some cases, the restrictions placed on young women by their male guardians led them to seek comfort in the online world (Alhajri, 2020). Although the ideal guardian is one who is protective, negative experiences of the guardianship system can instil young women with fears or lead them to engage in what is perceived as risky or rebellious behaviour. In both cases, young women may be discouraged from coming forward with cybercrime experiences due to the risk that it may come back to their guardian, which has caused some authors to reference a need for identifying and defining cyberfeminism as a way of combating cybercrime against women (Baluynkeswari and Mishra, 2023). In the context of the present study, and as detailed further in section 2.3.1, this highlights the role of social workers, particularly female social workers, in supporting females with the impact of cybercrime.

The male guardianship and patriarchal structure of Saudi Arabian society can make young women feel shameful about cybercrime experiences on social media. This can especially be the case when it comes to cybercrime related to the posting of pictures online. Alhajri's (2020) study shows that women who were a more active part of the online community had reservations about posting pictures online, for fear that the photos could potentially humiliate their guardians and male relatives. Alhajri (2020) attributes this to beliefs in Saudi Arabian culture that women are representative of the family unit as a whole, therefore meaning that her actions can influence how the family is seen in wider society. This can put pressure on young women who have become victims of cybercrime, who may feel shame or guilt and not feel encouraged to come forward. A further unintended result of recent social change in Saudi Arabia

Another barrier to access to social work is the lack of specialist training and social work skills of social workers in educational institutions in Saudi Arabia. As stated by Sawmar and Mohammad (2019) the social work sector in Saudi Arabia has not made significant investments in the specialisation of social workers. Without specialist training, social workers may not be able to deliver effective services that recognise the specific needs of young female victims of cybercrime. Many social workers lack the skills necessary to tackle the complex issue of cybercrime. This issue is especially evident in educational institutions, with numerous studies (Alessa et al., 2021; Sawmar and Mohammad,

2019; Rahman and Al- Borie, 2021) finding that in many cases social workers in these environments lack professional skills to meet the responsibilities of dealing with young people. Thus, there are a number of barriers that young women face in accessing social work services to deal with cybercrime.

5. Research Objectives and Research Questions

5.1 Objective

This study aims to explore the role of social workers in tackling cybercrime in Saudi Arabia, with a particular focus on its effect on female university university students. In so doing, the research not only aims to derive concrete and specific recommendations for both policy and practice emanating from the primary research, but also contribute to what is an emergent field of research and discourse in a Saudi context. Given the momentous and ongoing changes to Saudi society, the research aims to effect sustainable change to Saudi society through the growing role and influence of social workers against the backdrop of accelerated technological advancements and developments, and the occurrence and appearance of cybercrime in Saudi Arabia.

5.2 Research Questions

The three research questions that will be answered in the study are as follows:

RQ1: What role, if any, do social workers play in protecting female students at Saudi universities from cybercrimes?

RQ2: Are there any areas where this role could be improved?

RQ3: How could these findings be applied to other area of Saudi society?

The structure of this thesis is as follows. The next chapter is the literature review, which will begin with a more detailed discussion of social work in Saudi Arabia, including background on social work in the country and the challenges faced by social workers. This will be followed on a section that discusses the role that social workers can play in shaping the behaviours and attitudes towards women in Saudi Arabia. The next section of the literature review explores cybercrime and social media in Saudi Arabia, and how social workers are involved in tackling cybercrime. Following on from this is the methodology chapter, which introduces the methodological framework of semi-structured interviews, and the analytical approach of thematic analysis. The results chapter presents excerpts from the interviews ordered in accordance with the themes identified in the thematic analysis. The discussion chapter synthesises the results with the existing literature and presents recommendations based on the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 2- LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

As has been shown throughout this study, the Internet has become a vital element of everyday life in recent years. Statistics from 2020 reveal that over 5 billion individuals use the Internet globally, signifying that over half of the world's population engages with it. And whilst the Internet has several attributes that enhance its appeal and account for its rapid proliferation, including user-friendliness, immediacy, little legal constraints, affordability, and extensive accessibility, there exists a negative aspect to this heightened Internet use. The anonymity of the Internet, along with communication technology, provides offenders with extensive opportunities to perpetrate crimes, making the Internet an essential instrument for the emergence of cybercrime, as Abu-Ulbeh et al.'s (2021) systematic review identified. That said, Abu-Ulbeh et al. (2021) also found that current research has experienced difficulties in differentiating between certain manifestations of cybercrime, such as cyberstalking and cyberbullying, for example, due to the lack of agreed definitions and meanings.Investigating cyberbullying among a random sample of 2,642 university students (1,887 female), who completed an online survey about their experience with seven forms of cyberbullying, and the strategies they used to deal with each. Mahasneh et al. (2024) found a relatively low prevalence of cyberbullying among the sample, with 57.6% reporting

that they never experienced any form of cyberbullying and 20% reporting experiencing cyberbullying only once. The most common forms of cyberbullying were exclusion (56%), harassment (51%), and flaming (44%). While differences in the prevalence of cyberbullying are found according to gender in two forms, stalking and flaming, no statistical differences according to study discipline are evident. Students in their later years are more likely to experience all forms of cyberbullying than students in their early years ($p < 0.05$). The differences are significant across countries, with Jordan being highest, followed by Egypt then Kuwait. Self-defending and confrontation are found to be the most common responses to cyberbullying. Overall, the sample reported using active responses to cyberbullying more than passive responses. Al atiyat, Al-Soud and Al Dweri (2024) add to this that beyond the individual, more systems-based measures need to be taken to strengthen cyber security in order to prevent attacks.

The social work profession in Saudi Arabia is currently experiencing significant transformations, particularly with regard to the rising challenges triggered by the advent of technology. This chapter is structured into five principal sections, each addressing a critical aspect of the research topic. The review commences with an examination of social work and cybercrime in Saudi Arabia, providing a foundational context for the subsequent discussions. Building upon this foundation, the chapter then delves into the specific issue of social media-based cybercrimes against women in Saudi Arabia, exploring the unique

challenges and vulnerabilities faced by this demographic in the digital domain.

Following this, the discourse shifts to analyse the pivotal role of social workers in addressing and mitigating cybercrimes against women in the Kingdom. This section serves as a bridge between the problem identification and potential solutions, highlighting the significance of social work interventions in this context.

The chapter then explores relevant theoretical frameworks to provide a robust theoretical explanation for the research. These frameworks offer critical lenses through which to interpret and understand the complex interaction of social, cultural, and technological factors influencing the subject of this study.

Finally, the chapter concludes with additional relevant contextual information, ensuring a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research question three. This structure facilitates a logical progression from broad contextual understanding to specific issues, interventions, theoretical clarifications, and supplementary context, thereby offering a holistic view of the research topic.

2.2. Social Work and Cybercrime in Saudi Arabia

2.2.1. Introduction to Social Work and Cybercrime in Saudi Arabia

This literature review will evaluate the intersection between social work, and the surge in the use of social media in Saudi Arabia, exploring how this emerging dynamic can be leveraged to fight cybercrimes, especially among women using social media in Saudi Arabia. Analysis

of the literature reveals that the application of social work depends on the underlying political philosophy, resources available, and the core challenges that such approaches are designed to address (Hall, Slembrouck and Sarangi, 2020; Sheppard, 2021; Van Breda, 2018; Kaushik and Walsh, 2019; Goldberg and Warburton, 2021; Finn, 2020; Baker, Peckham and Seixas, 2020). In this regard, various nations utilise varying social work practices (Levin, Roziner and Savaya, 2022). For example, the United States employs social work differently from Nordic nations, such as Sweden and Norway. The differences are driven by political ideologies and economic implications (Alston and Bowles, 2018). In many cases, social work is funded by national (federal/state) and/or local governments. In this regard, to understand the role of social work practices and the employees operating in this system, there is a need to examine cases from specific nations (Hall et al, 2020; Sheppard, 2021; Van Breda, 2018; Kaushik and Walsh, 2019; Goldberg and Warburton, 2021; Finn, 2020; Baker et al, 2020). For example, there is a need to evaluate social work trends and patterns in Saudi Arabia to establish the role, effectiveness, and importance of social workers in combating challenges in areas such as housing, poverty, gender discrimination, online (cyber) crimes, disability, education, and healthcare and wellness (physical and mental).

According to systems theory, people are products of intricate systems, as opposed to being individuals acting in isolation. This framework

argues that behavioural and attitudinal concepts are shaped by several factors that systematically work in tandem (Berg-Weger and Morley, 2020; Fisher, Newton and Sainsbury, 2021; Hadley and Hatch, 2018; Levin et al, 2022). Systems theory proposes that some core variables influence the environment in which people grow and develop, identifying family, social settings, friends, religious structure, home environment, and economic class (Levin et al, 2022). A key facet of this theoretical framework is that people do not exist in isolation, instead, their characters, behaviours, attitudes, and abilities are all shaped by the external environment in which people exist in (Alston and Bowles, 2020). This theory underscores the importance of culture, religion, communities, and the prevailing environment (trends and patterns), as the core driving forces shaping individual and collective behaviour(s) of a community.

Systems theory is crucial in explaining the importance of social work in for the well-being of a community and society. In this regard, social work refers to a practice-based profession that is designed to drive social change, cohesion, development, and empowerment of communities and people (Berg-Weger and Morley, 2020; Fisher et al., 2021; Hadley and Hatch, 2018; Levin et al, 2022). Social work places emphasis on understanding the core tenets of human development, attitudes, behaviours, social, economic, and cultural interactions, as well as emerging institutions (Hadley and Hatch, 2018). Globally, the primary role of social work practice is enhancing human wellbeing and

bolstering the ability of people to meet complex and basic needs, especially those individuals and groups that are vulnerable, impoverished, or oppressed (Fisher et al., 2021). Social work is therefore a necessity for the survival of a society that rewards the smartest, most talented, and most resilient individuals, without leaving behind the vulnerable or exposed groups in society (Sheppard, 2021). System theory can be applied to social work as it focuses on the individual and their environment. In this case, social workers must consider the external factors that affect a person's outlook and situation (Berg-Weger and Morley, 2020; Fisher et al., 2021; Hadley and Hatch, 2018; Levin et al., 2022), thus making the environmental approach of systems theory particularly suitable. The consensus in the literature is that social work is mainly designed for vulnerable people and groups in communities or a country. However, analysis of the evidence reveals that social work is a fundamental part of most successful nations or communities globally (Hall et al., 2020; Sheppard, 2021; Van Breda, 2018; Kaushik and Walsh, 2019; Goldberg and Warburton, 2021; Finn, 2020; Baker et al., 2020). The implication here is that social workers help people of all ages, backgrounds, and sections of society. Even if individuals are not actively engaged with social work, the benefits of social work are still felt. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, systems theory offers a critical theoretical lens for comprehending the intricate social landscape of Saudi Arabia. By elucidating the complex

interdependencies between traditional tribal networks, Islamic principles, and contemporary social transformations, the theory of system enables social work professionals to develop nuanced, contextually sophisticated strategies for addressing the multifaceted challenges confronting vulnerable populations within the Kingdom's evolving social ecosystem.

Social workers operate in a variety of areas, including education, healthcare, disability, and low-income households. The extensive nature of social work underscores its role in confronting the core social issues facing human life, this mandate ranges from providing one-on-one support to affected individuals and/or families and shaping policy-level and legislative processes that can help in eradicating systemic injustices (Berg-Weger and Morley, 2020; Fisher et al., 2021; Hadley and Hatch, 2018; Levin et al., 2022). Therefore, social work involves helping other people to deal with and overcome challenges.

Social work can be divided into three major levels: macro, mezzo, and micro social work. At each of these levels, social workers offer different services to target populations in society. At the micro-level, social workers target their services at individuals, families, and small- group levels within communities (Barsky, 2019). In the process, social work at this level addresses broad-based social issues, such as substance abuse, housing support, counselling, and mental health interventions or therapy. Other issues tackled at the micro level include school violence, domestic abuse, and sexual abuse (Hall et al., 2020;

Sheppard, 2021; Van Breda, 2018; Kaushik and Walsh, 2019; Goldberg and Warburton, 2021; Finn, 2020; Baker et al., 2020). These are all areas that are critical in improvement and progress in communities. As this section is providing an overview of the different levels of social work, examples will not be given for each of these areas. Using just mental health as an example, the stigmatisation of mental health can create initial barriers to access, or even to renting accommodation and applying for jobs. If this stigma is combined with low levels of awareness, minimal diagnosis, and access difficulties, it can create considerable difficulties for individuals with mental illness or mental health problems (Overton and Medina, 2008). Through social work practices, communities (assisted by their governments/local authorities) can provide effective services, follow-up, training, and development, and create awareness, which will enhance positive outcomes for the affected individuals and their families (Payne, 2020). The reaction, perception, and conceptualisation of mental health, and the overall impact on the affected individuals and their families, affect the whole community considerably (Aleksandrovich, Israilovna and Vakhaevich, 2018). For example, Overton and Medina (2008) have found that the stigma faced by individuals with mental illness and mental health problems can cause others to view them as having a lower social status, leading to these individuals becoming marginalised. This can subsequently lead to issues of low self-esteem and discrimination, impacting their self-efficacy levels as they feel

judged. It is important to recognise how people who are mentally illunwell are affected, as they also face personal challenges and hardships which are multifaceted and may be enhanced by lack of access to healthcare. This is an example of one of the kinds of societal issues that social work seeks to address. Social workers operating on a mezzo level deal with groups of people in society to address emerging social dynamics, challenges, or trends. This could include working in schools, hospitals, prisons, or at the neighbourhood level (Goldberg et al., 2021). For instance, in schools, social workers can help students struggling with bullying (online or offline), substance abuse, peer pressure, discrimination, isolation, or even mental health issues (Baker et al., 2020). In Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Education has employed school social workers since 1954, and Alotaibi et al., (2020) note that the implementation of social workers in the educational system has undergone five distinct phases. In its most recent stage, the introduction of the General Directorate of Counselling and Guidance for students ensured that school social workers were re-categorised under the title “counselling and guidance”, which opened the doors to individuals who were not specially trained in the social work profession to take on roles (Abu Al-Naser, 2017). In institutions such as schools, social workers follow orders from superiors in the Ministry of Education, the regional Department of Education, as well as institutional administration and other colleagues. Although the competition of paperwork is part of the role of a social

worker, the bureaucratic challenges of social work in the Saudi Arabian context can lead to social workers needing to complete routine tasks that would not be expected to do in other contexts (Alotaibi et al., 2020).

The globalisation of education has ushered in an era of unprecedented diversity in learning environments, bringing with it a complex array of challenges that significantly impact students' well-being and academic success. As Payne (2020) incisively observes, these challenges primarily stem from cultural, background, and religious differences, creating a multifaceted landscape that educational institutions must navigate with care and consideration. Cultural challenges are often obvious in the form of conflicting values, communication styles, and social norms. Students from collectivist societies, for instance, may struggle in educational systems that prioritise individual achievement and assertiveness. This cultural difference can lead to difficulties in classroom participation, group work dynamics, and even basic interactions with peers and faculty, potentially hindering academic progress and social integration.

Background-related challenges further complicate the educational journey for many students. Socioeconomic disparities, variations in educational preparation, and differing levels of familial support can create significant hurdles. First-generation college students, for example, may lack the cultural capital and guidance that their peers from academic families take for granted, potentially leading to feelings

of isolation and inadequacy. These background factors can profoundly influence a student's ability to fully engage in both academic and extracurricular activities crucial for holistic development.

Religious challenges add another layer of complexity to the higher education institutions. Students adhering to minority religious beliefs may encounter difficulties in practicing their faith within the constraints of academic schedules and campus facilities. This can lead to stress and a sense of alienation, potentially impacting their academic performance and overall well-being.

In response to these multifaceted challenges, the role of social workers in educational settings has become increasingly critical. By offering a dynamic, adaptive, and supportive environment, social workers can significantly enhance the learning process and promote student well-being. Their interventions can range from providing culturally sensitive counselling services to advocating for inclusive policies and practices within educational institutions.

Moreover, social workers are uniquely positioned to address emerging issues in the modern learning environment, such as the rising threat of cybercrimes. As noted by (Canda, Furman and Canda, 2019; Goldberg and Warburton, 2021; Baker et al. 2020), the increased use of technology for educational, social, and informational purposes has led to a corresponding rise in cybercrime risks. These risks include cyberbullying, online harassment, identity theft, and exposure to

inappropriate content, all of which can severely impact a student's mental health and academic performance.

Social workers can play a pivotal role in mitigating these risks through education, support, and policy development. By collaborating with IT departments, conducting awareness programs, and providing support to victims of cybercrimes, social workers can help create a safer digital learning environment. Furthermore, their expertise in conflict resolution and policy advocacy can contribute to the development of comprehensive strategies to address the complex challenges of the modern, higher education institutions, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to thrive and succeed regardless of their cultural, background, or religious differences.

Macro social work comprises policymaking, community-based, and research initiatives designed to address specific social issues. Micro and mezzo levels focus on addressing specific causes of social problems; however, at the macro level, social work practices seek to establish systematic and systemic interventions that can alleviate some of the earmarked social challenges (Hall et al., 2020; Sheppard, 2021; Van Breda, 2018; Kaushik and Walsh, 2019; Goldberg and Warburton, 2021; Finn, 2020; Baker et al., 2020). Macro social work focuses on larger societal issues, such as substance abuse, cybercrimes, housing, and homelessness. Social workers work closely with research institutions, policy-making organisations, and leaders at different levels to collectively come up with creative, innovative,

practical, and effective approaches to address such challenges.

The integration of social work at the macro level in Saudi Arabian society remains in a nascent stage, as evidenced by recent studies conducted by Al-sulami (2023) and Alzamil (2021). These findings highlight a significant gap in the development and implementation of large-scale social work interventions within the Kingdom. This underdevelopment poses challenges for addressing systemic issues and effecting broad societal changes through social work practices.

Research by Alotaibi et al. (2020) provides valuable insights into the obstacles faced by Saudi Arabian social workers, illuminating three primary issues that impede their effectiveness and influence. Firstly, social workers report a lack of administrative and managerial support for their role in guiding the younger generation. This disconnects between social workers' perceived responsibilities and institutional priorities severely limits their ability to make meaningful impacts on youth development and societal progress.

Secondly, the profession grapples with issues related to specialisation. A notable shift in policy no longer requires individuals to possess specialised social work education to enter the field. This change has led to a devaluation of social work expertise, fostering negative perceptions of social workers as unspecialised professionals. Such views undermine the credibility and authority of social workers, making it challenging for them to advocate effectively for social change and

policy reforms

Thirdly, there is a pervasive lack of recognition for the value of social work within Saudi Arabian society. Social workers often find themselves burdened with tasks unrelated to their core competencies, diluting their focus and effectiveness in addressing critical social issues. This misallocation of resources and skills further marginalises the profession and hinders its potential to contribute meaningfully to societal development.

The confluence of these three issues places social workers in Saudi Arabia in a precarious position, significantly hampering their ability to engage in macro-level interventions. This situation not only affects the professional standing of social workers but also limits the potential for addressing complex social issues that require systemic approaches.

An illustrative example of these challenges can be seen in the context of addressing youth unemployment in Saudi Arabia, a pressing issue that requires macro-level interventions. Social workers, with their understanding of community dynamics and individual needs, could play a crucial role in developing and implementing comprehensive programs to tackle this issue. However, their efforts are often constrained by the challenges.

For instance, a social worker might propose a community-based initiative to provide skills training and job placement services for unemployed youth. Despite the potential impact of such a program,

they may face resistance from administrators who do not prioritise such interventions. Furthermore, the social worker's expertise might be questioned due to the perception of lack of specialisation in the field. Finally, instead of being allowed to focus on developing and implementing this youth employment initiative, the social worker might be tasked with unrelated administrative duties, effectively sidelining their potential contribution to addressing a critical societal issue.

This example underscores how the current positioning of social work in Saudi Arabia hinders the profession's ability to effect change at the macro level. Addressing these challenges is crucial for enabling social workers to fulfil their potential in contributing to Saudi Arabia's social development and realising the objectives outlined in the country's Vision 2030 plan for societal transformation.

2.2.2. Comparing Social Work in Saudi Arabia and the UK

To provide a comparison to a country with a well-developed social care system, this section will provide a brief overview of how social work functions in the United Kingdom. This section has been included to reflect the educational environment in which this research was conducted, and to provide a basis for discussion of the provisions of social work in Saudi Arabia. Social work has been practiced in the UK for well over a century and has established itself as a core part of British society since the introduction of the welfare state in 1948, yet, as argued by Parker (2020) has found itself stuck in the debate of ‘deservingness and undeservingness’, based on the perceived social

characteristics of the recipients. The development of social work has thus largely been led and offered by the state, with services provided by local authorities. Social workers in the UK working with local authorities or in the NHS often have a caseload, which can be a range of individuals they are working with. Social workers in the UK work with older people and young people, adults with learning disabilities, refugees, people with substance issues, and more. Also, was for charities and third sector organisations (NHS, n.d.). Once they have received their qualifications, all social workers must register themselves with Social Work England (SWE) which registers social work courses and provides other resources for social workers.

Social workers in the UK can choose to specialise with specific groups, such as children or older people. There are numerous avenues for gaining the appropriate qualifications to work

as a social worker in the UK, including undergraduate programmes, and a Department for Education sponsored 14-month intensive programmes for those who do not have a degree in social work (Department for Education, 2023). To register with Social Work England, all qualified social workers in England must have an approved level 6 or 7 degree in social work. In England, only individuals registered with Social Work England can legally use the title social worker (Social Work England, 2021). Social work services are delivered predominantly by local authorities, and according to 2021 statistics from the NHS, nearly half of social work services

(45.7%) are in direct care roles (NHS Digital, 2021). In the UK, there is a difference between statutory social work and non-statutory social work. Statutory work refers to work conducted in line with government legislation, and non-statutory work is that done on a voluntary basis, for example, working for a children's charity.

The delivery of social work services by underfunded local authorities has been another political flashpoint around social work in the UK. These issues were especially highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, where the tragic loss of life in care homes of both residents and social workers turned attention to issues of underfunding and lack of investment in social care (Social Work England, 2021). Social work in the UK has also been negatively impacted by high-profile media cases involving failures in the social work system. Parker (2020) references the response to the Baby P case, where a 17-month-old child was found to have 50 injuries, despite having been seen by social workers, doctors, and police officers 60 times in the months before his death. In the response that followed, much of the blame was placed at the feet of social workers, rather than the government who had initiated austerity measures on social work services for years. Parker (2020) attributes this to a general ambivalence to social work from the general public and the government, with the COVID-19 pandemic being another example of this. The COVID-19 pandemic was a more recent

example of a social work scandal, with austerity practices and lack of

government investment in social services leading to disproportionate impacts on ethnically diverse communities, disabled people, and older individuals (Sen et al., 2022).

Thus, social work in the UK has largely developed and been practiced as part of the welfare state. There are numerous organisations (e.g., Social Work England, British Association of Social Workers (BASW)that offer assistance and resources to social workers in the UK, and numerous different options for gaining the relevant qualifications. Despite social workers working with marginalised groups in society, Parker (2020) argues that there is a general ambivalence to the role of social workers, and the job can be precarious and demanding due to underfunding and shortages. Reliance on underfunded local authorities can lead to tragedies, as has been discussed in the examples of Baby P and the COVID-19 pandemic. above.

Social work in Saudi Arabia is still a relatively new profession, originating in 1955 when schools first employed two social workers to manage social activities (Almaizer and Abdelhamed, 2018). Furthermore, the construction of social care in the country has been influenced by the unique cultural and religious context of the country. Albrithen and Yalli (2012) note that Saudi Arabian society is one which places great emphasis on the involvement of the family in providing support to disadvantaged family members. They suggest that this has contributed to ideas that issues covered by social work are the responsibility of the family, and do not require specialised, professional attention. Albrithen

and Yalli (2012) further note that this extends to the administrative and managerial level, as social work is not seen as important to the development of Saudi Arabia, thus leaving social workers facing significant administrative and organisational significant barriers. Social work in the Saudi Arabian context, therefore, may not be seen as the most suitable option for addressing resolving social issues. Table 2.1 below provides some of the core differences between social work provision in the UK and Saudi Arabia.

Table 2. 1 Differences Between Social Work in the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia

Social Work Area	The United Kingdom	Saudi Arabia
Qualifications	Qualification in social work necessary	Qualifications in psychology and sociology accepted
Availability of training	Continued professional development is required and monitored annual, and training courses and opportunities are available	Few educational and training courses available. Social work education centered in Riyadh
Regulatory body	Social Work England provide regulation and the British Association of Social Workers provide	There is currently no regulatory body in Saudi Arabia

	best practice guidance, and ethical frameworks	
Nature of employment	Statutory (under the guide of legislation) and non-statutory (volunteer work) available	Most social workers work in the educational (Ministry of Education) or healthcare sectors (in hospitals)
Cultural differences	Welfare state places priority on working with underprivileged groups, ageing population contributes to emphasis on working with children, families and older people.	Religious and cultural factors mean that some areas are dealt with by family without professional help. Willingness to work on certain issues may be hindered by religious and societal beliefs
Values and standards	High levels of confidentiality (where appropriate), information is shared with the authorities for potentially harmful cases	Importance of family in Islam and community-based emphasis ensures that confidentiality may not be maintained
Lack of resources	Funding cuts and austerity have contributed to staff	Administrative issues mean that social workers

	shortages, causing problems in the social work sector	often have to perform other jobs, and are over worked
Social work development	Social work is well-developed in the UK and is accessible through local authorities and volunteer groups. There are regulatory bodies and government-sponsored qualifications available	Social work is under-developed and misunderstood as a profession. Social workers often face administrative and organisational hurdles and not respected in society

According to Alshakhs and Alanzi (2018) and Alotaibi et al., (2020), social work organizations in Saudi Arabia face staff shortages, inadequate capacity, skills shortages, and considerable lapses in delivering their mandate. The factors that underpin these challenges are different in the Saudi Arabian and UK contexts, however, these issues are not unique to their respective contexts, and the situations are similar. Additionally, several studies (Albrithen and Yalli, 2012; Albrithen and Brickman, 2014; Alotaibi et al., 2020) have mentioned the significant impact the sociocultural and political structure of Saudi Arabia has on the social work system. Notably, ideas of charitable giving in Islam and family responsibility for taking care of sensitive issues have caused some unique challenges for social work in Saudi

Arabia (Albrithen and Yalli, 2012).

2.2.3. Social Work Practice in Saudi Arabia

According to Alotaibi et al. (2020) social work was introduced into Saudi Arabian society in five stages. The initial stage involved education and the training of social work practitioners, followed by the establishment of the Department of Social Education and Social Activities. The third and fourth stages were the professional stages, in which Saudi Arabia initially hired social workers from Egypt which pioneered social work in the Arab world when began in the 1930s (Sloan et al, 2017). Before training and hiring Saudi social workers within Saudi Arabia (Alotaibi et al., 2020). Social work is currently overseen by the Ministry of Human Resource and Social Development (Ministry of Human Resource and Social Development, 2024). The Ministry of Human Resource and Social Development is responsible for labour affairs, empowering individuals and communities, and promoting social responsibility (Ministry of Human Resource and Social Development, 2024). This marks a difference with countries that have specialist institutions or regulators for social work.

Additionally, management of social workers is divided in accordance with the professional field in which they operate in the Ministry of Health deals with hospital-based social work services, and the Ministry of Education deals with social work in the social sectors (Albrithen and Briskman, 2015). Furthermore, there is a more generalised approach

taken to social work education. As mentioned previously, in the UK, social workers can take courses to specialise in working with a specific group (NHS England, n.d.), once they are qualified. In Saudi Arabia, there is less specific training available for specialisation within the social work profession, and as well as this, there is no regulatory body meaning there is no sufficient ethical framework for social work practice (Albrithen and Briskman, 2015). As has been shown by Alotaibi et al., (2020) social workers in educational settings are no longer required to have subject specialist training in social work and can have backgrounds in sociology or psychology. Social workers in educational settings are under the directorate of the Ministry of Education, and there is an expectation that they will further engage in carrying out relevant research in social work.

Almaizar and Abdelhamed (2018) conducted a study into the research outputs of social workers in Saudi Arabia, and this can give us an insight into core topics of interest within social work in Saudi Arabia. The percentage distribution of topic interest is presented in Table 2.2 below.

Table 0.1 Issues Commonly Addressed by Saudi Arabia's Social Work Sector (Percentage Distribution of Academic Social Work Research): (Source: Almaizar and Abdelhamed, 2018).

Issues Addressed by Saudi Social Workers	Percentage Distribution of Studies

	Quantity (%)
Youth issues	7.1
Economic issues	9.4
The quality of social work education	8.2
Individuals with special needs	8.2
Elderly issues	2.4
Issues with the professional practice of social work	25.9
Women's issues	8.2
Social defence issues	5.9
Family issues	8.2
Community development	2.4
Homosexuality	2.4

The results from the study by Almaizar and Abdelhamed (2018) illustrate that most research output by Saudi Arabian social workers is conducted on the topic of issues with professional practice. As the studies discussed above (Albrithen and Briskman, 2015; Albrithen and Yalli, 2012; Alotaibi et al., 2020) have shown, the lack of a social work regulatory body, ethics code, and standardised qualification system have had one of the largest impacts of the effective delivery of social work in Saudi Arabia. Social workers often face organisational, administrative, and managerial barriers in their practice. Whereas the low number of outputs for studies around older people might seem surprising when compared to the attention of the welfare of older

people in the UK, this is the result of the characteristics of Saudi Arabian society. Older people occupy a special place in the hierarchy, and respect for elders is important in Saudi Arabian culture. As this is deeply rooted in tradition, specialised studies that discuss this topic are not deemed to be necessary (Almaizer and Abdelhamed, 2018).

Family issues, women's issues, individuals with special needs, and the quality of social work education also all featured highly. Almaizar and Abdelhamed (2018) attribute the high percentage of studies on the general topic of 'woman' (14.1%) to the fact that the historical gender-segregation of Saudi Arabian society makes it relatively easy to gather data for conducting studies about women as a group. Additionally, as a group that have been subject to strict regulations on social mobility, and more likely to be in poverty (Fadaak, 2012) women represent a vulnerable group in Saudi Arabian society. The different value bases of the UK and Saudi Arabia will be discussed in the methodology chapter.

Studies have noted that many of the issues faced by the social work sector in Saudi Arabia are commonplace across other nations. Albrithen and Yalli (2012) extend this to the cultural

and religious level, stating that attitudes towards social work in Saudi Arabia are like those in Malaysia. Albrithen and Briskman (2015) likewise mention that the Western literature on social work may not necessarily be applicable to the Saudi Arabian context. Aydin (2021) has suggested that cultural and religious influence of Islam in countries

in the Arab world, such as the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Bahrain, has led to Western approaches to social work being seen as a form of 're-colonisation'. Parker (2020) has also observed issues of funding cuts, staff shortages, and high turnover in the United Kingdom, despite social work having a long history of practice in the country. Social work in KSA is less developed and effective than services offered in other European nations (Alshakhs and Alanzi, 2018; Althumali, 2021; Almaizar and Abdelhamed, 2018). Although immigrants can fill staffing gaps, especially in the healthcare sector, this is not a viable long-term option (Alsahkhs and Alanzi, 2018; Alotaibi et al., 2020). Albrithen and Yalli (2012) support this, noting that workers who are unfamiliar with the sociocultural context of Saudi Arabia have found it difficult to succeed in social work positions in the country.

Social work in Saudi Arabia draws influence from traditional Islamic values and facets of Saudi Arabian tradition and culture, and for these reasons, there are some areas where social work is deemed less necessary such as families and relationships issues. Social work in Saudi Arabia was initially influenced by social work practices in Egypt (Alotaibi et al., 2020). The Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia sought the assistance of social workers working in Egypt to develop social work education programmes in Saudi Arabia (Almaizar and Abdelhamad, 2018). According to Althumali (2021), the social work profession in Saudi Arabia took influence from practices in Western

countries such as the United States of America, despite cultural differences. There is no doubt, however, that the core influence on the goals of social work in Saudi Arabia is Islam. Saudi Arabia's legal system is based on Islam, and Islamic values and principles permeate Saudi Arabian society (Althumali, 2021). For these reasons, the goals of social work in Saudi Arabia are aligned with Islamic values such as helping others who are less fortunate, community cohesion, and an emphasis on family values.

The Islamic doctrine employed by the government of Saudi Arabia places emphasis on community cohesion (The New Constitution of Saudi Arabia, 1993), and as a result of this, community development is an essential role of the social work sector in Saudi Arabia. According to the United Nations, community development is a process in which people from a community gather to take collective action and come up with solutions to address common challenges or issues they face (Alzain et al., 2021). Some examples of community development in Saudi Arabia include building community networks, servicing self-help groups, and running social action and support groups (Aleban and Al-sanad, 2022). Community development is driven by the focus on empowering people and groups with the abilities and skills they need to execute change within their communities (Alshakhs and Alanzi, 2018; Althumali, 2021; Almaizar and Abdelhamed, 2018). Therefore, social workers focus on building and bolstering capacities among people in local communities to enhance and improve their local

environments and communities (Samargandi et al., 2019; Albrithen, 2019; Al-Malkawi and Javaid, 2018; Alzain, 2019; Bakur et al., 2020).

However, social workers face considerable challenges in community development because of the political and social implications of potential advocacy to the overarching cultural dynamics and political implications (Zakari et al., 2021; Aleban and Al-Sanad, 2022; Alzain et al., 2021; Baabdullah, 2018). The KSA (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) is conservative and does not allow thriving advocacy and expressive campaigns that challenge the status quo. As a result, social workers have to try and establish a balance between the challenges presented by the sociocultural and political environment of the country and the needs of their role. (Alshakhs and Alanzi, 2018; Althumali, 2021; Almaizar and Abdelhamed, 2018). In Saudi Arabia, community development is fundamental to achieving goals, such as ensuring a skilled labour force, less disparity between different communities, and reducing issues that affect local communities (Syed, Ali and Hennekam, 2018). Although it is difficult to gauge exact numbers on how social work services are divided in Saudi Arabian society, there are several qualitative studies that explore the placements of some social work students undertake as part of their professional development, offering an insight. However, not all social work students in Saudi Arabia undertake placements. In a study by Lardhi (2016) the most significant percentage of the students (34%) undertook placements in schools. The second largest percentage of the students

(just under 30%) took placements where they worked with individuals with disabilities. Older people and family breakdowns made up around 15% of the placements. With the lack of a national level social work organisation and a tendency towards generalisation rather than specialisation, it is difficult to gauge figures that specify the allocation of social work resources in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, studies discussed previously in this section have pointed towards administrative, organisational, and managerial challenges faced by social work in Saudi Arabia. As the research output and student placement data has shown, social work output in Saudi Arabia differs considerably from the UK.

The consensus in the academic literature is that the recent development of the Saudi Arabian social work sector necessitates updating the conceptualisation, approach, and strategic methods of addressing modern challenges such as cybercrime, globalisation, and identity issues, especially amongst young people (Zakari et al., 2021; Aleban and Al-Sanad, 2022; Alzain et al., 2021; Baabdullah, 2018). Elsayed et al, 2022) have also argued that the nature of social work in Arab countries research, dominated by Western approach and philosophy, must be balanced with the traditional cultural and religious values of Saudi Arabian society. It is important to note, however, that the vast majority of social work in the UK and other countries is based on direct practice rather than research-based practices. Islamic doctrine emphasises charity and duty of care to citizens, thus making

traditional Islamic values suitable for alignment with the values of social work. However, traditional values may also hinder tackling taboo or socially complex topics, such as drug abuse and violence against children (Lardhi, 2016). Traditional values often create barriers by prioritising family honour, social reputation welfare. This can lead to silencing victims, stigmatising sensitive issues, and resisting professional interventions that challenge deeply ingrained cultural norms and hierarchies.

However, this may be a more prominent trend on the national level. When evaluating the embrace of contemporary methods on the micro level, for example, at schools and hospitals in Riyadh, the findings have revealed that social workers are adopting new tools and methods (Samargandi et al., 2019; Albrithen, 2019; Al-Malkawi and Javaid, 2018; Alzain, 2019; Bakur et al., 2022). For example, social workers in schools, especially the technologically advanced institutions of higher learning in Saudi Arabia, offer robust support, educative, and intervention measures in addressing cybercrimes and other online-related challenges young people and staff face (Zakari et al., 2021; Aleban and Al-Sanad, 2022; Alzain et al., 2021; Baabdullah, 2018). However, as noted by Almaizar and Abdelhamed (2018), this could also be attributed to the fact that most advanced level qualifications and educational institutions for social work education are located in Riyadh. The centralisation of social work education in Riyadh can thus cause difficulties in accessibility for those who live outside the city.

This section of the literature review has explored the contextual background of social work in Saudi Arabia. Social work in Saudi Arabia presents a unique context that has been influenced by religious, social, and cultural aspects. Where certain trends, such as lack of funding and cuts, are similar to those observed in the social work sector in other countries, the context of Saudi Arabian society presents some unique challenges. First, there is the lack of an official regulating body and few opportunities for further professional development when compared to countries such as the UK. Second, social work is in its infancy, and the social structure of the country has contributed to the idea that social workers are not always necessary in some contexts. This has created administrative, managerial, and organisational issues for social workers as they often feel that they are not taken seriously by superiors, making it harder for them to effectively complete their duties. Third, social work education in Saudi Arabia is generalised, and there are few avenues for specialisation with specific groups. This can have ramifications on social workers having the necessary skillsets to deal with highly vulnerable sensitive groups or individuals. Thus, where social work has increased in frequency in recent years, there are still challenges and barriers faced by social workers in Saudi Arabia. The next section will discuss these challenges in more detail.

2.2.4. Challenges to Social Work in Saudi Arabia

The literature suggests that social workers in Saudi Arabia are faced

with several challenges, some of which are unique to the Saudi Arabian context. Social workers are afforded little recognition for their work, influenced by cultural and religious beliefs that place greater emphasis on the role of the family in resolving and managing social issues (Albrithen and Briskman, 2015). These attitudes have contributed to negative attitudes towards social work on the administrative and managerial levels (Alotaibi et al., 2020), as the role of social workers is understood, leading to social workers experiencing difficulties with communicating their needs to Senior-level decision-makers. The beneficial contributions social work can offer to Saudi Arabian society make social work an important part of progress , however, the lack of recognition for the role, lack of investment, and lack of structure and regulation make achieving this difficult (Almathami, Khoo-Lattimore and Yang, 2022; Alluhidan et al., 2020; Parveen, 2020). Around 96 per cent of the people in the KSA feel strongly regarding the role of social workers and the essential services they provide (Al Faryan, Frederico and Young, 2019; Ahmed and Al-Dhuwaihi, 2020). However, only 26 per cent of social workers in the KSA are proud of their profession and just 6 per cent would recommend it to others (Almathami et al., 2022; Alluhidan et al., 2020; Parveen, 2020). The statistics underscore the challenges facing Saudi Arabia (Syed et al., 2018). Although there is a recognition of the importance of social workers, most families and individuals do not view it positively enough to recommend it as a career choice (Alasmri et al.,

2020).

As has been discussed previously, the social work sector faces considerable barriers in administration. This has contributed to social work being viewed as ineffective (Almathami et al., 2022; Alluhidan et al., 2020; Parveen, 2020). Enhancing the relationship between social workers and the administrative and managerial levels will be crucial for Saudi Arabia to address its massive staffing shortages. This improved relationship will also help curb Saudi Arabia's reliance on foreign labour to fill crucial positions in social work, especially in healthcare.

Analysis of social workers in Saudi Arabia shows that, in 2020, more than 70 per cent are dissatisfied with their jobs. This is primarily due to the working conditions and perceptions they must face in their day-to-day operations (Syed et al., 2020; Al Asmri et al., 2020; Alahmad et al., 2020; Abou-Moghli and Al-Abdallah, 2019). For example, more than two- thirds of the social work employees have attended work while ill at least two times in 2020.

An earlier study also shows that most social workers have worked for more days in a year and hours in a day than they are contracted (Hammad and Shah, 2018). This has created an environment in which most of the social workers are considerably dissatisfied with their role and are actively looking to leave their profession entirely (Syed et al., 2018). The levels of stress among social workers in the KSA are considerably higher compared to the national average. This dynamic creates an environment of low morale, satisfaction, and motivation,

which affects the effectiveness of the work of social workers (Syed et al., 2020; Al Asmri et al., 2020; Hammad and Shah, 2018; Alahmad et al., 2020; Abou-Moghli and Al-Abdallah, 2020). This is challenging because it affects some of the most vulnerable communities in the country, such as children and young people, children, orphans, people who are the mentally unwellill, vulnerable women, and older people the elderly (Alahmad et al., 2020).

The analysis of social workers across the KSA conducted by Al Asmri et al., (2020) reveals crucial themes that characterise the challenges facing this sector. The three main themes established include administrative constraints, workload and occupational stress, and socio- demographic differences in the population. Socio-demographic differences refer to the variations in characteristics and attributes among different groups of people. These differences can include factors such as age, gender, income level, education, ethnicity, and occupation, for example, the wealth disparities of the high migrant worker population in precarious employment (Syed et al., 2020; Al Asmri et al., 2020; Hammad and Shah, 2018; Alahmad et al., 2020; Abou-Moghli and Al-Abdallah, 2020). The main sub-themes which highlight the specific challenges facing social workers include specialisation and competence, lack of resources, cultural diversity of the society, recognition, family education level, and workload and occupational stress (Abou-Moghli and Al-Abdallah, 2019; Al Asmri et al., 2020). These themes have been selected for further analysis as

they are of relevance to the present study and have been identified across numerous studies discussed in this literature, suggesting they are characteristic of the social work industry in Saudi Arabia. Some of these themes are examined below.

Alessa et al. (2021) posit that most of the social workers in the KSA are appointed based on general perceptions of their qualifications and competency. The sector has not invested heavily in the specialisation of social workers to bolster efficient and effective service delivery in specific sectors, such as education, healthcare, and community development (Sawmar and Mohammad, 2019). As was discussed previously, social work education in Saudi Arabia is largely geared towards generalised skillsets and not specific group specialisations. The result of this approach has been a considerable impact on the quality and effectiveness of social workers in addressing core challenges facing specific groups and communities in the KSA (Syed et al., 2020; Al Asmri et al., 2020; Hammad and Shah, 2018; Alahmad et al., 2020; Abou-Moghli and Al-Abdallah, 2020). Most social workers in Saudi Arabia lack the requisite skills and capabilities to deal with cases because they lack specialisation and competencies in such specific areas.

For example, Banafea and Ibnrubbian (2018) indicate that in Saudi schools, there is a need for social workers to have a robust background, skills, and competencies in handling the learning environment, working with educators, and addressing the dynamic

cultural and attitudinal factors shaping student lives. According to (Alghamdi, Albloushi and Alzahrani, 2019), these social workers also need to have effective communication, social, and expert skills in linking the parental roles to those of educators, administrators, and other education stakeholders. However, in the KSA, most of the social workers appointed to schools lack professional and experiential skills and abilities to meet these crucial responsibilities (Alessa et al., 2021; Sawmar and Mohammad, 2019; Banafea and Ibnrubbian, 2018; Alghamdi et al., 2019; Rahman and Al-Borie, 2021). For example, social workers are sometimes called to work with young students or specific groups of learners (such as young women) and help them adjust to the learning environment and address any emerging challenges (Al-Rasheed, 2018). These social workers interact with students directly, and sometimes they address situations by consulting with family members, teachers, and therapists to come up with the ways to promote the learners' health and wellbeing (Syed et al., 2020; Al Asmri et al., 2020; Hammad and Shah, 2018; Alahmad et al., 2020; Abou-Moghli and Al Abdallah, 2020). These responsibilities underscore the need for social workers to have considerable specialised skills in child development, teaching, healthcare, and wellness. Without such backgrounds, social workers are rendered considerably ineffective in delivering their core mandate to schools, students, teachers, parents, therapists, and other stakeholders (Hidayat-ur- Rehman et al., 2021).

In addressing contemporary challenges within an educational

environment, such as cybercrimes faced by young women using social media, social workers cooperate closely with the affected learners and their peers to raise awareness, teach preventative measures, and encourage them to report such cases to the relevant authorities (Alessa et al., 2021; Sawmar and Mohammad, 2019; Banafea and Ibnrubbian, 2018; Alghamdi et al., 2019; Rahman and Al-Borie, 2021; Al-Rasheed, 2018). These responsibilities require a robust background and knowledge base of the workings of social media, the Internet, and cybercrimes (Basri, 2020). Without such skills, social work might end up being a barrier in the fight against cybercrimes, which will negatively affect the wellbeing of learners, especially the affected women.

Alongside capacity and skills, there is a need for social workers to have access to the core resources they need to meet their obligations to local communities and deliver their services effectively and efficiently (Rahman, 2020). As has been explored in several studies (Almaizer and Abdelhamed, 2018; Albrithen and Yalli, 2012), access to continued training opportunities is of critical importance in social work education, as it enables social work to meet the demands of quickly changing societies. Being registered (successful completion of social work qualification) as a social worker with Social Work England requires yearly evidence of continued work and professional development (NHS England, n.d.). In Saudi Arabia's social work sector, the lack of resources has been of the key challenges that has

limited the operational effectiveness of the social worker sector.

In many cases, social workers in the KSA collaborate with the local institutions in which they are attached, appointed, or employed. Although the government invests heavily in the macro social work programs, the mezzo and micro social levels must draw their resources from individual institutions and local organisations (Alessa et al., 2021; Sawmar and Mohammad, 2019; Banafea and Ibnrubbian, 2018; Alghamdi et al., 2019; Rahman and Al-Borie, 2021; Al-Rasheed, 2018). For example, schools and institutions of higher learning in the KSA cooperate closely with social workers in areas, such as mental health, wellbeing, drug abuse, cybercrimes, familial issues, cultural and social challenges, poverty, and other emerging problems (Alsulimani et al., 2021). However, Basri (2020) has argued that trends in Saudi Arabia show that social work departments within institutions are often deprived of the necessary resources to provide appropriate services to the individuals involved.

The lack of resources means that most social workers feel limited in their abilities to meet their obligations and be effective in delivering important services (Al Asmri et al., 2020). The resulting low morale, satisfaction levels, and lack of purpose among social workers contribute to the negative perception of the profession among workers, families, and students (Alessa et al., 2021; Sawmar and Mohammad, 2019; Banafea and Ibnrubbian,2018; Alghamdi et al., 2019; Rahman and Al-Borie, 2021; Al-Rasheed, 2018). The breakdown of trust makes

it harder for social work professionals to do their work effectively, which facilitates more negative views because of ineffectiveness.

The cultural dynamic in Saudi Arabia is anchored in Islam. Religion and its core tenets are the guiding principles of Saudi culture (Al Faryan et al., 2019). However, modernity and globalisation have forced the country to continuously evolve and adjust to meet the socio-economic challenges of the 21st century. This dynamism is underscored by Saudi Arabia's heavy investment in technological advancement, literacy, and competency in its education sector, including schools and institutions of higher learning (Alessa et al., 2021; Sawmar and Mohammad, 2019; Banafea and Ibnrubbian, 2018; Alghamdi et al., 2019; Rahman and Al-Borie, 2021; Al-Rasheed, 2018). The resulting educational capacity is expected to propel Saudi Arabia into massive development by equipping it with the capacity, skills, and know- how of the modern economic needs, such as innovation, creativity, and technological advancements.

However, such technological advancements have come with cultural evolution and the need for the KSA to modernise in areas, such as gender issues, the role of women in the economy, and measures to address issues, such as mental health, housing, homelessness, poverty, discrimination, and immigration (Berg-Weger and Morley, 2020). Most of this agenda falls in the hands of social workers in Riyadh and across Saudi Arabia. Immigration has also introduced massive diversity (background and cultural) to not only the social work

sector's staffing but also the rest of the Saudi community (particularly in urban areas). As discussed by Elsayed et al (2022), many of the social work educational institutions are in the capital, Riyadh. They further note that several the staff at these institutions are foreign nationals, with many from Egypt or the West. They note that this has caused some cultural tensions and clashes.

Cultural diversity means different perceptions regarding the role of the state, social workers, the relationships in communities, and the impact of issues like poverty, crime, homelessness, education, healthcare, and mental health (Fisher et al., 2021; Levin et al., 2022; Hall et al., 2020; Canda et al., 2019; Aleksandrovich et al, 2018; Goldberg et al., 2021). Social workers must be aware of cultural differences before establishing the best approach to delivering their services optimally. There is not a single approach (universal technique) that works for all communities in Saudi Arabia. Social workers are forced to be agile, creative, and deliberate in their approaches to circumvent the cultural differences in society (Alessa et al., 2021; Sawmar and Mohammad, 2019; Banafea and Ibnrubbian, 2018; Alghamdi et al., 2019; Rahman and Al-Borie, 2021; Al-Rasheed, 2018). However, such dynamism poses a massive challenge to social workers that are often non-specialised and lacking in the required skills and competencies to handle such dynamic situations.

Saudi Arabia's national perception of social workers is that this sector is important in shaping key aspects of community development,

dynamism, and functioning. This identification is crucial in giving the sector legitimacy and the mandate to work closely with communities, groups, and individuals to address social challenges (Le Grand, 2018). The literature shows that 96 per cent of the people in the KSA have a positive perception of the role social workers play in their communities; they recognise that social work is a necessity for the wellbeing and effectiveness of communities (Barsky, 2019). However, very few people in Saudi Arabia view social work as a viable or prestigious enough career path. The dissonance here is that while recognising the central role of social work in Saudi society, a vast majority of Saudis would not be interested or willing to train and become social workers (Fisher et al., 2021;Levin et al., 2022; Hall et al., 2020; Canda et al., 2019; Aleksandrovich et al, 2018; Goldberg et al., 2021). This highlights a core challenge facing the social work sector in the KSA. Social work lacks the recognition as a valid professional role to attract investment and greater commitment to training and development, which are required to overcome staffing challenges, and facilitate greater specialisation (Payne, 2020).

The issue of recognition is also underscored by the budgeting process at the national level and resource allocation at the institutional and community levels (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). At the institutional level, social workers are hired to address challenges without the requisite resources and capacity they need. This is especially highlighted in learning institutions, where social workers lack the resources and

budget required to implement important programs that can drive their ability to meet their primary responsibilities (Fisher et al., 2021; Levin et al., 2022; Hall et al., 2020; Canda et al., 2019; Aleksandrovich et al, 2018; Goldberg et al., 2021).

The biting staffing shortages in the social work sector in the KSA means that workload and occupational stress are crucial themes characterising the work of social workers (Sawmar and Mohammad, 2019). As has been discussed by Parker (2020), this is characteristic of many social work sectors internationally, with similar situations observed in both the UK and the USA. For example, individual social workers in schools are often expected to serve support up to 500 students. In many cases, such institutions have a single social worker, which makes the resulting workload unmanageable (Fisher et al., 2021; Levin et al., 2022; Hall et al., 2020; Canda et al., 2019; Aleksandrovich et al, 2018; Goldberg et al., 2021). Coupled with the massive under-resourcing of social work, the resulting dynamic demonstrates a social work sector that is in a dire situation, characterised by ineffectiveness (Basri, 2020).

In cases where social workers have a caseload of more than 200 students, they do not find adequate time to provide individualised attention to the challenges they face. As a result, they develop standardised methods of processing all the cases as a group (Alsulimani et al., 2021). Although most social workers in institutions, such as schools, work for long hours with efficiency, professional

artistry, and integrity, their workload makes it hard to have the desired impact of their work on the learners and other affected individuals in such organisations (Hidayat-ur-Rahman et al., 2021). This situation also means that social workers must focus on the problems the people they are working with face, which leaves no room for research, innovation, and outside-the-box thinking that can help move the profession forward in addressing emerging challenges.

Social challenges are dynamic and continuously change with the external environment. This means that the social work profession needs to continuously update its approaches, techniques, and skills through training and development of its staff to ensure that it is equipped to address such emerging challenges (Fisher et al., 2021; Levin et al., 2022; Hall et al., 2020; Canda et al., 2019; Aleksandrovich et al, 2018; Goldberg et al., 2021). However, with the existing workload, under-staffing, high turnover, and lack of resources, the Saudi social work sector has been stagnant for many years, which means that most of its methods and approaches are out-dated and ineffective in addressing modern social challenges.

Studies (Syed et al., 2018) have shown that social workers with high workloads are susceptible to facing difficulties with stress and depression. Additionally, the Saudi Arabian social work sector is increasingly becoming output-oriented, which means that social workers must reach specific quantitative milestones without consideration given to qualitative achievements (Al Asmri et al., 2020).

This means that social workers are under pressure to serve a specific number of individuals without necessarily considering the quality and effectiveness of the services they discharge.

Heavy workloads and stress might also lead to the overlooking of trends and patterns shaping newer social dynamics in society (Hammad and Shah, 2018). For example, the surge in the use of social media among the Saudi population, including women, means that these users are exposed to new social and cultural challenges in online environments (Fisher et al., 2021; Levin et al., 2022; Hall et al., 2020; Canda et al., 2019; Aleksandrovich et al, 2018; Goldberg et al., 2021). However, the problems can be carried from online to offline scenarios with real-life effects on performance, motivation, and mental wellbeing. Therefore, the social work profession needs to be dynamic, innovative, and open to change (Abou-Moghli and Al-Abdallah, 2019). For example, the threat of cybercrimes has become a crucial issue facing most online users in KSA. This is particularly crucial among specific predisposed groups, such as young people, children, and women, when it comes to social media-based cybercrimes.

Despite the challenges facing the Saudi social work profession, there are encouraging signs of progress and growing recognition of its importance. Recent years have seen an increase in governmental and societal attention to the field, with increased investment in social work education and training programs. This shift reflects a broader understanding of social work's critical role in addressing complex

societal issues and supporting community development.

Local initiatives and community-based projects are increasingly incorporating social work perspectives, demonstrating a growing appreciation for the profession's unique contributions. Moreover, policy makers are beginning to consult social work professionals more frequently when developing social welfare programs, indicating a shift towards recognising their expertise.

While obstacles remain, the trajectory of social work in Saudi Arabia appears to be on a growing trend. The profession is gradually gaining respect, positioning itself as an essential component in the Kingdom's vision for social development and community well-being. This evolving landscape presents both opportunities and responsibilities for social workers to establish further their role in shaping Saudi society (Fisher et al., 2021; Levin et al., 2022; Hall et al., 2020; Canda et al., 2019; Aleksandrovich et al, 2018; Goldberg et al., 2021). As a result, institutions are beginning to include social workers in their strategic decision making and planning, which means that the resulting environment is not only welcoming of the services offered by social workers but enhances the effectiveness of social work among stakeholders (Alluhidan et al., 2020; Almathami et al., 2022). The importance of social work in modern institutions and organisations in the KSA is demonstrated by their role in combating social media-based cybercrimes and mental health issues. Additionally, greater integration between social workers and the authorities could mean that

social workers have a greater stake in the formation of macro policy on the national level.

2.3. Social Media-Based Cybercrimes Against Women in Saudi Arabia

2.3.1. Social Media and Cybercrime

Social media is a dynamic digital platform that function as virtual space where users can construct personalised online identities, connect with both existing offline contacts and new online acquaintances, and freely develop relationships irrespective of geographical limitations. These platforms enable individuals to express their passions, preferences, and interests while simultaneously providing opportunities to socialize with people who share similar backgrounds and perspectives (Stanger, Alnaghaimshi and Pearson, 2017). Social media can be defined as online platforms influencing strongly on people's daily live as it is an online wide community to interact (Elayan and Sykora, 2024).

The advent and popularity of social media have had implications on the prevalence and exposure of users of these platforms to cybercrimes. Several studies have examined the relationship between the use of social media and the frequency, success, and severity of cybercrimes. Soomro and Hussain (2019) examined social-media-related cybercrimes, the techniques used, and the prevention measures that can be taken. Their findings indicate that the prevalence of social media networks and their use globally has led to a surge in the number of cyber criminals and cybercrimes across the

world. The argument here is that the prolific use of social media allows cyber criminals access to countless opportunities to commit their acts. This stance is supported by Almadhoor, Alserhani and Humayun (2021) who evaluated the relationship between cybercrimes and the use of social media. Their findings show that the increase in social media use has led to the proliferation of cybercrimes. The central argument advanced by Almadhoor et al (2021) is that social media gives users the ability to be anonymous, which bolsters cyber criminals' preference of being untraceable after defrauding victims. (Siddik and Rahi, 2020) analysed cybercrimes in social media and the examined the existing legal frameworks, in their findings, they established that criminals can easily set up fake social media identity accounts and use them to communicate with anyone globally, which gives them the opportunity and cover to commit cybercrimes. However, this rise in cybercrime cannot simply be attributed to increased social media usage. Regulating social media and online communication has proven to be difficult, and there have been a number of high-profile cases where websites and social media platforms did not do enough to ensure adequate safeguarding of their users.

Overall, the proliferation of the use of social media platforms, defined by Boyd and Ellison (2008) as networks that foreground the social connectivity and encompass content produced by its users (Obar and Woldman, 2015), provides access to billions of people globally, as well as offering individuals an unprecedented level of access to information

(Soomro and Hussain, 2019). In 2024, global social media usage has reached a pivotal milestone with 5.04 billion active user identities worldwide. This unprecedented level of digital engagement represents approximately two-thirds of the global population, signaling a transformative shift in communication patterns and interconnectedness across international boundaries. The statistic underscores the increasingly central role of social media platforms in contemporary social, cultural, and communicative landscapes (Kemp, 2024).However, the downside of this is that it has also presented opportunities to defraud people (Almadhoor et al., 2021), and the anonymity to get away with cybercrimes (Siddik and Rahi, 2020). However, the general view of the data regarding the frequency of cybercrimes on social media does not provide an in-depth understanding of the core trends and patterns underlying the surge in social media-based cybercrimes. According to Yeboah-Ofori and Brimicombe (2018), the international nature of social media networks has allowed for a globalised sense of cybercrimes. This means that an individual in the UK can be defrauded by a criminal based anywhere in the world. In their findings, Yeboah-Ofori and Brimicombe (2018) states that the lack of a coordinated and concerted anti-cybercrime approach adopted by many countries has bolstered loopholes, therefore providing more incentive for committing cybercrime. The technological end of the social media sector is also continuously changing and advancing, which makes it hard for law enforcement

approaches to be effective in curbing cybercrimes (Almansoori et al., 2021).

In January 2024, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia exhibited a remarkably high digital engagement, with social media penetration reaching an unprecedented level. Specifically, the nation recorded 35.10 million active social media users, representing a staggering 94.3 percent of its total population. This statistic underscores the profound digital connectivity and technological immersion characteristic of contemporary Saudi society, reflecting a significant transformation in communication patterns and digital interaction modalities within the regional context (Kemp, 2024).

Almansoori et al., (2021) analysed cybercrimes on social media platforms and the challenges they pose to users. In their findings, they reveal that the growing popularity of social media use is mainly centred on sharing videos, feelings, and photos. Almansoori et al., (2021) also argue that the security risk such users face has surged considerably. Exposure to cybercrimes is compounded by the lack of awareness, knowledge, and understanding fraud risk among users. Buil-Gil et al. (2021) argues that law enforcement agencies across the world, especially in the West, are making massive efforts to curb the crime rates on social media platforms. However, these efforts have failed to achieve considerable results in denting the frequencies and severity of cybercrimes, because of a lack of participation among users, primarily due to inadequate awareness and knowledge of the risks they

face while using their social media platforms.

The surge in the amount (volume), veracity, velocity, and variety of information (data) on social media platforms underscores the unique exposure to cybercrimes facing users of these networks face (Almansoori et al., 2021; Buil-Gil et al., 2021). This dynamic shows indicates that the frequency and severity of cybercrimes will continue to rise with the current user behaviours, attitudes, and levels of information regarding cyber security (Anudini, Dissanayake and Uwanthika, 2021).

Ngejane et al. (2018) posit that advances in technology in areas like machine learning and data analytics, providing a crucial platform to bolster the fight against cybercrimes. Specifically, Ngejane et al. (2018) examined specific cybercrimes, such as identity deception, cyber bullying, online sexual grooming, and identity theft, especially among young people. In their analysis, Ngejane et al. (2018) establish that machine learning technologies have made considerable progress in identifying and preventing online sexual grooming between older perpetrators and young people. In Western nations, issues of rights to privacy have been critical in shaping the fight against cybercrimes, coupled with the anonymous nature of most social media platforms, the resulting environment makes it hard to address the risks from a legal and regulatory standpoint (Siddik and Rahi, 2020; Soomro and Hussain, 2019; Almansoori et al., 2021; Buil-Gil et al., 2021).

Apart from the general exposure to cybercrimes caused by social

media, several factors influence the individuals who are eventually affected by specific cases of theft, bullying, or fraud on social networks. A study carried out by Nalaka and Diunugala (2020) explored the factors associated with social-media-related crime victimisation among young people who were university students. The results show that some of the core factors shaping the intersection of social media use and cybercrimes include:

- Awareness
- Security management
- Digital literacy
- Income levels
- Relationship with family
- Purpose of online surfing
- Hours spent on these platforms
- The number of friends (acquaintances) on social networks
- Privacy concentration

The literature here demonstrates that while macro-trends show that the use of social media platforms generally increases potential for cybercrime, each individual case is unique, and is driven by various factors shaping individual or group dynamics (Ngejane et al., 2018;

Anudini et al., 2021; Nalaka and Diunugala, 2020).

The findings advanced by Nalaka and Diunugala (2020) present varying trends and patterns of cybercrimes in different communities, geographical regions, and countries. Geographical and cultural factors shape core factors, such as digital literacy, privacy concentration, relationships with family, awareness levels (Fahlevi et al., 2019), and educational levels, which shape the extent to which an individual or a group in the community is exposed to cybercrimes when using social media (Anudini et al., 2021). These dynamics underscore the need for specific analysis of regions, countries, or economic blocks, to establish in-depth understanding of the prevailing patterns and trends regarding social media-related cybercrimes. In this case, there is a need to evaluate the specific aspects of social media-based cybercrimes against women in Saudi Arabia.

According to Al-Ruithe et al., (2018), the rapid transformation of Saudi society is characterised by the massive role social media is playing in the everyday lives of ordinary people in the country. Globally, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia provides one of the largest markets for social networks like WhatsApp, YouTube, Snapchat, Pinterest, Instagram,

Facebook, TikTok and X. Social media is growing at a rate of 9.2% globally, and the growth rate in Saudi Arabia is close to this, at 8.7% (Alharbi, 2019). Table 2.3 below illustrates the raw numbers in relation to the use of social media in the KSA.

Table 0.2 The Internet Penetration and Social Media Use in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (Source: Alatawy, 2022).

The Total KSA Population	35.08 Million	100 per cent
The Number of Internet Users in the KSA	33.58 Million	93.31 per cent
The Number of Active Users of social media	27.80 Million	72.38 per cent

Analysis of the trends in the KSA also shows that the main platforms that are widely used include Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Pinterest, as illustrated in Table 2.4.

Social media users in the KSA also emphasise video content, which underscores the popularity of video platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook (Alharbi, 2019: Aina et al., 2019). Trends also show that young people in the KSA spend an average of more than three hours every day watching online videos, which surpasses the period they operate on online games and messaging apps (Aina et al., 2019).

Table 0.3 The Most Used Social Media Platforms in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Source: Alatawy, 2022).

Social Media Platform	Number of Users (in Million)	Percentage (%) of KSA Population
YouTube	31.40	89.50
Instagram	26.80	76.40

Facebook	25.92	73.90
Twitter	25.05	71.40
LinkedIn	13.96	39.80
Pinterest	10.21	29.10
Tumblr	6.240	17.80

Communication is important in the use of social media in the KSA. As a result, messaging applications have considerable popularity and use rates in the country. As shown in Table

2.5 below, Meta's WhatsApp is the leading messaging application used in the KSA with around 80.5 per cent of the population utilising it, followed by Snapchat (53.4 per cent) and Facebook Messenger (54.1 per cent) (Alhubaishy and Aljuhani, 2021).

Table 0.4 The Most Widely Used Messaging Apps in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

(Source: Alatawy, 2022).

Messaging App	Number of Users (in Million)	Percentage (%) of KSA Population
WhatsApp	28.24	80.5
Snapchat	18.73	53.4
FB Messenger	18.98	54.1
TikTok	15.61	44.5
Skype	9.09	25.9

LINE	7.26	20.7
Wechat	7.96	22.7

The preference of messaging apps in Saudi Arabia is driven by the fact that they are free for individuals with the access to an Internet connection (Moshashai, Leber and Savage, 2020). This shows that massive portions of the Saudi community interact and communicate using social networks and their messenger apps. This demonstrates a widespread embrace of social media across all levels of the KSA society (Alharbi, 2019: Aina et al., 2019; Alhubaishy and Aljuhani, 2021; Moshashai et al, 2020).

The use of social media in the KSA also forms a crucial part of the emerging technological trends and patterns in the Kingdom and the region. For instance, social media networks have been incorporated in professional activities, such as marketing, healthcare, education, and public outreach (Alanzi and Al-Yami, 2019; Alatawy, 2022). For example, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a transformational impact in the use of technology in several sectors, particularly the healthcare industry. In a study on the topic, Alanzi and Al-Yami (2019) examined the attitudes and behaviours among physicians in Saudi Arabia towards the use of social media platforms for professional purposes, with their results finding that there has been an increase in positive perceptions of social media as a healthcare delivery tool. This

was seen as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, which necessitated

delivering remote healthcare information (Hammad and Alqarni, 2021; Al-Regaiey et al., 2022). An increasing number of professionals in the Saudi healthcare industry have embraced the use of social media in delivering care, interacting with patients, and bolstering positive outcomes (Hamasha et al., 2019; Aboalshamat et al., 2019; Alghonaim et al., 2019).

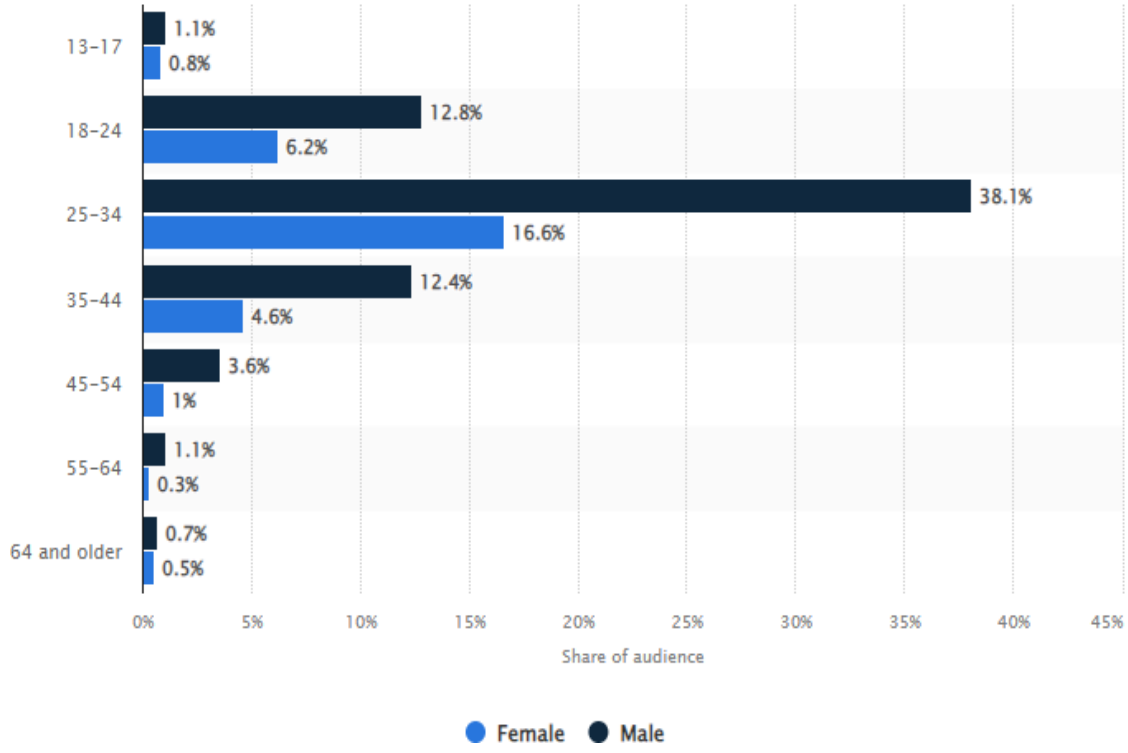
According to Almansoori et al., (2021), the upward trajectory of social media use in Saudi Arabia is especially pronounced among young people. Siddik and Rahi (2020) argue that this trend indicates that young people are uniquely predisposed to cybercrimes because of their high numbers on these platforms. However, Ngejane et al., (2018) argue that this assumption does not consider the targeted nature of various cybercrimes. For example, cyber bullying and sex grooming perpetrators often target young people, body shaming (e.g., commenting on a woman's body size, physical attractiveness) typically targets women, whereas fraud cases target individuals with online financial transactions (often older people) (Yeboah-Ofori and Brimicombe, 2018; Buil-Gil et al., 2021). This dynamic underscores. These dynamics underscore the need to examine specific demographics in evaluating the risk exposure to cybercrimes among social media users (Anudini et al., 2021; Nalaka and Diunugala, 2020; Monteith et al., 2021). Hassan et al. (2020) carried out qualitative questionnaire survey using convenience sampling with a dataset of 356 women to examine the cyber violence patterns among women in

Egypt. Their findings indicated that women using social media networks are among the most predisposed groups in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region. These findings were confirmed by Khalil and Storie (2021) and Al-Nasrawi (2021) who examined the trends of social media use among Saudi women.

2.3.2. Social Media and Saudi Women

As illustrated in Figure 2.1 below, an analysis of 2020 social media advertising data in Saudi Arabia reveals that there is a significantly high number of men using social networks when compared to women. Young people are a particularly important demographic when exploring cyberbullying, as they are the most likely to be affected (Al-Sulami, 2023). Of young people between 25 to 34 years old, there is around 16.6 per cent of women using social media actively compared to 38.1 per cent of men. Male social media users also outstrip female users at other age groups to various degrees.

Figure 0.1 The Distribution of Social Media Audiences in Saudi Arabia based on Gender and Age. (Source: Salminen et al., 2017).



Al-Talhi and Maarop (2018) examined social media usage by females in Saudi Arabia using an online survey of 632 respondents among Saudi females. In their findings, Al-Talhi and Maarop (2018) demonstrated that women in the KSA utilise social media for entertainment, staying up to date with developments, news, and current events, and connecting with family and friends. However, analysis by Al-Talhi and Maarop (2018) shows that although the number of women using social media is low compared to men, the examination of the professional use of social networks reveals an even lower proportion of women leveraging this technology compared to men using these platforms for business purposes. Al-Talhi and Maarop

(2018) also highlight the potential to play a key role in empowering women at an early age, and, thus, transforming their impact on their immediate communities and the Saudi society.

An analysis carried out by Salminen et al., (2017) on the use of social media among women in the Middle East and Arabian Peninsula shows that social media networks are offering women unique platforms to generate online personas liberated from real world restrictions, express their personalities, and leverage technology to create personal value. The examination of social data carried out by Salminen et al., (2017) shows that social media is empowering women in the region as they seek to transcend some of the traditional cultural dynamics and barriers to their social mobility and societal engagement. Al-Jabri, Sohail and Ndubisi (2015) utilise gratification theory (the theory that explores why individuals seek out media to meet specific needs) in evaluating the use of social media networks among Arab women. Their findings indicate that the proliferation of social media is driven by the need to divert from routine dynamics and emotions, for example, dynamics imposed by their position in the social hierarchy, the ability to cultivate their individual identities, and the seeking of information.

2.3.3. Social Media Cybercrime Trends in Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, the use of social media is consistent with the continuous gradual progress women have made into the mainstream in areas, such as driving (Alsulaiman and Rentner, 2021), involvement

in the workplace, and empowerment in education (Ibrahim, 2017; Almutairi et al., 2020). The upward trend of women using social media for activist and empowerment causes, alongside individual, communication, interactive, and professional reasons, has established an environment in which more women are also exposed to the ills of these networks, including cybercrimes. The cyber-based crimes against women in Saudi Arabia are driven by several factors. Khalil and Storie (2021), based on their use of the connective action theory (how power is organised in communication-based networks) in evaluating the use of social media among women in the KSA, revealed that social networks have been instrumental for Saudi women's networking, engagement, and bolstering their collective influence on their communities. However, these changes have disrupted most of the traditional tenets of Saudi culture regarding the role and position of women, which has facilitated cybercrimes against women, such as cyber bullying, shaming, and stalking.

The analysis of online trends in Saudi Arabia shows that more men are the targets of cybercrime compared to women (Alotaibi et al., 2016). Ali (2019) indicates that the business sector is the most-targeted area by cyber criminals in Saudi Arabia. However, these trends might be obscuring the underlying sub-patterns in the KSA. For example, the number of men using social media is more than double that of women on these networks in Saudi Arabia, this implies that the men using social media are the most available targets for criminals online, which

does not necessarily mean that men are the preferred targets of online crimes. Additionally, according to Kshetri (2013), cybercrimes targeting professional and business sector entities are more likely to be reported compared to those targeting individuals, and even less likely for those affecting women in the KSA. Al-Ghaith, Sanzogni and Sandhu, (2010). Posits that reportage and subsequent investigation of cybercrimes have a massive impact on the eventual statistics and analysis of Saudi Arabia's trends and patterns of online crimes.

The internet in Saudi Arabia is also considerably underdeveloped when compared to OECD countries, this affects the ability of authorities to capture and report the trends and patterns shaping the frequency, severity, and victim profiles of cybercrimes in the country (Kshetri, 2013; Albar, 2018; Hamdan, 2005). This is especially the case because Saudi Arabia is investing heavily in developing a cyber-infrastructure focusing on protecting the country from external threats to its key infrastructural and business sectors (Alotaibi et al., 2016; Ali, 2019; Al-Ghaith et al., 2010; Kshetri, 2013). However, this approach has overlooked some of the "smaller" crimes targeted at individuals that affect ordinary people daily (Aljabri, 2021). For women using social media in the KSA, cybercrime is characterised by low victim awareness of crime, minimal reportage, and little repercussion for perpetrators (Kshetri, 2013).

The compounding factor shaping the predisposition of Saudi women on social media to cybercrimes is the low awareness levels regarding

the risk they face when they use these networks and the core ways of preventing their exposure. Alzubaidi (2021) examined the cyber awareness among Saudi nationals through snowball and purposing approaches, employing a 1,230-respondent online survey, to establish the levels of knowledge and understanding among the KSA citizens regarding the risk and preventive measures against cybercrimes. The findings revealed that, on average, the Saudi awareness levels on core issues like cyber consciousness, cyber security, skills, personal information, and case reports, are relatively well-developed compared to other nations in the Arabian Peninsula and MENA. However, on a global level, these awareness levels are considerably lagging, and predispose most Saudis to a heightened risk of cybercrimes. Among social media-using women in the KSA, the awareness levels are considerably lower than the national, regional, and international averages (Almrezeq, Alserhani and Humayun 2021; Gharieb, 2021).

Additionally, online shopping has been identified in the existing literature as a common avenue for young Saudi women to experience cybercrime. This could be explained by the rapid increase of internet penetration in Saudi Arabia in the past decades, particularly social media. In a qualitative study with 34 female participants, Al-Mowalad and Putit (2013, p.34) made the interesting finding that ‘trust’ (45%) and ‘risk’ (40%) were the two main factors in making online purchases, indicating that participants were well aware of the potential dangers of shopping online, especially in regards to the legitimacy of online

shopping platforms. A more recent qualitative study by Roper and Alkhalifah (2020) provides greater insight, finding that the motivations for online shopping in culturally restrictive societies such as Saudi Arabia are different. Their study found that for the 34 Saudi participants, online shopping was a way of bypassing cultural restrictions placed on them, allowing them to align themselves with the cultural values of less restrictive societies. Furthermore, they argue that online shopping can serve as a valuable tool for more religiously conservative Saudi women who might prefer to make discreet personal purchase (Roper and Alkhalifah, 2020).

This analysis of the literature implies that, as a subgroup, Saudi women using social media are uniquely predisposed to cybercrimes. Consequently, there is a need to examine the inherent factors in Saudi Arabia that are influencing the social media among females, and especially their exposure to cybercrimes.

2.3.4. Cybercrime Awareness of Saudi Women

Alzubaidi (2021) argues that awareness of a risk is crucial in changing behavioural and attitudinal constructs, which can facilitate preventative measures. This argument is supported by Almrezeq et al (2021) and Gharieb (2021), who argue that individuals or groups least aware of the danger they face on online platforms are most likely to lose data and be defrauded. For Saudi women, the low awareness level is a core driving force in shaping their predisposition to cybercrimes in the country.

Micro trends in Saudi Arabia show that lack of individual awareness of how to remain safe online, presents one of the largest challenges for tackling cybercrime. This is especially the case because most potential victims are not aware of the risk in the first place and are not familiar with recourse measures once they are affected. As there is stigma attached to women who use social media in Saudi Arabia, this level of individual awareness can be even lower in women, due to less exposure and freedom to use social media when compared with men. Albar (2018), in his analysis of aggression in the cyber space in Saudi Arabia, demonstrates that the overarching culture in the KSA has allowed, cultivated, and fostered an aggressive cyber culture. For example, women using social media in Saudi Arabia are expected to not “cause trouble” or “look for trouble” on online platforms. This mentality has percolated into the Saudi psyche, which discredits the veracity of victim complaints and, thus, reduces the reportage of cases even further in the country.

Digital and computer skills are important in the use of social media networks. Populations with high basic or advanced skills and abilities in computer and digital technologies are typically effective in bolstering the numbers of people using the technology, awareness levels, and the extent to which they can address emerging challenges, including cybercrimes (Almarazroi et al., 2019).

In 2020, more than 50 per cent of the students in Saudi Arabia had access to computers in their lessons at school. Technologies like

tablets, iPads, robots, and interactive white boards are broadly used in the Saudi education system (Marganski, 2020). The continued integration of technology into the education sector in the KSA demonstrates a wider trend that has seen a proliferation of technological utilisation at different levels of individual, educational, and professional life (Sait and Al-Tawil, 2007). These trends mark a policy transformation adopted by the KSA authorities regarding the use of technology in diversifying the Saudi Arabian economy and moving away from dependence on oil (Alothman et al., 2017; Rahman, 2011; Al-Jarf, 2005; Alenezi, 2018).

A comprehensive analysis of digital literacy in KSA revealed that factors such as education level, socioeconomic statues, geographical location, and age significantly influenced how different groups in the nation accessed and used computers and digital platforms. This digital divide affected both the availability of technology and the ability to effectively use digital resources across various segments of Saudi society (Saad and Fahim, 2021). For example, the location and resources of specific cities could impact internet and technological access (Aljabri, 2021). Learners in Riyadh had access to the best tools and platforms for technological advancement compared to those growing up and attending school in small cities, towns, or rural areas (Alothman et al., 2017; Rahman, 2011; Al-Jarf, 2005; Alenezi, 2018). Parental encouragement is a crucial factor in shaping computer and digital literacy. Parents with college or post-graduate education are

highly likely to encourage and introduce their children to computer and digital technologies (Al-Khater et al., 2020). This analysis also demonstrates that individuals and learners with English language proficiency had greater chances of having higher computer and digital literacy levels.

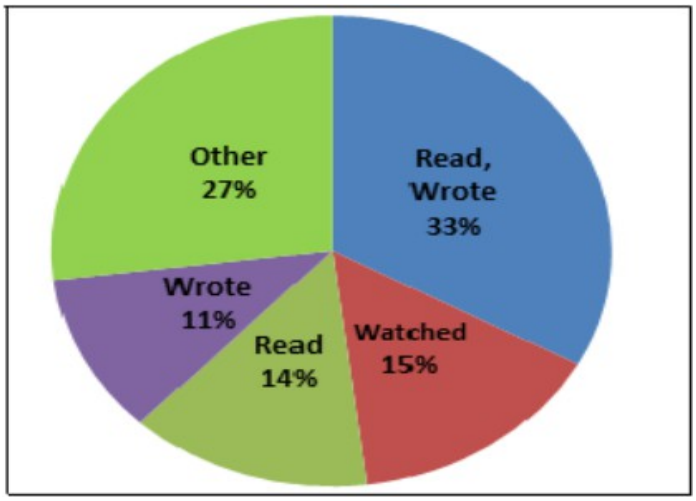
Gender is a major factor in affecting computer and digital literacy in Saudi Arabia. The gap between men and women is considerably higher among the generations older than Millennials in the country (Hamdan, 2005; Aljabri, 2021; Sait and Al-Tawil, 2007; Marganski,2020; Al-Khater et al., 2020). Among Millennials, this gap is considerably lower. In recent years, and as part of achieving Vision 2030, women have been regarded to be a core part of the workforce along with the ambitious goals to diversify the economy. This has been cited as one of the reasons why the government decided to lift the ban on women driving (Saudi Vision 2030, n.d.). Thus, younger generations have been introduced to progressive changes in gender norms and dynamics that previous generations had not experienced.

However, at advanced and professional levels, the rates of female computer and digital literacy are considerably lower compared to men (Alothman et al., 2017; Rahman, 2011; Al- Jarf, 2005; Alenezi, 2018). A study carried out by Albawardi (2017) focusing on digital literacy practices among female Saudi university students established that there are different types of literacy that influence the use of computers and digital platforms, such as social media. Albawardi (2017) argues

that the main literacy types include reading, writing, and watching, as illustrated in Figure 2.2 below.

Figure 0.2 Type of Literacy among Female Social Media Users

(Source: Albawardi, 2017).



The analysis conducted by Albawardi (2017) provides valuable insights into the relationship between digital platforms and literacy practices in Saudi Arabia. This research highlights how different social media networks and applications shape users' engagement with digital content through their unique features and functionalities. The study underscores the importance of understanding these platforms not just as neutral conduits for communication, but as active shapers of digital literacy practices.

Albawardi's findings reveal that the constraints and affordances of various networks play a crucial role in determining how users interact with digital content. For instance, the availability of a 'like' feature on Instagram, which is absent on WhatsApp, influences how users' express approval or engagement with content on these platforms. This distinction demonstrates how platform-specific features can guide user

behaviour and shape digital literacy practices.

Furthermore, the research points out significant differences in reading and writing behaviours across platforms. WhatsApp, for example, facilitates more text-based communication, encouraging users to engage in more extensive reading and writing activities. In contrast, Snapchat, with its focus on visual content, primarily promotes watching rather than text-based interaction, as noted by Al-Khater et al. (2020). These observations suggest that the inherent design and purpose of each platform significantly influence the type and extent of literacy practices users engage in.

It is crucial to note that these differences in digital literacy practices are primarily attributed to the varying functionalities of individual social networks and apps, rather than the inherent abilities of the users themselves. This insight challenges the notion that digital literacy is solely a user-centric skill and emphasizes the role of technological infrastructure in shaping digital competencies.

However, it is important to acknowledge the time-sensitive nature of these findings. The studies referenced were conducted in 2017 and given the rapid pace of technological advancement and changing user behaviours, it is highly probable that digital literacy levels and practices have evolved since then. The digital landscape is continually shifting, with new features being added to existing platforms and new platforms emerging, potentially altering the way users interact with digital

content.

Despite the likelihood of changes in digital literacy levels since 2017, the lack of more recent comparable research means that these studies remain the most current and comprehensive information available on this topic in the Saudi Arabian context. This gap in recent research highlights the need for ongoing studies to track the evolution of digital literacy practices in response to technological advancements and changing social media landscapes.

In conclusion, while the findings from Albawardi (2017) and Al-Khater et al. (2020) provide valuable insights into the relationship between platform functionalities and digital literacy practices in Saudi Arabia, there is a clear need for updated research to understand the current state of digital literacy in the region. Such research would be invaluable in informing educational policies, digital literacy initiatives, and the development of social media platforms tailored to the needs and practices of Saudi Arabian users.

However, the literature here demonstrates that men in Saudi Arabia have higher levels of computer and digital literacy than women. Such capacity allows many men to be aware of the risks inherent in online use, such as cybercrimes (Alenezi, 2018). The low digital literacy among women, coupled with the increasing number of female social media users, mean that there is a portion of users of these networks that lack the knowledge, skills, and awareness to identify, prevent, or

report cybercrimes (Alenezi, 2018). For example, users do not need advanced knowledge of software development, interface functioning, or programming to use social media for communication and interactive functions; all they need is the ability to read, write, watch, and sending media files (Linjawi and Alfadda, 2018). However, some of the cybercriminals possess deep understanding of the intricacies of programming, data analytics, and even hacking (Alasmari and Zhang, 2019). Therefore, the interaction between cyber criminals with advanced knowledge of computers and digital technologies and unaware social media users (such as women) increases the risk of anonymous crimes, which negatively impacts identification and reportage (Alothman et al., 2017; Rahman, 2011; Al-Jarf, 2005; Alenezi, 2018).

This analysis reveals that the low levels of digital and computer literacy among Saudi women uniquely predisposes them to increased risks of cybercrimes. When combined with relatively low awareness levels of the risks they face, these women face massive challenges in fighting or preventing these crimes or even reporting them to the relevant authorities for redress.

A study by Alatawy (2018) on the behaviour of social media users in Saudi Arabia demonstrated that the primary areas in which social media networks are utilised include socialisation, opinions, leisure, information, and entertainment. Alatawy (2018) established that people use social media differently. While some prefer to view others'

posts, others instead like to comment and contribute to the discourse. Therefore, the interactive aspect of social media platforms underscores the importance of community, gender, and faculty as advanced by Nalaka and Diunugala (2020). As for women in Saudi Arabia, community expectations and perceptions are fundamental to their behavioural and attitudinal constructs. As a result, their behaviour on online platforms is often intended to be reflective of the restraint and approaches they adopt in their real life. However, men are more experimental and disruptive in their online conduct (Al Qahtani et al., 2020; Elnaim, 2013; Alotaibi et al., 2020; Baabdullah et al., 2019). As men are given more freedom in real life, they are also able to engage in more risky behaviour such as contacting unrelated women or posting images displaying their bodies. Therefore, women are typically less confrontational and more passive when it comes to pursuing issues. This dynamic establishes a reality where women can be subjected to cybercrimes without reporting them to relevant authorities (Alotaibi et al., 2016). The cultural issue here prevents them from being confrontational about online experiences, which might mask their experiences, including cybercrimes.

Women are also likely to have different attitudes towards cybercrime than men. Using a survey methodology with 407 respondents (155 men and 248 women) to understand the link between gender and cybercrime types, Lazarus et al. (2022) found that there were significant differences between the way men and women perceived

the severity of certain cybercrimes in the United Kingdom. Although there was no difference in opinion between male and female participants in relation to socio-economic cybercrime (e.g., online fraud, scams), the results of their study showed that women were far more likely to find psychosocial cybercrime (e.g., online harassment, cyberstalking) more harmful than men, concluding that this indicated that psychosocial forms of cybercrime had greater disparity between the genders than socio- economic forms of cybercrime. In the study, women found 'revenge porn' to be the worst form of cybercrime. Lazarus et al (2022) further suggest that as previous research has shown, women are disproportionately affected by psychosocial cybercrime, particularly online abuse and harassment, hence a greater level of fear of those types of crimes. Additionally, they caution against a generalised approach to cybercrime, due to the disproportionate effect cybercrime has on women (Lazarus et al, 2022).

The intersection of gender and culture in Saudi Arabia is a potent issue affecting the behaviour and conduct of women online and offline. Societal expectations of women, despite the progress they have made in recent decades, are still fairly conservative (Linjawi and Alfadda, 2018). These cultural constructs affect both women with higher education qualifications and those without, employed and non-employed ones, as well as those in cities and those in rural areas. This dynamic has a considerable bearing on open expression on social

media and the accessibility to seek information regarding safety on online platforms (Baabdullah et al., 2019). As a result of this, demographic factors including such as gender, culture, and societal restrictions have made Saudi women particularly at risk with regard to “exposure to cybercrimes when using social media platforms. Behavioural factors that affect the safety and security of online users in Saudi Arabia, especially those employing social media, include the purpose of surfing online, time spent online, place of surfing online, privacy, and security management among the users. The purpose of online surfing is crucial in shaping the predisposition to cybercrimes. For example, individuals using WhatsApp to communicate with their family and friends face a reduced risk of cybercrimes compared to individual utilising Facebook or Instagram to click on links and open files uploaded by other users (Aljabri, 2021; Al-Ghaith et al, 2010). Additionally, individuals using social media or other online tools for communication and education are often targeted in their online environments. Individuals using social media outside of secure institutions often lack access to secure and safe links to provide resources, and this can therefore put them at risk of opening risky content. However, people using these platforms for entertainmentcan often end up clicking unknown links and downloading spyware into their devices (Sait and Al-Tawil, 2007). In Saudi Arabia, most women use social media for the purposes of communication, socialisation, entertainment, searching for information, and keeping abreast of

developments in their communities (Albawardi, 2017; Rahman, 2011; Al-Jabri et al., 2015). The emphasis on entertainment, socialisation, and sharing of information and files (video, audio, and text) poses a massive risk of cybercrimes against such users.

As some social media using women in Saudi Arabia may have low awareness levels of how to stay safe online, they may spend prolonged periods of time on social media daily without thinking of adequate safety measures (Al Qahtani et al., 2020; Elnaim, 2013; Alotaibi et al., 2020; Baabdullah et al., 2019). Prolonged exposure online gives cyber criminals the ample time they need to harvest data, including private details, which are leveraged to commit crimes. Alzubaidi (2021) examined the levels of cyber security awareness in Saudi Arabia; his findings indicated that 31.7 per cent of the respondents in the study utilised public Wi-Fi to access social media platforms and the Internet. The study also established that 51 per cent of the participants employed private information in developing and operating social media accounts, including passwords. These dynamics are more pronounced among women using social media in Saudi Arabia, where they demonstrate even less security management. The low awareness levels of the severity of the risk they face compound this challenge (Al Qahtani et al., 2020).

2.4. The Role of Social Workers in Tackling Cybercrimes Against Women in Saudi Arabia

2.4.1 Social Workers and Cybercrime

The best demonstration of the role of social workers in combating cybercrimes is in schools and institutions of higher learning in Saudi Arabia (Gharieb, 2021). For elementary and developmental schools, students face cybercrimes including stalking, bullying and sexual grooming. In institutions of higher learning, individuals face crimes like identity theft, online impersonation, bullying, shaming, stalking, and theft of private sensitive data (Mansour Omar and Gamal El Dein Ali, 2021). As demonstrated in Section 3 of this chapter, low awareness levels among users of online platforms, including social media, predisposes them to increased risks of cybercrimes (Alzubaidi, 2021; Albladi and Weir, 2020). As a result, Fakiha (2020) posits that these institutions have been forced to come up with strategic and structural approaches to incorporate online security and safety into their day-to-day operations. This is where social workers play a significant role.

The fight against cybercrimes in learning institutions involves all stakeholders, such as teachers, students, parents, administrators, therapists, and social workers. A collaborative approach ensures that learners, especially women using social media, are protected from risks, and are equipped to prevent and deal with emerging issues in their use of digital and computer technologies for learning, informational, entertainment, or interactive purposes (Fakiha, 2020; Alotaibi and Mukred, 2022; Al Amro, 2020; Badr et al., 2021). However, there is a need for a centralised and structured approach to addressing this complex challenge. This is because without a formalised

approach, several of the signs and effects of cybercrimes might go unreported, unidentified, and un-addressed, which will negatively impact the victims, and may encourage more cybercrime (Singh and Alshammari, 2020). This should be read in conjunction with number of culturally and socially rooted challenges that social workers encounter, even where they are embedded in institutions (Althumali, 2021).

In this sense, should students at educational institutions feel more inclined to work with both the social work office and staff in the school, they will be better equipped to address the

issues they face when it comes to using social media and the risks therein (Badr et al., 2021). Social workers are well-positioned to address cybercrime issues because they are focused on addressing problems emanating from the external environment of the students (Alotaibi, 2019). Additionally, learners are likely to trust social workers over their educators, especially when it comes to the informal nature of social media exposure to cybercrimes (Almrezeq et al, 2021). This allows social work staff to collaborate with parents, the students themselves, educators, and other administrators within institutions and settings to concertedly examine and address the emerging issues, with the collaborative approach being considered generally beneficial (Nguyen et al., 2022). The disadvantage of this approach is that most social workers are not trained or specialised in computer and digital technologies and cybercrimes (Al Amro, 2020). Although they might be more aware of the risks and dynamics of cybercrime, their lack of

specialised knowledge means that the learners might not get the information and skills they need to avoid and deal with the implications of cybercrime they have experienced. This remains important given that it is predominantly females who are exposed to cybercrime, leading some authors to call for a cyber-feminist approach to tackle cybercrime (Balunkeswari and Mishra, 2023). This is especially the case because most women in Saudi Arabia still face residual discrimination based on cultural and traditional concepts of the role of women (Moafa et al., 2018). As a result, women using social media are typically not assertive in their positions or actions when they are bullied or stalked online. This dynamic often leads to under-reporting of cybercrimes cases against women on social media. However, social workers can offer an engaging, interactive, bidirectional, enabling, and supportive platform for women to address these issues either anonymously or with the support they need to feel safe (Fakiha, 2020; Alotaibi and Mukred, 2022; Al Amro, 2020; Badr et al., 2021).

Additionally, social workers can seek to diverge from victim blaming as can sometimes be present amongst educators and family members, by focusing on managing any negative outcomes such as low self-esteem, stress, anxiety, depression, or decline in academic performance (Almrezeq et al, 2021; Singh and Alshammari, 2020).

Additionally, social workers can collaborate with women who are affected to come up with identify the ways to prevent such crimes from happening in the first place. Awareness creation is a fundamental remit

of social work offices across major institutions in Riyadh and across the KSA. Moreover, social workers work collaboratively with all stakeholders (parents, educators, policymakers and administrators) to develop guidelines and frameworks for dealing with cybercrimes at individual and collective levels (Singh and Alshammari, 2020; Ali, 2019; Almrezeq et al, 2021; Alotaibi, 2019; Al-Nasrawi, 2021; Aissani, 2022; Moafa et al., 2018). While the institutions and local authorities can establish broad policies to deal with bullying, the globalised nature of the Internet, means that prevention is not always effective (Alotaibi and Mukred, 2022). Laws on reporting and actions against cyber criminals do not always take into consideration individual experiences, perceptions, and cultural aspects. As a result, although institutions might require the reporting of cases of cybercrimes, such as bullying, this does not always mean that they will be reported (Mandal, 2022). There is under-reporting in Saudi Arabia among women using social media who that are currently predisposed to cybercrimes.

All that has been mentioned The section above highlights the role of social workers in assessing incidents indents of cybercrimes from an individual-in-their-environment perspective (Abdulhameed, 2021). They are able to consider the micro and mezzo environments, prevailing conditions, strengths, and risk factors, when developing school- wide prevention and intervention approaches. This way, an institution in Riyadh might propose different prevention and intervention techniques to cybercrimes than a school in rural Saudi

Arabia (Moafa et al., 2018). Training and raising awareness are the universal approaches adopted in Saudi Arabia to equip women with the abilities to identify, prevent, and report cases of cybercrimes when they occur (Rajeyyagari and Alotaibi, 2018). For Saudi Arabian women, mastering preventative skills is crucial, as it allows them to take charge of their cybersecurity and digital autonomy.

In Saudi Arabia, social workers are involved in designing and implementing prevention and intervention measures for individuals exposed to cybercrimes (Al-sulami, 2023). The emphasis is often on safety tips, such as using strong passwords, updating software in their devices, managing social media settings, bolstering their home networks, talking to peers regarding the Internet, and keeping up to date regarding major security breaches (Alsubaie, 2021). Managing social media settings is especially important for most women with low awareness levels of the risk of cybercrimes. This low awareness can place them in the role in predisposing their information and devices to criminals on the web (Singh and Alshammari, 2020). Social workers can encourage women to keep their private and personal information locked down and inaccessible to other uses on the web (Hawamleh et al, 2020); this includes reducing the amount of information shared in public.

Prevention measures against identity are also addressed by social workers when working with women who are actively using social media (Nasrallah and Sarkis, 2020). Most people in the KSA, including

women, access the Internet using public Wi-Fi within institutions and other public organisations, this exposes many of these users to potential theft of personal data in the ways involving deception and fraud (Aissani, 2022; Moafa et al., 2018). Techniques, such as the use of a VPN (virtual private network) allows women using social media to protect the data they send and receive, and, thus, makes it hard for cybercriminals to access and steal their personal data (Aljuryyed, 2022).

Social workers can also play an essential role in raising awareness among women regarding what to do if they become victims. Social work employees offer various options available to the potential victims, such as reporting to the local police, reporting to the social workers' offices, institutional offices dedicated to these issues, and alerting parents (Tonkolu, 2019; Densmaa, Kaliinaa and Sembeejav 2021). Reporting is crucial because it allows relevant bodies to track and examine the perpetrators of these online crimes, which enhances the likelihood of stopping and/or arresting them. This is especially important in preventing further crimes against others in future (Almrezeq et al, 2021).

2.5. Further Relevant Contextual Information

This section will provide further relevant contextual information on Saudi Arabia to assist in answering the third research question in the present study. As Saudi Arabia has undergone sweeping economical and societal changes, there is evidence suggest that this may have

contributed to a generational gap between those who grew up under more restrictive sociocultural conditions, and those who are now experiencing the lifting of some of these restrictions. Where this is to be expected with rapid sociocultural changes, there are some factors specific to Saudi Arabia that have contributed in distancing attitudes between different generations, and can be better understood by considering the cultural norms of the social hierarchy of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is a country with a high-power distance, and is a culture that places emphasis on respect for elders (Almaizer and Abdelhamed, 2018). A high-power distance culture is one where individuals defer to others in authority positions. Thus, younger people may find it difficult to openly communicate with older people. The ideas of power distance originate in the work of Hofstede and Bond (1984), who introduced a series of cultural dimensions to enhance cross-cultural studies. However, it has to be acknowledged that in more recent research, the western-centric and heteropatriarchal nature of Hofstede and Bond's premise for their analysis is increasingly contested (McSweeney, 2002; Ailon, 2008; Biswas, 2023). These four dimensions are as follows: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, and masculinity versus femininity. The basic societal issue addressed by power distance is social inequality, uncertainty avoidance addresses how a society deals with conflict, individualism versus collectivism refers to whether cultures look out for themselves/immediate family or the wider in-group, and

masculinity versus femininity explores social sex roles and how this impacts self-conceptualisation (Hofstede and Bond, 1984, pp.419-420). In 2010, Hofstede and Bond's (1984) original framework were altered, adding short-term orientation versus long-term orientation and restraint versus indulgence. According to a study by Singh and Alshammari (2021), as of 2017, Saudi Arabia ranked near the extremes in three dimensions: power distance (95), individualism versus collectivism (25) and masculinity versus femininity (60). Singh and Alshammari (2021) interpret these scores to indicate that Saudi Arabian society at the time was characterised by a rigid social hierarchy, collectivistic values over individualistic ones, and is driven by competition. More recent statistics from Hofstede Insights (2024) indicate that this has changed significantly in the past few years, likely a result of the impacts of Vision 2030. Since Singh and Alshammari's (2021) study, the dimension of masculinity versus femininity has been removed, and replaced with motivation towards achievement and success. Saudi Arabia is now ranked at 72 for power distance and 48 for individualism (Hofstede Insights, 2024). This indicates that where power distance remains close to the extreme end, individualism has increased significantly, with the country now only considered to be 'slightly collectivistic'. These changes help explain why generational differences may have arisen due to the sociocultural shift in Saudi Arabia, especially since the inception of Vision 2030. They further support a study by Jiang et al. (2018), who found that younger Saudi

Arabians are becoming increasingly more individualistic, detaching from traditional cultural and religious ideas grounded in collectivism.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

2.6.1 Cultural Stereotype and Sociocultural Theory

The concept of the stereotype was first introduced in the field of psychology by Lippmann (1922), who believed that the process of stereotyping arose through a cognitive process wherein individuals identify a well-known trait in others, before using the information to make mental associations to fill in the rest of the picture. In the literature, stereotypes have therefore been largely regarded to have developed from the natural process of human categorisation. The dominant idea that stereotypes are 'inside' people has been challenged by Langenhove and Harré (1994), who have argued for a 'cultural stereotype theory' that includes greater exploration of how stereotypes are discursively constructed in conversation. For Langenhove and Harré (1995), cultural stereotypes function as a social construct, and for this reason, they have advocated for the treatment of cultural stereotypes as "rhetorical devices that people use in order to position themselves" (Langenhove and Harré, 1994, p.371). Stereotypes are two sided in the sense that they can be constructed on the level of the social identity (who an individual is around others), and self-categorisation (how an individual categorises themselves).

Cultural stereotype theory was developed in tandem with positioning theory. According to Moghaddam and Harre (2010, p.2), positioning

theory is concerned with “how people use words (and discourse of all types) to locate themselves and others”. Positioning occurs on both the individual and the social scale, as it serves to locate the self internally and externally through interaction and communication with others. Cultural stereotype theory and positioning theory are also often related to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. According to Vygotsky (1978), social interaction and wider cultural structures play a critical role in the cognitive development of high-order functions in the brain. As a result of this influence of culture and social interactions on cognitive development, Vygotsky (1978) posited that children receive “tools of intellectual adaptation” which are adapted to the specific culture in which they live. Both cultural stereotypes and sociocultural theory are suited for the methodological approach and topic of the present study. This is since the results of the results of the study pointed towards culturally embedded gender bias behind the increased vulnerability of Saudi Arabian women to cybercrime when compared with men. Previous studies on gender stereotypes in the Saudi Arabian context have found that stereotypes around women are the result of a complex mixture of religious, political, and sociocultural factors (Omair, 2017). Furthermore, respondents also detailed negative attitudes towards the social work profession, which could be explored using a cultural stereotype/sociocultural theory framework.

There are further studies that have used sociocultural theory in the Saudi Arabian context, particularly in relation to online/e-learning.

Walabe (2020) finds that there are multiple sociocultural factors that impact the delivery of e-learning in Saudi Arabian universities. Walabe (2020) notes that one of the core factors is the Islamic influence on the education system and institutional structure. Due to women being more socially restricted than men, they tend to have a greater reliance on distance or e-learning due to spending more time at home. Furthermore, Walabe (2020) states that as Saudi Arabia is a collectivist high context culture that relies on more indirect forms of communication such as gestures or tone of voice to infer information, e-learning may run into social barriers due to lacking these non-verbal cues. These theories are particularly relevant to the present study given the focus is on the experiences of Saudi Arabian women. As noted by both Omair (2017) and Walabe (2020), gender stereotypes and the position of women in Saudi Arabia have been influenced by a range of complex sociological, political, and cultural factors. These factors could influence not only how the female respondents self-categorise themselves (e.g., as more vulnerable to cybercrime), but also how they are perceived in wider society (e.g., social work is not a profession that is valued).

2.6.2 Feminist Theory

Feminist theory was applied from the outse as it is relevant to present study and other two theories mentioned above was added in light of findings. Feminist theory, which intersects well with both cultural stereotype and sociocultural theory. In its most broad definition,

feminism “is both an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks an end to gender- based oppression” (McAfee et al., 2023). Feminist theory is rooted in the idea that society should be equal for both men and women and is motivated by “the quest for social justice” (McAfee et al, 2023). Feminist theory is largely understood in the academic literature to have developed in four distinct ‘waves’. According to Molyneux (2021) the first wave of feminism occurred in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, the second in the late 1960s to early 1970s, the third in the 1980s/1990s, and the current fourth beginning in the millennium. The first wave of feminism was associated with the emergence of collective feminist action and is mostly associated with the suffrage movement and the right to education. The first wave of feminism was predominantly focused on addressing these issues in Western contexts. The second wave brought on a more radical globalised feminist movement, with an increased desire to create exclusive spaces for women under the belief that male-led organisations and institutions were no longer serving women. The third wave of feminism marked the moment in which global feminist movements extended beyond the dominant narratives of the Western world. During this period, feminist ideas began to enter mainstream politics, influenced by movements for global human rights. Finally, the fourth wave has been marked by the involvement of young feminists and increased opportunities for women at high professional levels.

However, feminist theory has been criticised for assuming a

Westernised lens, making it difficult to adapt and apply the theory to complex sociocultural contexts not explained by Western cultural norms and structures. Many of the dominant feminist scholars and theorists are from the United Kingdom, the United States, and Europe, making feminist theory less effective when applied to contexts outside of these zones. Hoza, (2018) argued Western theories of feminism have influenced the perception of Saudi Arabian women. Rather than being seen as capable and independent, from such a perspective they are seen as submissive and deprived of opportunity. This is contrary to the fact that existing studies have found that some Saudi Arabian women find empowerment in the traditional culture of the country. Hoza (2018) finds that where under a Western feminist framework gender segregated spaces may be seen as exclusionary, contradicting the fight for equality between men and women, on the other hand, Saudi Arabian women may prefer women-only spaces.

The use of feminist theory here then recognises these differing perspectives but argues that feminist theory is particularly relevant to this study as there are few existing studies that have adopted a feminist perspective in a Saudi Arabian context. Furthermore, the participants of the study are all women, with the results showing that this was a core factor in attitudes towards cybercrime and vulnerability to it. As Hoza (2018) argues, women's movements in Saudi Arabia are beginning to take shape in recent years, evidenced by the government's drive to increase female participation in the workforce,

yet this can make women more vulnerable to gender motivated abuse. Additionally, as was identified in the results section, changes to women's rights and empowerment on the legal level have changed the situation of women in Saudi Arabia. Feminist theory could further be employed in exploring the role that social workers can play in curbing cybercrime experienced by women and girls in Saudi Arabia. Empowering social workers and placing increased value on their work in the Saudi Arabian professional sphere can impact their ability to successfully tackle cybercrime and feel that they have the tools to do so.

To conclude, cultural stereotype, sociocultural theory, and feminist theory are intersecting theories that are used to create the theoretical framework of the present study. All the theories can be successfully applied to the current study to explore how sociocultural, political, and religious factors may be influencing cybercrime experienced by women in Saudi Arabia, and how social workers can effectively manage this situation.

This is particularly important to consider in the Saudi Arabian context. As has been discussed, society and culture in Saudi Arabia are deeply influenced by both Arabic culture and traditions and Islamic culture and traditions. As a place of deep religious significance in Islam, Binsahl et al. (2020) argue that cultural and religious elements are "hard to distinguish", and that the Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia suggests a "cultural rather than a religious tradition". This 'religious nationalism'

has had considerable repercussions on Saudi Arabian culture and society, including the creation and maintenance of gender norms that have placed women in a subordinate position. Alqahtani (2015) argues for the point that the restrictive laws placed on women because of religious nationalism are responsible for the subordination of women in Saudi Arabia, rather than the traditions and doctrines of tribal. Wheeler (2020) discusses this further, suggesting that Saudi Arabia's ambitious Vision 2030 project is as much about embracing a more moderate form of Islam as it is about attempting to displace the conservative religious identity of Saudi Arabia with a more coherent national identity.

The subordination of women in Saudi Arabian culture is a topic that has been studied extensively in the literature, with El Alaoui et al., (2017) finding that women learning English in Saudi Arabia were faced with feelings of guilt and shame due to their defiance of cultural norms that limit the social mobility of women. Binsahl et al (2020) also discuss the strict gender segregation in Saudi society. As was outlined in the Constitution, the family unit is of great importance in Saudi Arabian culture. As per cultural and gender norms in the country, Saudi women are "expected to avoid talking to unrelated males" (Binsahl et al, 2020). Should Saudi women engage in this type of activity outside of the family, it could be seen as damaging the reputation and honour of the family. Where this has historically been the point of contention around Saudi Arabian culture and society, the Crown Prince has been

committed to changing the negative external image of Saudi Arabia regarding attitudes towards women and the enforcement of strict religious doctrine. The “role of the religious in public life” has now been reduced considerably, including the ability for men and women to congregate in mixed-gender groups (Wheeler, 2020).

A core part of Vision 2030, as put forth by Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman, is moving away from the highly conservative forms practised previously and towards a more open. Part of this change involves ensuring that women are more socially mobile and engaged in Saudi Arabian society, however, implementing this change has been difficult due to the deep and intrinsic ties between culture and religion in the country. In 2018, Saudi Arabia officially lifted a ban on women driving, having been the only country in the world at the time to enforce such a rule. One of the key motivators behind the decision was making it possible for women to engage in the workforce more easily to achieve the ambitious goals set out in Vision 2030. Immediately prior to this point, several activists from the group Women to Drive had been arrested (Alqahtani, 2015). Wheeler (2020) argues that despite the lifting of the ban, there are still relatively few women driving in Saudi Arabia, which she attributes to the fact that much of Vision 2030 occurs from the top-down rather than the bottom up, which runs the risk of incentives and changes being shaped by conservative attitudes and managing the reputation of those who live there. Culture and religion are therefore deeply

intertwined in Saudi Arabian culture, and one must be considered with the other.

Saudi Arabia is a culturally complex country that has largely fallen victim to essentialist narratives in both the media and academic literature. Scholars such as Alqahtani (2015) and Alaoui et al., (2017) have challenged this, arguing that the mixture of conservative religious and tribal tradition and consumerist culture imported from the West has created a schism in contemporary Saudi society. Although both highlight the importance of avoiding reducing Saudi Arabian society to a more simplistic interpretation, it is generally understood to be a highly collectivist society (Omair, 2017). However, Alaoui et al., (2017) state that this may be changing as younger Saudis become increasingly more individualistic along with the effects of globalisation. As a society which values honour within the family and adherence to traditional values, violations of these norms and societal values can bring about feelings of shame. For Hamdan and Mustafa (2021, pp.1012) “shame arises from violating external cultural norms and societal values”. EL Alaoui et al., (2017) found in a study of bilingual female Arabic-English students that the dominant feeling was that of shame, rather than guilt, which instead implies a violation of one’s own personal morals. Moreover, they argue that feelings of shame amongst Saudi Arabian women may rise from the fact that by engaging in the educational system, they are defying the cultural norms of what is expected from women. These arguments are supported by Hamdan and Mustafa

(2021), who found that Saudi women were experiencing sociocultural guilt learning English, as they were afraid that acquiring ideology and norms from the language would threaten their Islamic ideology. Participants in the study also noted feelings of shame from older Saudi women in their networks (e.g., family members, and colleagues), as these individuals were critical of their decision to learn English. In contrast to the stereotypical image of the submissive Saudi women, this was instead seen as further motivation to defy patriarchal restrictions by continuing to learn the language. Thus, shame as felt by Saudi Arabian women is most often linked to the defiance of sociocultural norms.

Where literature has largely attributed this to the role of religion in all aspects of public life in Saudi Arabia, studies by Song (2019), Alqahtani (2015) and Hamdan and Mustafa (2021) have found that it is through Islam that women are also able to empower themselves. Song (2019) found that the cultural norms of Saudi Arabian women are predicated on “women’s deference and modesty”, with the findings showing that Saudi Women’s deference to maintaining the ideal standards of womanhood led to nonparticipation in the classroom and reduced levels of social interaction with other classmates. In Song (2019), those who complied with the norms made the argument that they were simply following what was outlined by Islamic belief, whereas those who challenged these norms believed that they were a matter of culture, rather than a matter of Islam.

2.6.3. The Conclusion of the Theoretical Framework

Each of these studies discussed above illustrates how feminist theory can be an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding the experiences of women in the Saudi Arabian context. In Saudi Arabia, cultural values are deeply tied with religious values, and the interpretation of these values in Saudi Arabia has created a complex reality for women, many of whom have experienced some level of social restriction. In addition to this, feminist theory is complementary to cultural stereotype theory, as cultural restrictions based on stereotypes of women as 'submissive' or 'weak' may have led women themselves to internalise these stereotypes, leveraging them against other women, or themselves., as highlighted by Taylor (2020), for example, although research specifically situated in Saudi Arabian contexts is limited at this point, thus highlighting the need for the present research. Moreover, cognisant of the cultural and societal specificity of Saudi Arabia, the growing tensions between a proliferation of online participation and behaviours, and the societal constraints in relation to females and their place in higher education and wider society, particularly when it comes to the predominant Western conceptualisations of the role of women in Saudi Arabia. This could be said to highlight the need for the present research, particularly as it is incorporating primary data collection and analysis.

2.7. CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown the intricate nature of social work in Saudi

Arabia, particularly in relation to addressing cybercrimes against women. The comprehensive review of the literature reveals several gaps that need to be discovered.

Firstly, it is evident that social work plays a crucial role in Saudi society yet faces significant challenges in its development and implementation. The profession's underdeveloped status, largely attributed to negative perceptions among Saudi nationals, underscores the need for concerted efforts to enhance its standing and effectiveness. Moreover, the complex collaboration of religious, social, and cultural factors contributes to the underreporting of cybercrimes and the increased vulnerability of Saudi women to online threats. This vulnerability is further exacerbated by low awareness levels and restricted access to social media due to societal stigma.

In light of these challenges, the Saudi government's commitment to achieving the ambitious goals outlined in Vision 2030 presents a unique opportunity for the advancement of social work. The emphasis on digital literacy and increased access to internet technologies, as part of the Vision 2030 agenda, aligns closely with the need to address cybercrime issues. However, recent studies, including those by Al-sulami (2023), indicate that social workers continue to face considerable obstacles in their practice. Nonetheless, the government's dedication to realising Vision 2030 objectives may serve as a catalyst for better integration of social workers across various sectors of society.

A notable finding of this review is the potential for female social workers to play a pivotal role in addressing cybercrimes against women. The gender alignment between social workers and victims can facilitate more open and effective communication, particularly in cases where feelings of shame may prevent victims from discussing their experiences with male family members or, in some instances, any family members at all.

Despite growing interest in social work within SA, there remains a significant gap in research focusing on social workers in the educational context. This study addresses this gap by examining how social workers can assist young female university students in mitigating and tackling cybercrime. This provides a system for suggesting a framework for integrating female social workers at universities into the mitigating and management of cybercrime experienced by young Saudi women.

The theoretical explanation of this research, drawing upon feminist theory and cultural stereotype theory, provides a nuanced lens through which to analyse the complex relationship of cultural, religious, and social factors shaping women's experiences in Saudi Arabia. This theoretical framework offers insights into both external societal pressures and internal psychological dynamics influencing women's perceptions and behaviours in this unique culture.

Furthermore, the literature review findings will contribute to identifying

social issues beyond the educational setting and inform recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of social work practice in Saudi Arabia more broadly. This comprehensive approach allows for a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by Saudi women in the digital domain and the potential role of social workers in addressing these issues.

In essence, this chapter underscores the critical need for further development and integration of social work in Saudi Arabia, particularly in addressing the growing concerns of cybercrime against women. The study's focus on the educational context and its innovative approach to integrating female social workers in universities represents a significant step forward in tackling this issue.

As Saudi Arabia progresses towards its Vision 2030 goals, the role of social work in addressing critical issues such as cybercrime against women is likely to gain increasing prominence. This study, therefore, serves as a timely and valuable contribution to the ongoing dialogue on social development and women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia. It paves the way for more effective, culturally sensitive interventions in the future while also highlighting the need for continued research and policy development in this crucial area.

Therefore, this chapter not only contributes to the academic discourse but also provides practical insights that can inform policy and practice in social work interventions across Saudi society. As SA continues its

journey of social and economic transformation, the findings and recommendations emerging from this research have the potential to shape the future environment of social work and cybercrime avoidance in Saudi Arabia.

CHAPTER 3- METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the methodological framework used to carry out the research and answer the specific research questions. The section begins by outlining the research philosophy, including the epistemological and ontological framework of the present study. Following on from this, the chapter introduces the time horizon, research approach, ethics, data collection, and analytical framework. As the present study is exploring attitudinal factors (e.g., causes for cybercrime, personal challenges in social work, young women's experiences), a qualitative semi-structured interview approach was deemed the most suitable method, as it allows participants to express themselves using their own words, with minimal guidance from the researcher.

This study adopted an approach grounded in narrative research. Narrative research involves using storytelling to understand the interpretations of each respondent, thus informing the study by making sense of their own experiences (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis, 2012). This was of particular importance in the present study, as it deals with the sensitive issue of cybercrime experiences, which as has been discussed in the literature review, can have harmful and long-lasting psychological impacts that reach far beyond the experience of the crime. The final section of this chapter discusses the limitations of the

present study, and also outlines some of the challenges experienced whilst conducting the present study.

3.2 Research Philosophy

In research, one must consider the assumptions concerning the realities encountered (ontological assumptions), human knowledge (epistemological assumptions), and the ways and degree one's values influence the process of research (axiological assumptions). Different research philosophies each provide a differing perspective on the nature of knowledge and the social world, which subsequently impacts how research questions are approach and addressed during the course of the research process. Epistemology and ontology are the foundations of research work (Grix, 2019). For example, research sources, methods, and methodology are closely based on and linked to epistemological and ontological assumptions. According to Saunders, Lewis and Adrian (2019, p.130), "these assumptions inevitably shape how [one understands their] research questions, the methods [they] use and how [they] interpret [their] findings" (p. 130). A consistent and well-thought- out set of assumptions form a compelling research philosophy that underpins the methodological choice, research approach, data collection and analysis techniques (Saunders et al., 2019). A social science researcher must be aware of the philosophical obligations associated with selecting a specific research strategy because this could significantly impact what they do and their understanding of what it is they are studying.

Thus, the epistemological and ontological approach must be consistent with the approach taken during the study. Ontology refers to interpretations regarding the foundational elements of reality, and epistemology refers to assumptions about knowledge, including what is acceptable knowledge, and how it is subsequently reported to others. The ontological and epistemological approach in the present study will be discussed in more detail in the two subsections that follow.

The choice of an appropriate research philosophy can pose significant dilemmas for students and new researchers, as confusions over the most suitable approach for a study can easily occur (Ganzevles, Andriessen and Regenmortel, 2021). Therefore, researchers should be aware of philosophical assumptions based on the problem under investigation, the research questions, and the method of data collection and analysis. Aspers and Corte (2019) support this argument, noting that putting together a precise, logical, and clear work requires recognition of the fundamental philosophical assumptions that underpin research work. This process must remain coherent throughout the research process, from the formulation of the research questions to the analysis of the data, and even the sources that are utilised to answer the research questions. For these reasons, it is important to begin by presenting the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin the study to help avoid confusion in theoretical discussions and the approaches used to

answer the research questions (Ganzavles et al, 2021).

3.3 Ontology

Grix (2019, p.83) notes that "ontology is the starting point of all research, after which [a researcher's] epistemological and methodological positions logically follow". Some research conflates epistemology and ontology by arguing that there is no point in highlighting the logical flow of these positions. However, Aspers and Corte (2019) argue that the two positions should be separated despite being inextricably connected. Ontology describes the assumptions about the essence of social reality, what exists, its nature, the component units, and the interactions between them (Lawson, 2012; Lundh, 2018). In other words, ontological assumptions describe what we believe makes up social reality. Therefore, it demonstrates how different researchers can have fundamentally diverging worldviews and assumptions, underscoring their approaches to social work enquiry (Al-Saadi, 2014). It is only when a researcher recognises and understands that a broad range of ontological positions exist, and they can result in different research outcomes that they can start to engage with various research works.

As Grix (2019) argues, failing to address ontological assumptions in research often emanates from imprecision, vagueness, or a lack of understanding that there exists more than one ontological standpoint. Objectivism, pragmatism, subjectivism, and constructivism comprise the key aspects of ontological positions (Lundh, 2017). Whereas

objectivist ontology emphasises that a social phenomenon and its meanings independently exist from social actors, constructivist ontology argues that a social phenomenon and its meaning are subject to social actors in a specific context (Bryman, 2012).

Likewise, pragmatism assumes that the world is inseparable from agency and thus remains a theory of knowledge and a distinct and radical school mostly applicable to science. (Lawson, 2012). As this study is exploring the specific social context of Saudi Arabia, as well as the interpretations of young female students and social workers, it adopts a subjectivist stance that recognises that reality is not objective, but rather, is constructed in the minds of individuals, and further influenced by social interactions and the relationships constructed with other individuals. The participants in the present study are influenced by the sociocultural context of Saudi Arabia, and therefore, their understandings and experiences of cybercrime and other social issues in the country are shaped by their context. Thus, the attitudes and interpretations presented by the participants in this study are, for example, going to differ from those of individuals from another country. This is an approach that is particularly suitable for the interpretivist epistemological framework adopted in the present study, that is discussed in more detail in the following subsection.

This approach is an anti-foundationalist approach, which asserts that knowledge is not certain, and thus cannot be generated from pure experience or reasoning on the part of the researcher (Klein, 2016).

Whereas foundationalism posits an external objective reality, anti-foundationalism aligns with constructivism. As this study is adopting a qualitative approach with an interpretivist epistemological framework, an anti-foundationalist approach was deemed most suitable, especially given the sensitive nature of the topic. As participants (students and social workers) will be detailed their subjective thoughts on cybercrime, it was necessary to adopt an ontological approach that would allow for the consideration of a range of different viewpoints, and not assert particularly importance to one or the other.

3.4 Epistemology

Epistemology, also known as the theory of knowledge, is a branch of philosophy responsible for understanding the origin, nature, and limitations of human knowledge. The term is associated with knowledge and reason (Chowdhury, 2014). Saunders et al. (2019) present a detailed definition noting that epistemology describes the assumptions concerning knowledge, what is considered valid, legitimate, and acceptable knowledge, and how knowledge can be communicated to others. In other words, it concerns claims about knowing what is assumed to be our reality (Grix, 2019).

For example, assumptions can be made about the role of social workers in dealing with cybercrime against women and then applied in the context of Saudi women. While ontological assumptions might initially appear relatively abstract, the significance of epistemology is discernible (Saunders et al., 2019). The multidisciplinary framework of

social work means that various forms of knowledge, ranging from textual to visual and numerical data, from opinions to facts, and including stories, narratives, or case studies, can all be legitimate tools for research. Accordingly, different researchers in the field of social work adopt different epistemological research underpinnings, thus providing a pool of methods to consider (O'Gorman and Macintosh, 2015). However, it is necessary to understand the impact of epistemological assumptions on the choice of methods and the subsequent strengths and limitations of the research findings. For instance, epistemology assumes that a researcher gains knowledge by understanding the lived social realities of each participant.

This study uses an interpretivist philosophy to investigate the role of social workers in addressing cybercrime against Saudi Arabian women. An interpretivist approach is particularly suitable for the present study as first, it aligns with the subjectivist ontological approach, and second, it complements qualitative research. The interpretivist rejects the objectivist approach by recognising that knowledge is construct through the interpretation of the experiences of each individual, rather than assuming that knowledge is "simply there to be identified and collected" (Hiller, 2016, p.103). An interpretivist epistemological approach recognises that participants have consciousness and their own interpretations of social realities and are not just puppets that depend on external social factors (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018). As this study includes two different sets of

participants – young female students and social workers – it was especially necessary to recognise the individual interpretations of each different group. Furthermore, interpretivism is subjective, and likely to change, unlike realism, which is objective, independent, and realistic. For these reasons, interpretivism is most suitable in the context of the present study. Combined with an anti- foundationalist ontological approach, an interpretivist epistemology recognises the importance of understanding the social realities that can influence the responses of each participant. This is especially relevant to the present study as it explores the sensitive issue of cybercrime, and how cybercrime incidence may be linked to cultural or religious factors. Moreover, interpretivism allows for smaller sample sizes, focusing on gathering detailed, context-sensitive information. The criticism of this is that smaller data sets can limit the potential for generalisation across a research population (Hennink and Kaiser, 2022). It does, however, enable the researcher to focus on the details of a study and motivate and encourage outcomes based on contextual factors. The small sample size of the present study is mitigated through the depth of questions asked, and the decision to adopt thematic analysis as an analytical framework. Through thematic analysis, the identification and prevalence of certain themes make it possible to make comparisons across the dataset and more robust analytical assumptions (Yin, 2015). The criticism of this is that smaller data sets can limit the potential for generalisation across a research population (Yin, 2015: Hancock,

Ockleford and Windridge, 2007). It does, however, enable the researcher to focus on the details of a study and motivate and encourage outcomes basedon contextual factors. The small sample size of the present study is mitigated through the depth of questions asked, and the decision to adopt thematic analysis as an analytical framework. Through thematic analysis, the identification and prevalence of certain themes make it possible to make comparisons across the dataset and more robust analytical assumptions.

The research base of interpretivism is value bound, and the researcher cannot be separated from what is being investigated and thus forms part of the study. Being part of an investigation causes the researcher to take a stance, whilst being aware of the potential of researcher bias. This can be mitigated through a variety of strategies, including awareness, avoiding questions by association, or skewed questions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007), to name but three. However, interpretivism was considered preferable here, since an investigator can focus on a small sample size and conduct an in-depth study to understand the role of social workers in cybercrime. Using a smaller dataset in the present study made it easier to both assess participant attitudes towards cybercrime, and their suggestions on how to integrate social workers into solutions. Using a larger dataset in this case would have made it difficult to answer the research questions of the present study, as it would have been difficult to gain such detailed information. Interpretivism is also different from other philosophies

like such as pragmatism which uses mixed or multiple methods, or positivism which is more closely aligned with focuses on quantitative data. Interpretivism is appropriate for this study because it allows for data collection in the natural setting. Researchers are expected to be unobtrusive, non-controlling, and non-manipulative, hence the choice of semi-structured interviews (Chowdhury, 2014 ; DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019). Unlike a structured interview, the semi-structured interview involves minimal guidance from the researcher and makes it possible to gain insights into the participant's individual experiences. Open-ended questions and a less structured approach are characteristic of the semi-structured interview approach, making it additionally a particularly suitable approach for researching topics that are still relatively understudied. This is the case of the present study, where there are few studies that explore the topic of social work in Saudi Arabia from the interpretations of both social workers and the individuals that they work with. One final strength of interpretivism is the deliberate emphasis on the individual experiences of participants. This is of particular importance in the present study as it touches on issues that may be sensitive, such as experiences of cybercrime, cultural, religious, and social issues. Moreover, the participants are from two different social positions, students and social workers, thus necessitating an approach that considers the individual needs of each different group, and that is sensitive to their differences. However, interpretivism has its shortcomings and weaknesses.

In most research using an interpretivist approach studies, personal subjective viewpoints and values affect the data collection and interpretation, thus making it difficult to draw generalised conclusions (Sauders et al., 2012). As this study is focusing specifically on the viability of integrating social workers into cybercrime strategies for young women in Saudi Arabia, as well as strategies for achieving this, the focus on the study is on transferability, rather than generalisability. Thus, the results of the present study cannot be used to make generalisations about the whole student or social worker population of Saudi Arabia. However, the framework adopted in this study may serve for other similar studies. Common criticisms of studies adopting an interpretivist framework revolve around validity, reliability, and representativeness. Interpretivist studies have been criticised for the impact of the researcher's own viewpoints or bias. Additionally, interpretivist frameworks have been criticised for their aim of exploring deeper knowledge of phenomena in a specific context, thus hindering the ability for these studies to be useful and valid outside of these contexts.

These weaknesses were minimised throughout the present study by adopting an approach that included adopting a reflexive approach throughout the study, as well as ensuring a balanced relationship with the participants. As has been argued by Dutta, Kaur and Elers (2020) one of the most crucial ways a researcher can address issues of validity in qualitative research is through ensuring positioning within the study,

and thorough awareness of the research dynamics and wider context. The reflexive approach adopted in the study is discussed in more detail in the following section providing more information on the interview approach.

3.5 Research Methods

This study aimed to explore the different dynamics of cybercrime and the role of social workers in preventing or mitigating cybercrime against women in KSA. A qualitative methodology was selected because the researcher intended to gain insights into cybercrime and the role of social workers through the thorough examination of the research participants' views, experiences and perceptions. Qualitative studies are particularly well suited to exploratory work (Dutta et al., 2020) whereas quantitative studies tend to confirm an already existing hypothesis or viewpoint. Additionally, a qualitative approach is particularly well suited to the ontological approach of subjectivism and the epistemological approach of interpretivism, making a qualitative approach most suitable for the present study. It also makes it possible to gain in-depth information and data from a smaller sample size.

Quantitative research design can be differentiated from qualitative approaches for its tendency to focus on the collection and statistical analysis of numerical data. A quantitative research design is usually adopted when the data collection techniques or analysis procedures generate or use numerical data. In contrast, qualitative research design is usually adopted when the data collection techniques or

analysis procedures generate or use non-numerical data (Saunders et al., 2019). For example, the quantitative research design often uses questionnaires to collect data, in contrast, the qualitative research design commonly uses semi-structured interviews where a researcher can establish a bond with the participants and thus understand their emotions, opinions, and viewpoints (Alase, 2017). Generally, quantitative research designs are associated with the positivist position and experimental or survey research (Saunders et al., 2019). In contrast, qualitative designs are typically associated with the interpretive stance because it requires a researcher to make sense of the constructed and subjective meaning of the phenomenon under study, where one explores their lived experiences and stories in the best way possible without distorting the meaning (Alase, 2017; Saunders et al., 2019). Moreover, a qualitative approach enabled the researcher to interact with the issue and own or use knowledge, which means that the researcher could leverage their existing knowledge or gain new insights through the research process and pursue awareness of social workers' roles vis-à-vis cybercrime against Saudi women. The qualitative approach was deemed a suitable choice for this study because it involves processes allowing the researcher to enlarge understanding and analyse the social issues (Grinnell and Unrau, 2014). Additionally, Creswell and Creswell (2018) point out that qualitative approaches require exploration, and the study participants should be assessed in everyday surroundings. The adopted study

design allowed the researcher to achieve this. The practical methodological implications and limitations of adopting the qualitative research design included creating an instrument (semi-structured interviews) that evaluated what social workers know about cybercrime and their role in preventing cybercrime against women.

Some advantages of quantitative methods include the generalisability of the research findings, as well as increased validity due to adopting statistical methods. This therefore increases the reliability, as well as the possibility of applying the methods to other contexts beyond the one explored. Additional advantages include ease of data analysis, and the collected data tend to be precise, consistent, and reliable (O'Gorman and MacIntosh, 2015). However, quantitative research designs have key limitations, like the inability to generalise the findings to a larger population, overreliance on a researcher's experience and the likelihood of bias, data collection is time-consuming, and data analysis is more complex compared to the quantitative approach (de Vaus, 2014; Hammarberg, Kirkman and De Lacey, 2016). Likewise, measuring or understanding a phenomenon related to human behaviour may be difficult, and the collected data may not be strong enough to elucidate complex social issues (Bryman, 2012). Despite the limitations of qualitative studies, it is relevant to the current study because of the ability to conduct behavioural and social studies. Similarly, it allows a researcher to deeply investigate and collect rich descriptive data concerning a social phenomenon. In addition, it

provides detailed information that can help explain a complex issue, and the process of collecting data is relatively cost-efficient (O'Gorman and Macintosh, 2015). In this study, qualitative methods were adopted to explore and understand the role of social workers in preventing cybercrime against women in Saudi Arabia. According to Hammarberg et al. (2016), qualitative methods can help answer questions concerning perspective, meaning, and experience, most often from the participants' standpoint, which the research sought to explore.

3.6 Research Design

3.6.1 Time Horizon

The time horizon in research can be longitudinal or cross-sectional, as noted by Saunders et al. (2019). A cross-sectional time horizon involves data collection at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of the phenomenon under study. In contrast, a longitudinal time horizon entails data collection at multiple points over an extended period, allowing for the observation of changes and trends over time.

For the present study, which examines the social worker's role in addressing cybercrime against young women in Saudi Arabia, a cross-sectional time horizon was employed. This choice was primarily driven by practical considerations, particularly the time constraints associated with the degree program. As Collis and Hussey (2021) point out, cross-sectional studies are often favoured in academic research due to their efficiency and feasibility within the limited timeframe of most degree programs.

Additionally, cost constraints played a significant role in the decision to adopt a cross- sectional approach. Longitudinal studies typically require more resources, both in terms of time and financial investment, as they involve repeated data collection and analysis over an extended period (Bryman and Bell, 2018). Given the budgetary limitations often faced by academic researchers, particularly those conducting studies as part of a degree program, a cross-sectional design offered a more cost-effective alternative.

While acknowledging the limitations of a cross-sectional approach, it's important to note that this design still allows for valuable insights into the current state of social work practices related to cybercrime in Saudi Arabia. As Neuman (2020) suggests, cross-sectional studies are particularly useful for describing phenomena and identifying relationships between variables at a specific point in time. This "snapshot" can serve as a crucial baseline for understanding the present landscape and informing future research directions.

Moreover, given the rapidly evolving nature of cybercrime and social work interventions, a cross-sectional study provides timely data that can be immediately relevant to practitioners and policymakers. While a longitudinal study might offer insights into trends over time, the urgency of the issue at hand makes current data particularly valuable for immediate action and policy formulation (Creswell and Creswell, 2022).

In conclusion, while the cross-sectional time horizon was primarily

chosen due to pragmatic constraints, it however offers a methodologically sound approach to addressing the research questions within the given context and limitations.

3.7 Data Collection

3.7.1 Sampling Strategy

Sampling refers to the means used by the researcher to select a relevant portion of the population to investigate in the study. Bryman and Bell (2015) have divided sampling techniques into probability and non-probability. In the case of probability sampling, the sample is representative of the whole population, and in the case of non-probability sampling, the sample is representative of a specific group. In most cases, the sampling approach selected by research reflects the accessibility of the participants' distribution and the nature of the information to be collected (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Therefore, the study adopted a non-probabilistic sampling approach in data collection. , as the study is exploring the experiences of two specific groups, young female university students, and social workers in the Saudi Arabian context.

This study adopted a purposive sampling method (a type of non-probabilistic sampling), as it explores a specific topic that requires participants to have some existing knowledge and/or experience of cybercrime. Sharma (2017) defines purposive sampling as a selective, judgemental, or subjective sampling approach that relies on the researcher's judgment when selecting participants for the study.

Purpose sampling can include expert sampling, homogenous sampling, maximum variation sampling, total population sampling, and extreme case sampling (Sharma, 2017). The researcher used their judgment to select female social workers and female Saudi students to include in the study. Specifically, expert sampling was employed in the study to find and select research participants (social workers) with professional experience addressing cybercrime against Saudi female students. Purposive sampling was also used to identify and select Saudi female students with experience with the effect of cybercrime. The choice of purposive sampling was also influenced by the need to minimise the cost of research. Choosing the best-fit participants for the study eliminates costs associated with participants with limited or no contribution to research (Collis and Hussey, 2021). Hence, purposive sampling reduces the costs and time needed for research. The purposive sampling also contributed to the reduction of the margin of error because it led to choosing the best-fit participants for the study.

The adoption of purposive sampling has limitations. First, purposive sampling is often associated with bias because researchers use their judgment to decide which participant to include in the study (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). In this case, expert elicitation for social workers and cybercrime experience affects Saudi female students (Bryman and Bell, 2016).

3.7.2 Data Sources

Qualitative research uses different data sources to help researchers

understand the studied issue. As noted in the previous sections, these data sources include focus groups, in-depth and standardised interviews, and artefacts like documents, works of art, or books (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The data used in this research was collected from the study participants (Saudi female students and women social workers) using semi-structured interviews, which allowed the researcher to gather open-ended data, explore the participants' beliefs, feelings, and thoughts about cybercrime against Saudi women, and deeply investigate personal or sensitive issues concerning cybercrime in Saudi Arabia. The current research was sensitive because it targeted women social workers who have limited visibility in Saudi Arabia and limited power regarding self-determination, as shown in the literature review; most of these women are averse to change, are conservative and not outspoken in Saudi society (Albrithen, 2019; Althumali, 2021) Creating an environment of trust and safety was important in the data collection process, so that each participant could feel that they were understood by the researcher. Participants were informed that the information would only be used for research purposes and were able to withdraw at any moment.

After identifying the purpose of the study and the research questions, the researcher identified the potential study participants to help answer the research questions. When selecting participants for the study, it was necessary to pay attention to the specific circumstances of each

participant to form a better idea about each individual prior to assessing their suitability for the study, and to inform the study process should they be selected.

Other attributes that improved the quality of data collected included the availability of research participants, their willingness to participate in the interviews and knowledge and lived experiences about cybercrime in Saudi Arabia, hence the choice of Saudi female students. In addition to female students, female social workers working within a higher education institution (King Saud University) were selected to participate in this study. The rationale for choosing female social workers is that, within King Saud University, female students' related concerns and issues are managed and directed by female staff. In total, 30 participants, 15 female students and 15 social workers, were interviewed. I interviewed 15 women social workers as it was the maximum available in the university. However, saturation was reached after 15 interviews with female students.

The focus was on their perspectives on cybercrime, the factors that cause cybercrime, and their role in preventing or mitigating the impact of cybercrime against Saudi young women. Working with social workers and Saudi female students was highly beneficial because they are trusted sources that can provide a valid and relevant target sample. In addition, the participants were identified through purposive sampling. However, with an emphasis on privacy and shying away from any publicity amongst Saudi females, finding participants to

provide data for this study was quite challenging.

3.7.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria establish the limits or parameters within which research is carried out (Strauss, White and Bierer, 2021). This is especially the case when choosing a sample of participants, which is designed to bolster the quality and effectiveness of the collected data (Gefenas et al., 2022; Armond et al., 2021; Busher and Fox, 2021).The ethical challenge I faced in this study, both in its formulation in the UK and execution in the KSA, was that too stringent criteria could easily have become a barrier to data collection, whereas too lenient criteria could negatively impact the quality of information collected. Establishing the criteria for Saudi female students using online platforms and social workers in the KSA was straightforward, in as much as that their use of social media and experience of cybercrime were deciding factors.

Age is a factor in the UK approach for ethical review, which meant that the participants had to be above the age of 18 (below this age they are considered too young). More information on the ethical procedures is detailed in later sections of this chapter.

Therefore, the inclusion and exclusion criteria employed in this study include:

- The respondents had to be either female students and/or female social workers.

- The participants also had to be social workers in the KSA working with women.

- The participants had to be older than 18 years old. It is important to note that laws have changed in Saudi Arabia, allowing women that have turned 18 years to be independent and even to live alone (Gefenas et al., 2022). However, the legal shifts

  have not reshaped societal norms and expectations extensively (Busher and Fox, 2021). This means that women that are independent and living alone might be viewed negatively by society at large (Armond et al., 2021).

The reason for adopting these inclusion and exclusion criteria were as follows. First, as this study is exclusively exploring the experiences of women, the participants had to be female students/and or social workers. In addition to this, the social worker participants had to have direct experience of working with women, particularly young women. Second, the participants had to be older than 18 years old. This ensured that they were not subject to the restrictions of the guardianship system and were therefore able to participate in the present study on their own accord. Involving participants that were still under the guardianship system could pose potential problems, and would require approval from guardians, potentially jeopardising the participants.

3.8 Interview Method

3.8.1 Development of Interview Guidelines and Preparations

The development of semi-structured interviews for this study was a careful process, designed to ensure both the comfort of participants and the richness of data collection. The interview guide combined a variety of question types: guiding questions to steer the overall direction of the conversation, probing questions to delve deeper into specific areas of interest, and follow-up questions to clarify responses and encourage elaboration.

Careful attention was paid to the formulation of these questions. They were shaped to be neutral, avoiding any bias that might influence participants' responses. The language used was clear, simple, and free from jargon, ensuring accessibility for all participants. This approach was crucial in creating an environment where participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives openly.

Recognizing the importance of linguistic and cultural context, all interviews were conducted in Arabic, the native language of the participants. This decision was made to eliminate potential language barriers and allow participants to express themselves more naturally and precisely. The use of Arabic also helped to establish rapport and create a more relaxed atmosphere during the interviews.

The structure of the interviews followed a carefully considered progression, as recommended by Josselson (2013). The interview guides (see appendices G and H) began with relatively straightforward,

context-setting questions before moving on to more complex or in-depth inquiries. This approach served multiple purposes: it helped put participants at ease, built rapport and confidence, and gradually led them into the core topics of the research.

Specifically, the interviews commenced with questions aimed at collecting demographic data. This not only provided valuable contextual information for the study but also served as an easy entry point for participants to begin sharing information. From there, the questions progressed to explore participants' views on cybercrime, including their perceptions of causal factors, the specific risks faced by female students, and the role of social workers in prevention and intervention.

This carefully structured approach was designed to generate rich primary data that could inform the further development of the interview. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) note, building rapport and confidence in this way often leads to more detailed and insightful responses from participants.

The duration of the interviews varied, as is common in semi-structured formats, but generally ranged between 40 and 60 minutes. This timeframe allowed for in-depth exploration of the topics while respecting participants' time commitments. Interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's consent; in cases where consent for recording was not given, detailed handwritten notes were taken instead.

A key consideration in the design of the interview questions was to ensure alignment with the interpretivist approach adopted in the study. To this end, questions were carefully worded to avoid privileging any particular interpretation over others. This open-ended approach allowed participants to express their own understandings and experiences without feeling constrained by the researcher's preconceptions.

The process of developing and refining the interview guide involved multiple stages of review and pilot testing. Draft questions were discussed with academic supervisors and colleagues to ensure their relevance and clarity. Additionally, pilot interviews were conducted with individuals similar to the target participant group. This allowed for the identification and resolution of any potential issues with question wording, order, or content before the main data collection phase began.

Throughout the interview process, the researcher remained mindful of the potential power dynamics at play, particularly given the sensitive nature of the topic and the cultural context of Saudi Arabia. Efforts were made to create a non-judgmental and supportive atmosphere, encouraging participants to share their thoughts and experiences freely.

In summary, the development and implementation of the semi-structured interviews for this study reflected a thoughtful, participant-centred approach. By carefully considering language, structure, and

cultural context, the interviews were designed to elicit rich, nuanced data while ensuring participant comfort and ethical research practice.

3.8.2 Conducting Interviews

Even though the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia announced that students and staff would return to campus in September 2021, the researcher had a contingency plan to conduct the interviews via Microsoft Teams, Skype or Zoom if physical access to participants remained restricted due to COVID-19. The in-person interview was regarded as the first choice instead of online interviews because they offered the researcher the ability to gauge any potential discomfort when discussing such as sensitive issue such as cybercrime. However, some of the participants chose the online interview option. Although, there are some benefits to adopting an in-person interview approach. First, in-person interviews require no use of technology which could fail during the interview. Second, as the topic of the study is sensitive, the use of an in-person interview approach made it possible for the researcher to intervene should participants be demonstrating any signs of distress. On the other hand, given the nature of the topic, it was possible that some of the participants may have preferred the online interview approach as it made them feel safer (e.g., they could conduct the interview in a safe space), thus giving them more control and autonomy.

The interviews which were conducted face-to-face, took place in halls at the university, which had been pre-booked to allow the researcher

to meet the female students without interference. The researcher met the participating social workers in their offices, the university halls or online based on individual preferences. However, the female students were interviewed in classrooms or online. The relatively open public spaces made the participants more comfortable for some of them. However, they posed some privacy issues for the participants. For this reason, the interviews were conducted in secluded zones to offer the participants confidentiality and privacy. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, allowing better engagement with the participants (Ongena and Dijkstra, 2021). The Because the interviews were conducted in Arabic, and they were later translated into English and analysed. The researcher independently translated each interview word by word. The translation was twofold. The researcher first translated each interview recorded using a tape recorder and then listened to each interview and wrote the responses into a Word document. The methodological implication of translation is that it disrupts the fluid research process by altering the original use of language and, sometimes, the original language structure (Al- Amer et al., 2016; Squires, 2009). Squires (2009) further points out that the translation process may substantially change the text and that the researcher will might not sufficiently capture the essence of the social issue in the translated language. This is because poorly translated phrases or concepts may change the emerging themes from the data analysis and may not mirror what the respondents said (Al-Amer et al.,

2016; Inhetveen, 2012). It may threaten, for example, the dependability and credibility of cross-language research and form part of its limitations. However, the researcher sought to overcome these limitations by capturing as much information as possible, comparing the recorded translation, identifying any variations, and later comparing the written translations with the audio and selecting emerging themes.

Qualitative researchers Brown and Danaher (2019) have placed emphasis on the importance of ensuring that dialogue with participants is authentic. suggest that this can be is achieved through use of the guiding principles of Connectivity, Humanness, and Empathy. Connectivity is built through the initial relationship between researcher and participant and can be cultivated through being approachable and open to the perspective of participants. This was particularly important in the present study given the sensitive nature of the topic. Humanness recognises that participants and the researcher are in a bilateral relationship, with both able to offer valuable input. Participant responses were listened to closely and with attention and their data and ideas allowed the researcher to identify new themes. The final principle is empathy, and empathy and is again related to the connection built between the researcher and the participants (Brown and Danaher, 2017). Again, given the sensitive nature of the topic of this study, responsive listening techniques were used to demonstrate the researcher I was actively involved in understanding the lived

experience of the participants.

In addition to this, to minimise the potential impact of my own assumptions and values on the research, elements of reflexivity were employed throughout the research process. Reflexivity is a core aspect of qualitative research, and there are different ways that it is realised in research that fall under the umbrella of the social sciences. According to Ide and Beddoe (2023), reflexivity "suggests an awareness of a qualitative researcher's self- influence on the research". Reflection is a crucial part of reflexivity, and to maintain reflexive practices in the present study, I had to interrogate and reflect upon my own values and assumptions, and how I positioned myself in relation to the participants. I had to recognise that I may already have preconceived views of cybercrime in Saudi Arabia, and that my own hypothesis on the positive role female social workers could play in tackling cybercrime may be challenged. I further had to recognise that my own 'insider' position with first-hand knowledge of Saudi Arabian culture may influence my ability to distance myself from the experiences of participants, especially as my research is exploring a sensitive subject. I had to be prepared for the possibility that the participants may share information that could have emotional impacts, and additionally, ensure that I treated the social worker participants and the student participants equally, without elevating the interpretations of one group over the other.

3.9 Analytical Framework

Thematic analysis, as described by George et al. (2023), is a methodological approach that involves "investigating, categorising, and delineating 'themes' within the verbatim interview transcripts" (p. 17). This method was adopted in the present study to highlight overarching themes in the interview data, rather than approaching the collected information with a predetermined framework. The goal of thematic analysis, as Josselson (2013) notes, is to identify common patterns across the collected data. These patterns may emerge within a single semi-structured interview or across multiple interviews, depending on the research questions and study design.

The process of thematic analysis in this study involved several steps. Initially, the researcher immersed themselves in the data through repeated reading of the transcripts. This was followed by the generation of initial codes, which involved identifying and labeling relevant features of the data. The next step was to search for themes by examining the codes and identifying broader patterns of meaning. These potential themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the data. Finally, themes were defined and named, and the analysis was written up.

A critical aspect of this process was the interpretation of data using different keywords and phrases, examining their frequency before identifying themes and sub-themes. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives, capturing both explicit and implicit meanings within the

data.

The transcription process, which McMullin (2021) describes as transforming audio recordings into written form, played a crucial role in preparing the data for analysis. This step required careful consideration of various factors. The researcher had to decide what to include in the transcripts, such as non-verbal cues, and whether to edit grammar or correct mistakes (Nascimento and Steinbruch, 2019). Additionally, decisions were made regarding the inclusion of contextual data like crosstalk, interruptions, and inaudible segments (McMullin, 2021).

Given that the interviews were conducted in Arabic, the transcription process involved an additional layer of complexity. The researcher first transcribed the interviews in Arabic before translating them into English. This approach allowed for continuous examination of the original Arabic transcripts against the English interpretations during analysis, ensuring accuracy and contextual relevance.

The translation process itself required careful attention to maintain conceptual equivalence and accuracy of the research findings. The researcher employed the Brislin model of translation (de Wet et al., 2020), which involves translating from Arabic to English and then back to Arabic. This back-translation method enabled the researcher to compare both versions, checking for equivalence and accuracy.

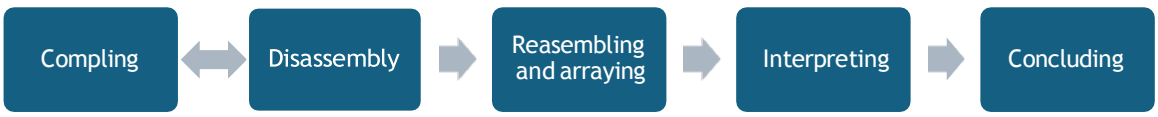
Throughout the transcription and translation process, the researcher compared the notes taken during the interviews with the transcripts to

identify any inconsistencies or conflicting information. This cross-checking helped to ensure the reliability and validity of the data.

The transcription and coding processes were undertaken concurrently, following Yin's 5 phases of analysis (Yin, 2015). These phases provided a structured approach to data analysis, guiding the researcher through the stages of compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. This systematic approach helped to ensure rigor in the analysis process and contributed to the overall credibility of the findings.

By meticulously following these procedures for thematic analysis, transcription, and translation, the researcher was able to develop a rich, nuanced understanding of the data, grounded in the participants' own words and experiences. This approach allowed for the emergence of themes that accurately reflected the complexities of cybercrime against young women in Saudi Arabia and the role of social workers in addressing this issue.

Figure 0.1 Yin's (2015) 5 steps of thematic analysis



These processes are as follows. First, analysis begins with the compiling stage, which involves arranging and organising data gathered in the data collection stage, in this case, the interview data.

This stage therefore involved organising all of the interview data in order. The second stage of disassembly began with the initial generation of codes (Yin, 2015). At this stage of the research, these codes were simple and broad, allowing for greater refinement through the analytical process. This made it possible to begin to group the data thematically, in accordance with the needs of the specific research questions. At this stage, the data was roughly grouped according to key themes that were identified in relation to each research question. The next stage involved is reassembly, in which the data was then organised in tables to better visualise the links between the data. The fourth phase of the analysis process was interpreting, in which the data was further organised and the process of drawing firm links between the information was instigated (Yin, 2015). During this stage of the process, the themes were refined, and more developed conclusions were drawn from the dataset.

Finally, the concluding stage involved using the data to draw conclusions. In the present study, themes were identified based on keywords provided by the participants. The main themes identified in the study were divided into relevant subthemes in accordance with the participant responses. Where main themes represented the overarching theme, the subthemes were used to focus on specific aspects of the research. Throughout the process of thematic analysis, it was necessary to revisit the data and ensure that the themes were refined as new information arose during the research process. This

was especially critical when identifying the final themes to be featured in the research.

3.10 Ethics

In social research, ethics are self-regulatory guidelines that play a pivotal role in the decision-making process (Brown, Spiro and Quinton, 2020); ethics also play a role in defining processes that researchers employ when collecting targeted information and the subsequent analytical and inference approaches (Kara, 2018). According to Iphofen and Tolich (2018), the development and sustenance of ethical codes are crucial for researchers and research organisations and their ability to maintain the integrity of the data collection and analysis process. Additionally, ethics allow for the definition of the behavioural and attitudinal constructs that should shape researchers, participants, and other stakeholders; this is designed to protect the welfare of participants, stakeholders, and researchers while bolstering the ability to conduct analyses with validity and credibility (Brown et al., 2020; Kara, 2018). Overall, research ethics provide a robust role and responsibility to a research process (including the researcher) in considering, designing, and executing the role of participants while advancing their rights, freedoms, dignity, and welfare even as they pursue a study's objectives.

This study investigated an important and sensitive topic in Saudi Arabia – cybercrimes against females and the role of social workers in addressing this problem. This research was sensitive because it

targeted two groups of women – female students and social workers – who had either experienced cybercrime directly or indirectly. According to Albrithen (2019), women in Saudi Arabia generally display conservative tendencies and are not outspoken in Saudi society. Althumali (2021) also indicates that women tend to be less assertive when it comes to addressing issues they face in society; this finding is consistent with the argument advanced by Albrithen (2019). With the emphasis on privacy and shying away from any publicity, finding participants to provide data for this study was a challenge. However, most importantly, guaranteeing the welfare, rights, and dignity of the participants was even more important in this study, which underscores the centrality of the research ethics aspect of this process. I first discuss the ethical review and approval process undertaken before offering an examination of the core challenges faced and navigated in this research.

Ethical approval processes were required both in both the UK and Saudi Arabia. Since the study was supervised from the UK and carried out in Saudi Arabia, getting approval from both countries was important to ensuring the completion of the study and that it was undertaken in an ethical manner which did not negatively impact on those who took part.

In the UK, the University's Research Ethics Committee required provided ethical approval for the study. This was necessary for me to carry out a study involving participants anywhere in the world. The

targeted principles in the approval process included detailed consideration of:

- Voluntary participation
- Confidentiality, anonymity
- Results communication
- Informed consent
- Potential harm.

With these principles addressed in my research design, the approval process in the UK was detailed, but helpful and allowed me to consider the ethics of my research in depth. However, the approval process in Saudi Arabia was challenging because of the two-country dynamic. The need for communication between my University in the UK and the host of the research in the KSA caused considerable delays. However, there was no substantial opposition to the core structure and objectives of the research. The challenges were primarily cultural.

I carried out qualitative semi-structured research; in my experience in navigating the ethical approval process between the UK and the KSA, there were extensive procedural and cultural differences between the two countries in relation to the approval of studies involving people. In the UK, the ethical review is much more rigorous and, thus, took more time than I had expected – 6 months, which impacted the timelines of my research work. In the KSA, the approval process was

straightforward, notwithstanding the cultural differences referenced above. They required a letter from my supervisor explaining the research topic and overall objectives and the ethical approval from my parent University in the UK; it took less than a month to get approval in the KSA. This difference could be viewed in one of two ways; the KSA approval was straightforward because of the existing cooperative relations between KSA higher education and the UK's universities, which allowed for a quick approval; or, secondly, the KSA approval process is considerably less rigorous compared to that of the UK. The comparison is important because I am on a scholarship in the UK from the King Saud University. Adherence to the guidelines in each system ensured that the resulting findings are robust and obtained in application of ethically sound methods.

3.10.1 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is incredibly important to social work values in the UK, explaining the rigour attached to professional accreditation and the context of data and privacy legislation. It is also of paramount importance to research, which This is highlighted by the crucial role (confidentiality) plays in the research ethical approval in UK-based institutions. The cultural dimension is important in Saudi Arabia, especially when it comes to shaping women's participation in the social discourse and the lack of visibility in some areas, as explored in the literature review. Cybercrimes and the use of technology (including access to social media platforms) is a sensitive issue in Saudi Arabia.

Confidentiality and duty of care, considered below are important in ensuring that female participants feel safe and comfortable taking part in the research process. As became evident during the research process, the research participants had a differing idea of confidentiality, with some participants routinely sharing confidential information. This had an impact on the research process and the data that was collected throughout the process.

The fact that women in Saudi Arabia display conservative and reserved tendencies and that they are generally less outspoken than men underscore the role of confidentiality and duty of care in the present research. This means that the design of this study sought to ensure that participation by targeted women did not lead to any recriminations in their communities or expose them to atypical attention or even danger of reprisal(s) (Zimmer, 2018; Tiidenberg, 2020; Gearon and Parsons, 2019).

3.10.2 Duty of Care

Although offering an environment in which the research participants could provide information about such crimes, while ensuring that whatever they said remained confidential was my ethical obligation, I was inclined as a researcher, and social worker to advance this important value to participants in my study, some of whom had not considered this issue before, as it transpired during the research process. This also meant that I ensured that the participants were not exposed to further cybercrimes or any social recriminations because

they participated in this research process. I was further inclined to consider that the sensitive nature of the topic may distress the participants, making it necessary to consider this during the research process. The rigorous ethical review approach adopted in the UK ensured that I had taken all the requisite measures to protect participants in this process; this highlights the overarching importance of research ethics in advancing the welfare, rights, and dignity of the participants.

However, given the different types of cybercrimes experienced by participants in this research and the various impacts (psychosocial and socioeconomic) on victims, there was no standardised approach I could apply to ensure that the participants were not negatively affected while recounting their experiences. Thus, I had to ensure that I remained flexible in my response to each individual interpretation of the participants.

3.10.3 Data Protection

One of the critical elements that the ethical review and approval process focused on was the collection, handling, storage, and destruction of the collected information regarding participants during and after the research had been conducted. This aspect of research ethics is particularly crucial in the digital age, where data breaches and privacy concerns are increasingly prevalent.

On the UK side, the Data Protection Act (2018) offered the overarching framework for the storage of personal information by researchers. This

legislation, which implements the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the UK, sets out strict guidelines for the processing and protection of personal data. In this regard, the information was processed by the University in the UK under the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018, ensuring compliance with international standards of data protection.

In this study, maintaining the secure storage of collected data and related documents was straightforward, thanks to the robust infrastructure provided by the UK university. The university's secure servers in the UK were used to store the data with password protection.

These servers are equipped with advanced encryption technologies and are regularly updated to guard against potential cyber threats.

To avoid redundancy and over-exposure of the data, it was only stored in the UK University's secure servers and not within the KSA; this was because the subsequent analysis was carried out in the UK. This decision also helped to navigate the potential complexities of cross-border data storage and transfer, which can be subject to different legal frameworks and regulations.

The choice to store data exclusively in the UK also aligned with the principle of data minimization, a key tenet of modern data protection laws. By limiting the storage locations, the researcher reduced the potential points of vulnerability for the sensitive information collected during the study.

Furthermore, access to the stored data was strictly controlled and

limited to the researcher and authorized supervisory staff. This access control was implemented through a combination of unique user credentials and multi-factor authentication, adding an extra layer of security to the stored information.

The data management plan also included provisions for the eventual destruction of the data. In line with ethical guidelines and data protection regulations, all personal data will be securely erased from the university servers upon completion of the research project and any associated publications. This erasure process will use industry-standard methods to ensure that the data cannot be recovered or reconstructed.

3.10.4 Informed Consent

In research ethics, consent is understood as an ongoing process rather than a one-time, all- encompassing decision. This perspective recognises the dynamic nature of research and the evolving understanding that participants may develop as the study progresses. Zimmer (2018) argues that research participants can never be fully informed of all the dynamics of the research at the outset, which inherently limits their ability to provide complete consent to participation. This understanding challenges the traditional notion of informed consent as a single event and emphasises the need for a more fluid, continuous approach.

Building on this, Gearon and Parsons (2019) propose that consent should be viewed as a step-by-step agreement by the participant(s) to

continue taking part in the research process as new information and dynamics are revealed. This conceptualisation of consent as an ongoing process aligns with the ethical principle of respect for persons, acknowledging participants' autonomy and right to make informed decisions about their involvement at every stage of the research.

In practice, this means that participants in this study retained the right to stop their participation before, during, and even after data collection. This approach respects the participants' agency and recognizes that their willingness to participate may change as they gain a deeper understanding of the research or as their personal circumstances evolve.

However, the implementation of this ongoing consent process presents practical challenges, particularly in the post-data collection phase. To address these challenges, I established a final date by which participants could withdraw from the study. This decision was necessitated by the fact that after a certain point in the research process, the collected information would be anonymized, making it difficult or impossible to identify and remove an individual participant's data.

The establishment of this cutoff date for withdrawal was carefully considered to balance the ethical imperative of respecting participants' autonomy with the practical needs of the research process. It was crucial to communicate this limitation clearly to participants from the outset, ensuring they understood both their rights and the constraints

on those rights. This approach to consent aligns with the guidelines provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018), which emphasize the importance of ongoing consent in educational research. BERA recommends that researchers remain alert to signs of participant discomfort or withdrawal of consent, even if not explicitly stated.

Furthermore, the ongoing nature of consent in this study was supported by regular check- ins with participants throughout the research process. These check-ins provided opportunities to remind participants of their rights, update them on any new developments in the study, and reaffirm their willingness to continue participating.

The implementation of ongoing consent also required careful documentation. Each interaction with participants regarding consent was recorded, including initial consent, any discussions about continuing participation, and acknowledgement of the final withdrawal date. This documentation serves not only as a record of ethical compliance but also as a valuable resource for reflecting on the consent process in future research.

By adopting this nuanced approach to consent, the study aimed to uphold the highest ethical standards while acknowledging the practical realities of conducting research. This balance between ethical ideals and research practicalities is a crucial consideration in contemporary social science research, particularly when dealing with sensitive topics

or vulnerable populations.

3.11. Comparison of ethical approaches

3.11.1 Summative Reflection on the different approaches to ethics between Saudi Arabia and the UK:

The foundations of research ethics, as outlined by Brown et al. (2020), Kara (2018), and Iphofen and Tolich (2018), underscore the critical importance of protecting participants' welfare, rights, and dignity in any research endeavour. These principles form the basis of ethical research practices generally, yet their interpretation and implementation can adjust significantly across cultural and national contexts. This variance is particularly evident when comparing the approaches to research ethics in Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom.

In my experience conducting research on cybercrimes against females in Saudi Arabia, I encountered a complex web of cultural, social, and institutional factors that profoundly influenced the ethical landscape of my study. The sensitivity of the topic, coupled with the unique position of women in Saudi society, created a multifaceted ethical challenge that required careful navigation.

The conservative nature of Saudi Arabian society, especially concerning women's roles and public engagement, presented a significant difficulty in participant recruitment and data collection. Many potential participants were hesitant to speak openly about their experiences or perspectives, fearing social repercussions or breaches

of privacy. This reluctance is deeply rooted in cultural norms that value discretion and modesty, particularly for women (Albrithen, 2019; Althumali, 2021). As a researcher, I found myself constantly balancing the need for robust data with the imperative to respect and protect my participants' cultural values and personal boundaries.

The contrast between the UK and Saudi Arabia's approaches to research ethics became increasingly apparent as I progressed through my study. In the UK, the ethical review process is characterised by a high degree of standardisation and rigour across all disciplines, including social sciences and humanities (Dominelli and Holloway, 2008). This standardisation is reflective of a broader societal emphasis on individual rights, transparency, and accountability in research practices.

For instance, when I conducted a pilot study in the UK as part of my research training, I was struck by the depth and breadth of the ethical review process. Every aspect of my research design was scrutinised, from the wording of my consent forms to the data storage protocols. The ethics committee raised questions about potential power imbalances between the researcher and participants, the psychological impact of discussing sensitive topics, and the measures in place to ensure participant anonymity (Alahmad, 2017). This level of scrutiny, while sometimes frustrating in its intensity, ultimately strengthened my research design and enhanced my awareness of the ethical implications of my work.

In contrast, the ethical review process I encountered in Saudi Arabia for my main study was markedly different. While there were certainly ethical considerations to address, the level of scrutiny for social science research was noticeably less rigorous than what I had experienced in the UK. This difference is not necessarily a reflection of lesser concern for ethics but rather a manifestation of different societal priorities and institutional structures.

The disparity in ethical review processes between the two countries can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the UK has a longer history of formalised research ethics in social sciences, which has led to the development of robust institutional frameworks and a culture of ethical awareness among researchers. Secondly, the UK's diverse and pluralistic society has necessitated the creation of ethical guidelines that can accommodate a wide range of perspectives and sensitivities. In Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, the emphasis on ethical review has traditionally been more focused on clinical and medical research, with less attention paid to social sciences and humanities. This prioritisation reflects both the country's developmental focus on medical advancements and the cultural context in which social research operates. In a society where social norms and religious values play a significant role in shaping public discourse, there may be an implicit assumption that researchers will naturally adhere to these norms, reducing the perceived need for extensive formal ethical review processes.

However, it is important to note that the landscape of research ethics in Saudi Arabia is evolving. As the country continues to invest in education and research, there is a growing recognition of the need for more comprehensive ethical frameworks across all disciplines, mainly social sciences (Collins, 2018; Albrithen and Briskman, 2015). This evolution is part of a broader trend of modernisation and international engagement in Saudi academia.

My experience navigating these different ethical environments has profoundly shaped my understanding of research ethics as a dynamic and culturally embedded practice. It has highlighted the importance of cultural competence in ethical decision-making, particularly when conducting cross-cultural or international research.

Moreover, the process of conducting this research has underscored the need for a nuanced understanding of privacy and confidentiality across different cultural settings. In the UK, these concepts are often framed in terms of individual rights and data protection. In Saudi Arabia, however, privacy is deeply intertwined with concepts of honor and family reputation. This required me to develop additional safeguards to protect not just individual participants, but also their wider social networks.

Reflecting on these experiences, I have come to appreciate the importance of flexibility and cultural sensitivity in ethical research practices. While universal principles of research ethics provide a valuable foundation, their application must be adapted to local

contexts. This adaptation requires ongoing dialogue between researchers, participants, and institutional review boards to ensure that ethical guidelines remain relevant and effective across diverse cultural landscapes.

In conclusion, the journey through this research has not only contributed to our understanding of cybercrimes against females in Saudi Arabia but has also illuminated the complex interplay between research ethics, cultural norms, and institutional frameworks. As global research collaborations continue to grow, fostering a more nuanced and culturally informed approach to research ethics will be crucial in ensuring that ethical standards are both rigorous and respectful of diverse cultural contexts.

CHAPTER 4- RESULTS And ANALSIS OF The DATA COLLECTION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and interprets the results obtained from the thematic analysis of the data, as detailed in Chapter 3. The structure of this chapter is designed to provide a comprehensive and systematic exploration of the research findings, organized into several key sections.

The chapter commences with an analysis of the participants' relevant demographic information. This initial section provides crucial context for understanding the background and characteristics of the study participants, offering insights into factors that may influence their perspectives and experiences.

Following this, the chapter delves into the first research question: "What roles, if any, do social workers play in protecting female students at Saudi universities from cybercrimes?" This section explores the conceptualisation of cybercrime within the Saudi Arabian context, examining how it is defined and understood. Additionally, it investigates the potential causes of cybercrime specifically affecting female Saudi students. This analysis aims to provide a foundation for understanding the unique challenges faced by this demographic in the digital sphere.

The subsequent section addresses the second research question: "Are there any areas where these roles could be improved?" Here, the

chapter examines the definition and perception of women social workers in Saudi Arabia, exploring their potential to provide solutions to cybercrime issues facing women in SA. This section also critically analyses the limitations and challenges these social workers encounter in their professional capacity within the Saudi Arabian context.

Building upon these findings, the chapter then transitions to the third research question: "How could these findings be applied to other areas of Saudi society?" This section broadens the scope of the analysis, discussing how the insights gained from the study might be applicable to wider Saudi Arabian society beyond the specific issue of cybercrime. It explores potential implications for social work practice, policy development, and societal attitudes towards women's safety and empowerment in the digital age.

Throughout all sections, the results are presented and analysed using a framework of themes, subthemes, and codes developed from the collected data, following Yin's (2015) approach to thematic analysis. This methodological approach ensures a rigorous and systematic examination of the research findings, allowing for the identification of key patterns, trends, and insights emerging from the data.

By structuring the chapter in this manner, the research aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the role of social workers in addressing cybercrime against female students in Saudi

universities while also considering the broader implications for Saudi society. This approach not only addresses the specific research questions but also contributes to the wider discourse on social work, women's rights, and digital safety in the Saudi Arabian context.

4.2 Participants' Demographic Information

The participants in this study consisted of female university social workers and female Saudi students at the university. The relevant demographic information of the social workers is summarised in appendix A, pseudonyms have been used for each of the participants.

4.2.1. Demographic Information of Social workers

Appendix A in the appendices section provides demographic information from the fifteen social workers (SW) that participated in the study. The following section will discuss in more detail the relevance demographic details for the present study. When quotes are presented from the social worker participants, the suffix 'SW' will be used to indicate that a social worker participant is being discussed.

The academic qualifications of social workers were relevant in this study because they were considered a basis for establishing whether the participants had the expertise necessary for them to have appropriate data. A previous study into social work in Saudi Arabia by (Al- shammari and Khoja, 1992) found that most university level social workers were required to have some level of professional qualification in social work, be it a diploma in healthcare or an undergraduate degree. This is because there are expectations that social workers in

academic settings will also engage in the production of research. This has been supported in a more recent study by (Mahmoud, 2020), where it was found that social workers were highly skilled. However, Alotaibi et al., (2020) and Mahmoud (2020) have both further noted that there is not a consistent certification standard for social worker qualification in Saudi Arabia, thus leading to the risk that workers may not be adequately qualified or lack the skills for their role. Additionally, given that social work is a practice-based profession, it is notable that qualifications are required to carry out research rather than actual practice.

This made it essential to recruit participants who had the relevant qualifications and education level to have the greatest insight into the research questions of the present study, as unqualified social workers are not uncommon in Saudi Arabia. The qualification level of the participants was therefore important to take into consideration

The results in Appendix A in appendices indicate that fourteen of the participants had a bachelor's degree in social work, and of these, five had advanced to a master's degree in the same field of expertise, and one had progressed further to a PhD in sociology. Only one social worker had attained a bachelor's and master's Degree in psychological counselling. These results reveal that most of the participants had attained pre-service professional training in social work. Therefore, they were able to provide data about how social workers in their experiences had dealt with cybercrime facing female

Saudis, and how they could become more active in the challenges facing young women who have experienced cybercrime in Saudi Arabia.

In addition to pre-service training, it was necessary to establish whether participants had received practical training in social work, as the basis for determining their appropriateness to provide data from a point of view of practical knowledge about whether and how they had dealt with cybercrime that female Saudi students faced. the data indicates that eleven out of the fifteen participant social workers underwent in-service job training, self-development, or self-directed training, career growth training in social work, and psychological therapy. It is important to note here some differences between social work training in Saudi Arabia and how it differs from other countries. As stated by Sloan et al., (2017) the introduction of social work in the Arab Gulf nations has been a relatively recent adoption to the healthcare system, with most social work undergraduate programmes in Saudi Arabia. Thus, for such a large region, there are relatively few options available. Additionally, as stated by Mahmoud (2020), many social work students may choose to study abroad as part of their training.

Albrithen and Yalli (2013) have found that many social workers in Saudi Arabia felt that they lacked significant educational training to be able to conduct their work effectively. They noted that there is currently a lack of a regulated social work organisation such as the National Association of Social Workers in the USA. The recent development and

expansion of social work in Saudi Arabia, in conjunction with the lack of regulations and standardised practices across institutions (Mahmoud, 2020; Albrithen and Yalli, 2013), has ensured that required qualifications for social workers in Saudi Arabia can be variable. While some institutions may require a BA in social work, psychology, or sociology, others may require further education and demonstrated experience. In an updated study, Albrithen and Yalli, (2022) note that the minimum requirement for a social work position in Saudi Arabia is an undergraduate degree in any field, however, they further state that this is influenced by the fact that there are still relatively few postgraduate options available. In their qualitative study on social workers in Saudi Arabia, most participants had a degree in sociology (41%), compared to a slightly lesser percentage who had a degree in social work (37%). In comparison with the UK, where all social workers are required to undertake a first or second degree in social work or undergo various fast-track schemes to become qualified (NHS England, n.d.). All include 200 days of placements as well as academic requirements. This highlights some differences in the training system and availability of social work education in Saudi Arabia and its limitations.

As most of the participants had undergone relevant practical training, this ensured that they had on the ground experience, making them suitable for providing data on the role, and how they could relate to female Saudi students. Additionally, they might be further able to offer

insight into how they could be better integrated into a more formal system of social work in Saudi Arabia. The type of work the participant social workers did was necessary to determine whether they had dealt with cybercrime experiences of Saudi female students, how they had handled the experiences and how best they could deal with them. The results in Appendix A indicate that nine of fifteen participants had worked in general administrative and research related to social work, three had worked in the administration of student affairs, three had worked in administrative and direct social work practice, and one had worked in social work, guidance and counselling. These results suggest that the participant social workers were all involved in the provision of social work services, some of which involved dealing with students. The participants were, therefore, appropriate to provide data on any cybercrime experiences with which students grappled and had shared with them.

The working experience of the participants was considered relevant as the basis for determining their appropriateness to provide necessary data based on the length of time they had spent practicing social work. Appendix A indicated in the table that the minimum social work experience was nine years, and the median working experience was twelve point five years. Given the previously outlined concerns over qualifications and certifications in Saudi Arabia, the lengthy experience of the participants selected sought to ensure that they were well-positioned to offer significant insight into the cybercrime

experiences of female students, and issues facing their positions as social workers in the Saudi Arabian context, from a social worker perspective.

As discussed in the literature review, young women are targeted for cybercrime at a greater frequency than other demographics (Nalaka and Diunugala, 2020). Even if social workers may not have first-hand experience of cybercrime, they are likely to have heard of cybercrime incidents through family or friends, or in their professional environments. This awareness is also reflected in parental concerns: in a study by (Alfakeh et al., 2021) exploring parental attitudes towards cyberbullying, a large percentage of participants (67.6%) felt that their children were at threat. This is indicative of how endemic issues of cybercrime are or can be perceived to be in Saudi Arabia. Appendix A indicates that six of the interviewed social workers had experiences of cybercrime in the form of being defrauded personally, having their close relatives (daughter or sister) or friends defrauded, or dealing with victims of hacking. This suggests that some of the participants were able to provide data on personal experiences as well as professional ones.

Appendix A indicates that the interviewed social workers were selected from different colleges, including the College of Arts, Education, College of Applied Sciences, College of Applied Studies & Community Service, Faculty of Pharmacy, College of Computer and Information Sciences, and College of Science. These results illustrate

that the participant social workers were selected from different colleges. Therefore, the data they provided reflect cybercrime experiences, causes and solutions proposed by different sectors of the University colleges. The departments from which the interviewed social workers were selected were also considered relevant.

In terms of selecting participants from appropriate university departments, it was necessary to place emphasis on social workers who are directly involved in the psychosocial well-being of students rather than purely academic affairs, e.g., changing course modules, as these are some of the expectations of the social worker role in educational contexts in Saudi Arabia. This was identified prior to the study, and as a result, was subsequently deemed as an important factor in the inclusion criteria. For this reason, the study opted to include participants that were from various different departments, such as the Department of Education, the Department of Guidance and Counselling, and the Office of Student Affairs. This ensured that the selected participants were more suitable for the present study, as they were from departments that were identified to have a more active involvement in student affairs, thus ensuring that the participants were more likely to have an awareness of cybercrime issues and provide more relevant data. It is further important to note that as discussed in multiple studies (Mahmoud, 2020; Alotaibi et al., 2020), social workers in Saudi Arabia often must take on multiple roles, including teaching and research. Thus, it is commonplace in Saudi Arabia that social

workers work across different departments.

4.2.2. Students' Demographic Information

As has been outlined previously, the other participants group included in the study was female students studying at King Saud University. As with the section that discussed relevant demographic features of the social workers above, this section will provide a discussion on relevant demographic information of the student participants in the study in below as illustrated in appendix B.

Appendix B indicates that fifteen female students participated in the study. The next section discusses the demographic attributes considered most relevant in this study and why they were regarded as necessary for this research. When the student participants are referred to in the text, the suffix 'S' will be used to indicate a student participant.

Students' age was considered relevant in this study because, according to Pew Research Center (2023), it is one of the factors that influence people's use of cyber communication, with those below the age of 30 years spending more time using this communication through social media, which may expose more of them to cybercrime compared to those above 30 years of age. The results in the age column of Appendix B indicate that all the students who participated in the study were below 30 years old, with fourteen of them aged below 23 years. These results suggest that the majority of the students belonged to Generation Z – described by Dimock (2019) as a

generation of people born between 1995 and 2012 and characterised by much more use of online and social media communication compared to previous generations (baby boomers and millennials). Therefore, students who participated in the study were within the demographic group characterised by the predominant use of online and social media platforms. Consequently, the students were in a position to explain their online experiences, including those they had heard about and those to which they had been exposed. Marital status was another relevant demographic attribute as explained below.

The results in Appendix B indicate that only two out of fifteen students were married. Therefore, most of the students were single, suggesting that, in accordance with the Saudi culture described by Alfaryan (2014) and Al Faryan et al. (2019), they were still under the control of their parental family authority. Hence, their responses to cybercrime may have been influenced by their parents' control. The college and department from which students were selected were also considered relevant, as explicated in the next section.

The college and department were considered relevant as a basis for determining whether the interviewed student participants were appropriate to provide the data that was needed to answer the set research questions. The results in Appendix B indicate that students who participated in the study belonged to different colleges and departments. Fourteen out of the fifteen students belonged to the College of Arts, with ten of them belonging to the Social Work

Department, two students to the Media Department, and two students to the Sociology Department. One student belonged to the English Department in the College of Linguistics. The preceding results indicate that most of the students belonged to the College of Arts and Social Work Department. The fact that most of the students were in the Social Work Department suggests that they had been taught about the role of a social worker. They could, therefore, understand some of the needs and expectations of the social worker role. Students from other departments were included to establish whether they had been exposed to cybercrime and whether social workers had helped them deal with it. As shown in Appendix B, one level of Saudi Arabian higher education is equivalent to a semester in the UK university system. Each academic year has two levels or semesters. During the four-year bachelor's program at the university, therefore, students are expected to complete eight levels - two levels per academic year. This level was among the demographic attributes considered relevant for this study because it could indicate the length of time for which the students had been at the university and the experiences they had faced while there, including cybercrime experiences, if any. The region from where students hailed from was also considered relevant as explained below.

The regional location of the participants before beginning studies in Riyadh, was important to consider in determining how ideas around cybercrime might manifest across different regions of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is a large country and has thirteen distinct regions

(emirates) as shown in figure 4 below. Although, most of the participants were from Riyadh, there were participants from Al-Qassim, South Side, and Khobar (East Side). This made it possible to diversify the dataset by comparing responses from different parts of the country. The overall population of Saudi Arabia is approximately 35 million people, with over 7 million of the population living in Riyadh. The second biggest city, Jeddah, has a population of around 4 million (Ministry of Interior, n.d.).

Figure 0.1 Administrative Divisions of Saudi Arabia



According to a report by the United Nations, a very high percentage (82.1%) of the population live in urban locations. In Riyadh, the capital, this rate is even higher (90.9%). Riyadh, as the capital of Saudi Arabia,

is the financial, political, and commercial hub of the country (UN Habitat, 2016), with the largest population. Saudi Arabia is a large country, and there are differences between the different regions. For example, where Riyadh is estimated to have a population of over 7 million, Al-Qassim has just over 1 million (Ministry of Interior, n.d.). Utilising participants from different regions can therefore offer greater insight into the data collection process, as these differences may manifest in the results.

The results in appendix B indicate that five of the students who participated in the study had been directly exposed to cybercrime experiences. Two of these students had been exposed to scamming and hacking; one had a sister who had been duped into extortion and another had a friend whose image had been smeared. Being 'smeared' in the Saudi Arabian context is particularly harmful due to the norms and standards that women are expected to uphold. As has been identified in the literature review, Saudi Arabian culture is shame-based, and the restrictions placed on Saudi Arabian women often lead to feelings of shame when they violate social norms (Alaoui et al., 2017). This is discussed considered in more detail in the literature review and will be responded to further in this chapter. These results suggest that some of the student participants provided data based on actual cybercrime that they had encountered, some were based on the experiences of their family members and friends. While others making no reference to any personal understanding.

Appendix B illustrates that the students who participated in the study could provide data about the nature of cybercrime to which young females in Saudi Arabia has been exposed, and how social workers dealt with or could deal with it. Generally, the demographic information suggests that both students and social workers were both in a position to provide relevant data on the cybercrime experiences faced by young female Saudi students, the causes of these experiences, how they were dealt with them, and how best they could be addressed. Thematic analysis of how the data collected from these study participants in response to each research question led to results presented in the following sections.

4.3. Defining Cybercrime

To better contextualise the current research, the first set of results sought to ascertain how cybercrime was interpreted and understood by participants. This was achieved by asking each participant what they understood by the term cybercrime. This section will begin by presenting how the social worker participants understood cybercrime. This section functions as the contextual background of the present study, providing a basic framework for understanding cybercrime as understood the participants, indicating how cybercrime against women is understood in the Saudi Arabian context.

Table 0.1 Female Social Workers' understanding of cybercrime

Main Theme	Description

Financially motivated cybercrimes	Impersonating a well-known personality and asking for money (SHAZA-SW) Defrauding through false pretence (RADWA-SW) Stolen bank details (MALAK-SW) Extortion (NADA-SW, MALAK-SW)
Interpersonal cybercrimes	Cyberbullying (RADWA-SW) Blackmail (exposing photos) (RADWA, SHAZA)
Cybercrimes with malicious intent	Cybercriminals wish to damage the image of the county (RADWA-SW) Identity theft through hacking (MALAK-SW, AMAL-SW) Spying on other people's devices without permission (NOOR-SW)

4.3.1 Financially motivated cybercrime

The first set of results pertain to cybercrimes that were financially motivated, that is, geared towards financial gain. From the social worker responses, cybercrime was most commonly understood to be related to financial gain. Social workers made mention of extortion, false pretence, stolen bank details, and impersonation as financially motivated cybercrimes. The first excerpt describes cybercrime as using impersonation to extort:

> "Impersonating a well-known personality. He (the impersonator) may feel that he is inferior. I feel that it is an

> internal psychological thing. This is what I noticed on social media. There is always a famous person saying my account has been hacked (dupe people to contribute money for him or her). This is what I noticed recently" (SHAZA- SW).

The excerpt above indicates that impersonation was defined in a way that involves an individual presenting him or herself to others using the identity of another famous person for the purpose of deceiving them that their account has been hacked so that they can be duped into rescuing him or her.

The excerpt above provides valuable insights into the nature of impersonation as a form of cybercrime in the Saudi Arabian context. Her observations highlight several key aspects of this phenomenon, which merit further analysis.

Firstly, SHAZA identifies impersonation as the act of assuming the identity of a well-known personality. This suggests that cybercriminals specifically target individuals with public recognition, likely due to the potential for greater impact and credibility when using these identities.

Secondly, SHAZA posits a psychological dimension to this behaviour. She hypothesises that the impersonator may be driven by feelings of inferiority, indicating that this form of cybercrime might have roots in complex psychological issues. This perspective invites a deeper exploration of the motivations behind such acts, potentially informing more effective prevention and intervention strategies.

The social worker SHAZA's comments suggest that this is a recurring pattern she has noticed on social media platforms. Her use of the phrase "This is what I noticed recently" implies that this form of cybercrime may be on the rise or evolving in its tactics.

SHAZA's insights provide a multifaceted view of impersonation as a cybercrime, about the methods used, the potential psychological factors at play, and the targeted nature of these attacks. Her perspective as a social worker offers a unique lens through which to understand this issue, blending observations of online behaviour with potential psychological underpinnings. RADWA recounts a similar case of defrauding through false pretence:

> "There is a Twitter site about an investment of money…. the company is headquartered in Dubai...My daughter contacted them and they said that they do not accept less than 2000 Riyals... so she said that she has 2000 only, they said it is "Ok"... it ended with them no longer responding to her, so I...called them, a Lebanese... said that her money is lost in their trading and she has nothing with them, then hung up on me" (RADWA-SW).

In the example above, the fraudsters made it seem as if they operated a genuine company headquartered in Dubai, however, this was not the case when RADWA confronted the individuals.

RADWA illustrates a sophisticated form of investment fraud

perpetrated through social media. In this case, the cybercriminals employed several tactics to create an illusion of legitimacy. They established a presence on Twitter, a widely used platform, and claimed to represent an investment company headquartered in Dubai, a well-known financial hub. This false association with a reputable location likely aimed to instil trust in potential victims.

The fraudsters demonstrated a calculated approach by setting a minimum investment amount of 2000 Riyals yet showing flexibility when RADWA's daughter expressed having only that exact amount. This adaptability suggests a strategy to maximise the number of potential victims by accommodating various financial capabilities.

The true nature of the scam became evident when communication ceased after receiving the money. RADWA's subsequent attempt to confront the fraudsters revealed their deceptive strategies. The claim that the money was "lost in trading" and the unexpected termination of the call indicates a planned scheme to avoid accountability and prevent further inquiry. This example underscores the complex and adjustable nature of cybercrime, highlighting the challenges in identifying and combating such fraudulent activities. DUHA makes mention of blackmail for financial gain:

> “She will give him money to buy his silence. He might ask for money today, but he will ask for money again in the future” (DUHA-SW).

DUHA's statement provides insight into the nature of blackmail as a form of cybercrime. She describes a scenario where a female victim is coerced into paying money to a male perpetrator to maintain his silence, presumably about compromising information or content. DUHA emphasizes the cyclical nature of this crime, noting that the initial payment is unlikely to be the last. Her use of gendered pronouns suggests a pattern where males are typically the perpetrators and females the victims in such cases. This observation may reflect broader gender dynamics in Saudi society or specific trends in cybercrime. DUHA's insight highlights the ongoing vulnerability of victims to repeated extortion, underscoring the persistent and damaging nature of blackmail in the digital sphere. NADA also provides an example of financial extortion/blackmail:

> “My sister paid for an Instagram account of a Kuwaiti designer, who has a large number of followers, to order a dress, she transferred 2000 SR for the order which was delayed in shipping, so she wrote to the designer that she will report a complaint if the order does not reach, where the designer replied that she will report my sister because of her rude way, to the Saudi authorities...” (NADA-SW)

As can been seen from the excerpt above, social media platforms such as Twitter were identified as sites for potential cybercrime. In the case described above, NADA recounts how her sister made a purchase and then expressed concern over the delivery. The seller then threatened

to report her to the authorities. The same participant continues by stating:

> “My sister was forced to remain silent and not to claim her rights, as her husband does not know and he will blame her for transferring such large amount without guarantees, it was a hard lesson for her on no trust without a guarantee” (NADA-SW).

The excerpt from NADA above shows how cybercrime was also understood to have consequences that went beyond the crime itself. This excerpt demonstrates the fears Saudi Arabian women can hold for fear of recrimination from their husbands, thus limiting their ability to gain support and effectively address and manage the situation. This further indicates that the effects of cybercrime may go beyond the crime itself, as female victims may feel that they cannot get the support they need from the authorities or close family members, making them feel that they need to remain silent and not proceed further with their case. As a society characterised by a high-power distance and high levels of masculinity, violation of these norms and social values can bring about feelings of shame. This is articulated by Hamdan and Mustafa (2021, p.1012) who state “shame arises from violating external cultural norms and social values”. As men are regarded in Saudi Arabian interpretations of Islam to be the guardians of women, women may feel especially fearful when faced with having to confess their experiences to male authority figures, including their own

husbands. According to Song (2019), the cultural norms of Saudi Arabia are predicated on “women’s deference and modesty”, and it is likely that this has contributed to how women in Saudi Arabia self-conceptualise their position, especially in relation to the men they are expected to defer to. In the excerpt above, the potential feelings of shame that could be brought about by committing an act not condoned by the husband (in this case, falling victim to a scam without the husband’s knowledge) is likely to have influenced the preferred decision to remain silent.

This is discussed in greater detail in the discussion section.

> “Maybe she got hacked and her cards and bank details got stolen. I saw this happen before; a lot of people were complaining they received a message that says a withdrawal occurred using their cards” (MALAK-SW).

The quote from MALAK sheds light on a prevalent form of cybercrime that targets personal financial information. It illustrates how hackers exploit vulnerabilities in digital systems to gain unauthorised access to individuals' banking details and payment cards. This form of cyber theft operates stealthily, with victims often unaware of the breach until they receive notifications of unauthorised transactions. The sudden alert of an unexpected withdrawal serves as the first red flag, catching many off guards and potentially leaving them in financial distress. MALAK's observation indicates a pattern of such incidents, suggesting it's not an isolated event but a recurring issue affecting multiple individuals.

This points to a broader cybersecurity challenge that banks and financial institutions face in protecting their customers' sensitive information. The scenario described also highlights the importance of prompt notification systems in detecting and alerting users to suspicious activities. While these alerts can be distressing, they serve as a crucial first line of defense, allowing victims to take swift action to mitigate further losses. Overall, MALAK's comment underscores the ongoing threat of financial cybercrime and the need for heightened awareness and security measures among both individuals and financial institutions. MALAK also makes an indication of online threats used to extort money from victims:

> “Online threats, whether it is through email, WhatsApp, or through any social communication to extort money from victims” (MALAK-SW)

MALAK's statement provides a concise definition of online threats as a form of cybercrime, highlighting the various digital platforms through which these threats are conveyed. Her inclusion of email, WhatsApp, and other social communication channels underscores the pervasive nature of these threats across multiple digital mediums. The analysis of these results reveals a complex landscape of financially motivated cybercrimes. While the ultimate goal may be monetary gain, the underlying motivations and methods employed by perpetrators are multifaceted. The use of threats as a primary tactic suggests that these crimes often involve psychological manipulation and coercion,

extending beyond simple financial fraud. The international dimension of these cybercrimes, as evidenced by the involvement of non-Saudi perpetrators, adds another layer of complexity to the issue. This transnational aspect presents significant challenges for law enforcement and legal systems, as it transcends national boundaries and jurisdictions.

Furthermore, the prevalence of these crimes on social media platforms highlights a critical vulnerability in the digital landscape. Social media, designed for connectivity and communication, becomes a tool for exploitation in the hands of cybercriminals. This raises questions about the adequacy of existing legal frameworks and protective measures, particularly in the context of rapidly evolving digital technologies

4.3.2 Interpersonal Cybercrime

Many of the social worker participants identified cybercrime that had interpersonal motivations, such as ruining reputation/ slander/ defamation/ or insults and abuse through social media/online platforms:

> “I understand it (cybercrime) as any abuse, insult posted on social media with intention to torture another person psychologically. This is on the increase among our girls, they are tortured by messages posted to them by people who want to torture them mentally” (RADWA-SW)

> “The most common kinds (of cybercrime) are photographs,

> dissemination of information over social media platforms such as Twitter, Snap Chat, Tik Tok to defame" (NADA-SW)
>
> "It is a behaviour that violates existing laws within a country, potentially through social media. The most common kinds are photographs, dissemination of information, defamation, threat and bullying." (NADA-SW)

The two excerpts from RADWA and NADA above list cybercrime as abuse or dissemination of information online to defame or 'torture' another individual. RADWA focuses on the psychological aspect of cybercrime that involves abusing another person on social media.RADWA additionally specifically mentions that this is something that is happening to young women. NADA also makes mention of social media, referring to the dissemination of photos/information on social media which is used to defame the victim.

Blackmail as understood by the participants was mentioned in both financially motivated cybercrimes, which fall into the category of crimes using the machine in Phillips et al.'s (2022) taxonomy, and interpersonal cybercrimes, which fall into the category of crimes in the machine in the taxonomy. Looking at the responses, however, did indicate that the most common form of blackmail identified by the participants was interpersonally motivated blackmail. In particular, blackmail appeared to be specifically linked to the dissemination of private photographs for motivations of extortion, defamation, or even

‘torture’. RADWA and MALAK provide further excerpts that elaborate on forms of interpersonal blackmail:

> “Cybercrime from my point of view is very diversified, for example, it may be a blackmail, I mean, I think it is related to (young women in) relationships that get into blackmail... Blackmail by exposing photos...” (RADWA-SW).

> “Possibly the most common thing that Saudis are subjected to is blackmail, for example, by a person whom she trusted, and she gave him her private pictures. Maybe the criminal hacked her device and took personal pictures.” (MALAK-SW).

Specifically, one of the interviewed social workers, SHAZA, described cybercrime as:

> “Electronic crimes that involve ... blackmail by threatening to expose a girl’s ... photo
>
> ... or video on social media should the girl who posted it to the perpetrator decline to do what the perpetrator wants” (SHAZA-SW).

In the three excerpts provided above, blackmail is explicitly associated with revealing private photos of young women. This confirms that the cybercrime landscape in Saudi Arabia is understood by the social worker participants above to disproportionately affect young women. This confirms Marganski’s (2020) argument for a feminist approach to cybercrime, following Danner’s (1989, p. 51) definition referencing a

‘woman-centered description and explanation of human experience and the social world’, as women have been shown to be particularly vulnerable to cybercrimes that fit under the crimes in the machine category of Phillips et al.’s (2022) cybercrime taxonomy. Although the participants were not specifically asked about cybercrime that affects young women, their responses indicated that men were perpetrating interpersonal blackmail against young women. Reading this from a cultural stereotype perspective can help further contextualise these responses. The family is of particular importance to Saudi Arabian society, and women are treated as an extension of the family unit. In Alharji’s (2020) study, women who were particularly active on social media were hesitant about posting personal pictures online, as they were afraid that the photos could potentially humiliate male guardians and relatives. The problem with this attitude is that it can open up avenues for further cybercrime. As is mentioned in the excerpts above, the initial blackmail (threat to release private photos) could lead to extortion, as mentioned in the excerpt from SHAZA.

The fact that this blackmail occurred to young women in relationships suggests that its perpetrators were the boyfriends who wanted the young women to succumb to their demands by threatening to electronically “expose her photos and/or videos” on social media as SHAZA explained. The threat of online exposure of a woman’s photos and videos was considered blackmail because it is extremely damaging in the Saudi Arabia, as mentioned above. It should be noted

that by referring to this blackmail as electronic, SHAZA differentiated it from the blackmail that occurs through non-electronic means. Cybercrime was also understood by one participant to refer to "sexual comments or pornography"

(NOOR), however, this was the only example where a social worker participant made explicit mention of cybercrime that may be sexually motivated. potentially representative of taboos around open discussion of these types of crimes, which are subject to particularly harsh punishment in the Saudi Arabian legal system. Thus, the most frequently mentioned interpersonal cybercrime was blackmail.

The prevalence of this type of crime is not only related to the position of women in Saudi Arabian society, but also to the position of men. Marganski (2020) has argued that gender- based cybercrimes are the result of privileges in the social sphere that are afforded to men in patriarchal societies. As has been mentioned before, Saudi Arabia is a patriarchal society, and the subordinate position of women may enable men to feel that they can effectively undermine the social progress made in Saudi Arabia and remind young women of their place in society (Alfakeh et al., 2021). These desires to re-assert masculine values in the online space have also been discussed by Taylor (2003), and it is evident from the social worker responses that cybercriminals were taking advantage of the fact that young women were likely to remain silent for fear of further repercussions.

Blackmail was very commonly understood to be related to releasing

young women's photos. This is discussed and explored in more detail in the discussion section.

4.3.3 Cybercrime for Malicious Intent

This section explores understandings of cybercrime as perpetrated for malicious intent, for example, to tarnish the nation's image, influencing individuals, identity theft, spying, and hacking. RADWA felt that cybercriminals were a national issue, as they were intent on 'distorting' the image of Saudi Arabia.

> "Those (cybercrime perpetrators), I consider them among the spoilers of earth, as they purposely photograph what distorts the image of the country" (RADWA-SW).

A similar sentiment was expressed by MONA:

> "I think it looks like a sea, among other things are, penetrating privacy of a person, interfering identity of a person or falsifying a certain thing, these are simple examples of impersonation, fueling public opinion on social networking sites and influencing a society" (MONA-SW)

MONA makes mention of 'influencing a society' as a cybercrime, illustrating how like RADWA, she believes cybercrime to be potentially harmful on a wider level than individual cases. Other examples from the social worker participants focused on spying:

> "(Cybercrime is) spying on phones. Taking picture of someone. Spying on someone else's devices. Criminals use a lot of

> programs. I can send something to your phone and using a code, I can then later access your phone and spy on you without you ever knowing" (NOOR-SW).

NOOR discusses how she believes cybercrime to be spying on phones, either by taking pictures or using other programs. NOOR notes how easy spying on phones is.

This excerpt suggests that smartphone technology has contributed to cybercrime. This is consistent with Chachak (2022), who indicates that cybercriminals are increasingly using mobile phones and computing knowledge to commit different forms of cybercrime such as defrauding business companies regardless of their sizes. One social worker defined cybercrime as an anonymous cyber-attack. Another participant supports this perspective by stating that cybercrime "is a recent problem that we face, like cyber-attacks on devices by

anonymous (people for reasons known to them alone)" (MAHA-SW). Thus, cybercrime was understood to be a range of different behaviours according to the responses from the social worker participants. Financially motivated cybercrime was the most common understanding, followed by for malicious intent and then interpersonal cybercrime. Only one of the social worker participants mentioned cybercrime that was sexually motivated. The next section will explore in more detail the student understandings of cybercrime.

Table 0.2 Students understanding of cybercrime

Main Theme	Description
Financially motivated cybercrime	Extortion that occurs online or through social media (JASMINE-S, LULU-S) Forgery and impersonation of bank employees (SARA-S)
Interpersonal cybercrime	Impersonation to damage reputation (SARA-S, LANA-S, JASMINE-S) Cyberbullying on social media (LEENA-S)
Cybercrime for malicious intent	International entities hacking for information (MAI-S) Breach of personal information (LANA-S) Impersonation (TOGA-S, TALA-S)

4.3.4 Financially Motivated Cybercrime

The student participants also understood that cybercrime could be financially motivated. JASMINE summarised this kind of cybercrime by describing it as “extortion that happens online” (JASMINE-S). This demonstrates that all extortion that takes place online is viewed as a cybercrime. Another student, FARAH, described cybercrime as a notion that involves providing trial online programs with intent to defraud users through lack of clarity over a trail period. This student stated that:

> “You know some (people) provide a trial (programme) for a week or month and ... withdraw money from your visa” (FARAH-S).

This suggests that some of the online trial versions, which internet users reasonably expect to utilise for free of charge, are subject to changes in charging that users may not be aware about. However, it is recognised that this does not constitute a cybercrime in accordance with the taxonomy of Phillips et al., (2022). Online extortion was further perceived to include cybercrime committed by perpetrators outside Saudi Arabia as MAI states in her description of cybercrime:

> “It is a crime that takes place through the Internet. It can be impersonation, for example, hacking information from an official entity or a certain ministry in another country. The crimes are performed outside of Saudi Arabia. Extortion is also another example. I remember that there was a case of extortion and the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue (the religious police) secretly help girls. I don't know if this is true or not. But I read so many stories of girls getting blackmailed by young men, and they were helped, but the stories were without real names, so I don't know if it was true or not. Most of the stories are about a girl who trusted a boy, and she sends her pictures or went out with him, and he threatened her. If she did not listen to him, he will tell her parents. After that, the commission (the religious police) helped them and defended them. As it was written in the

newspapers” (MAI-S)

In the statement above, MAI demonstrates that overlapping nature of cybercrimes experienced by young women in Saudi Arabia. Whereas blackmail is sometimes financially motivated, it can also be classified as an interpersonal crime when the intention is to ruin the reputation of a young woman, particularly when perpetrated by a young man with whom she is in a relationship with. MAI also details how cybercrime may involve cybercriminals impersonating an official institution from another country. Again, this shows the international nature of the cybercrime in Saudi Arabia. The results indicate that financially motivated cybercrimes are perceived to be more likely to originate outside of Saudi Arabia, compared to interpersonal blackmail crimes, which are more likely to occur within Saudi Arabia.

MAI’s perspective suggests that Saudi females can recognise that cybercrime is global rather than confined to their country. Another student, SARA, makes mention of the financially motivated cybercrime of fraud committed through online forgery that involves updating messages sent by people who impersonate as bank employees. SARA demonstrated this perspective by describing cybercrime as including:

> “Forgery, and we also find warning messages from banks because there are people impersonating bank employees and asking to update the data (to extort money from our bank

accounts using the updates we provide online)" (SARA-S).

In addition to this, cybercrime was also seen to involve extortion through hacking of social media accounts:

> "(This is when unknown people block or hack a girl's social media account). Then an amount of money is requested from her in exchange for returning the account, as girls fear losing their accounts, for example, a girl could have a number of followers in her public account, so she wants to recover it, this is most of the girls' goal than a girl whose account is private, just a photo or two" (LULU-S).

The above excerpt suggests that cybercrime is understood as hacking with intent to extort money. For female student, RAWAN, cybercrime involves hacking perpetrated with intent to steal people's rights through social media or technology. This study participant expressed this perspective by stating, "Cybercrime is the same as existing real-life crime, but it is on social media or through technology, like stealing someone's rights" (RAWAN-S). Another closely related definition was that cybercrime was a form of breaching confidential information as LANA explained, "I believe it (cybercrime) is regarding anything that affects the other party, whether it is a breach of confidential information" (LANA-S). These excerpts support the social worker's responses by highlighting financially motivated crimes as typically involving extortion, blackmail, or impersonation. Additionally, both sets of

responses identify that cybercrimes may be originating from outside of Saudi Arabia, demonstrating that the participants were aware of the fact that cybercrime was not limited to Saudi Arabian borders.

4.3.5 Interpersonal Cybercrime

The phenomenon of cybercrime, particularly in the form of online defamation and impersonation, presents a significant challenge in the digital age. As evidenced by the student participant SARA's statement, there is a growing awareness of how these malicious activities can profoundly impact individuals and communities.

> "To harm people. For example, someone impersonating someone (else) to damage their good standing in the community" (SARA-S)

This excerpt illuminates a crucial aspect of cybercrime: the intentional manipulation of online identities to inflict reputational damage. In the context of Saudi Arabia, a nation deeply rooted in shared values, the ramifications of such actions are particularly severe.

The concept of "good standing" within a community holds immense significance in Saudi Arabian culture. It includes not only an individual's personal reputation but also extends to their family's honour and social status. In this societal framework, where interpersonal relationships and collective harmony are paramount, any assault on one's reputation can have far-reaching consequences that transcend the digital realm.

The act of impersonation in cyberspace, as highlighted by SARA, goes beyond mere identity theft. It represents a calculated attempt to undermine an individual's credibility and social capital. By assuming the identity of another person, cybercriminals can engage in behaviours or express opinions that contradict the impersonated individual's values or character. This misrepresentation can lead to a cascade of negative outcomes, including damaged professional relationships, strained family ties, and social rejection.

Moreover, the impact of such cybercrimes is amplified by the rapid dissemination of information in the digital era. False information or malicious content can spread virally, making it challenging for victims to contain the damage or rectify misconceptions. This speed and reach of digital platforms exacerbate the potential for long-lasting harm to an individual's reputation.

In the Saudi Arabian context, where traditional values intersect with increasing digital connectivity, the consequences of reputational damage can be particularly acute. Loss of standing within the community may result in reduced social and economic opportunities, affecting not only the individual but also their extended family network. This interconnectedness of personal and collective reputation underscores the gravity of cybercrime in community-oriented societies.

The recognition of impersonation and defamation as forms of

cybercrime reflects a growing understanding of the need for digital literacy and cybersecurity measures. It also highlights the importance of developing legal frameworks that address these evolving threats to personal and community well-being in the digital landscape.

Defamation was also explained by one of the interviewed students, LANA, as a form of cybercrime that negatively affects “the honour of the other person” (LANA-S). This perspective did not differ from that of another student, SARA, who described cybercrime as defamation by publishing pictures with the intention of causing harm. To this study participant, cybercrime involves “young people (who) ... take pictures of girls and publish them ... (for) defamation (intended to cause) ... great psychological harm” (SARA-S). All these perspectives suggest that cybercrime can be is perceived in Saudi Arabia as defamation committed online to hurt others. This, therefore, suggests that the student participants also recognised that the nature of cybercrime appeared to be predominantly motivated by personal factors. The excerpt from SARA again focuses on using young women’s photos for personal gain. Other student participants also defined cybercrime in terms of online harassment.

Online psychological harassment was expressed in the form of

> “psychological or moral damage (through) insults (posted on social media)” (JASMINE-S).

This perspective suggests that cybercrime can create

‘psychological’ or ‘moral’ damage through insults that are posted on social media and directed towards one specific individual. LEENA described cybercrime as cyber bullying as follows,

> “... bullying...(on) Snapchat, mocking (posted)...pictures and adding sarcastic phrases or insults, for example... ‘ugliest girl like this’” (LEENA-S).

These results reveal that Saudi female students perceived cybercrime to include as social media posts that are deliberately posted to induce distress.

Where both the student and the social worker participants demonstrated an understanding of the interpersonal nature of cybercrimes such as harassment, cyberbullying, trolling, and coercion, the student participants articulated a more thorough understanding of how this may be realised in the online space. The social workers made more generalised references, however, in the examples from the student participants, there was also reference to the psychological impacts of these types of cybercrimes, which are classified as interpersonal violence under Phillips et al.’s (2022) taxonomy. One participant, LEENA, gave a specific example of how cybercriminals may insult or bully others though describing them as ‘ugly’. Thus, the student participants made direct links between cybercrime and the harm caused, reflecting an understanding of intent to cause psychological harm, rather than just extort.

4.3.6 Cybercrime for Malicious Intent

Cybercrime was also understood to be perpetrated from malicious intent:

> "(Cybercrime is) an indirect infringement on others — entails severe penalties, such as posting pictures of others or using the voices of others for certain purposes. I mean, it may be like what I say, plagiarism, and referring to oneself, intellectual theft" (TOGA-S).

In the excerpt above, TOGA notes how cybercrime is an 'indirect' infringement on others, which involves taking the personal information (e.g., photos, voice) of others for malicious gain. This indicates that student participants were also aware of impersonation as a cybercrime that was used for malicious intent. TOGA does not specify whether the impersonation is for financial gain, simply stating 'certain purposes'. The preceding excerpt indicates that cybercrime involves penalising others by posting their pictures, voices or it may refer to plagiarism or intellectual theft. Another general perception of cybercrime was that it is an illegal social media act involving hacking private information and using it to extort and harm others:

> "Cybercrime is an illegal act done through the internet, mmm and yes, there are thefts or extortion in any way that aims to harm others or hack their private information. Criminal do not communicate directly, but it is done through social media programs. Like stealing Visa details through Instagram that you use for donations. Or through different games which requires

you to enter your bank details" (TALA-S).

4.3.7 General Definitions of Cybercrime

Finally, both the social worker and student participants had a number of responses that provided more generalised definitions of cybercrime. Generalised definitions were categorised as such if they did not fit into any of the more specific categories as identified in Phillips et al., (2022) taxonomy. One of the general descriptions was that cybercrime was "any behaviour or act against the law or general taste, but through electronic network or internet" (LULU-S). This definition was general because behaviour against the law but through electronic network or internet is very general – it includes all the crimes committed in this manner. Cybercrime was also generally defined as any "crime through internet" (NORA-S) or as a crime committed remotely through electronic or social media as the following excerpt indicates:

> "Cybercrime is a crime that can be committed remotely through social communication programs of various kinds... It is electronic through communication or social media apps or things like that. It can occur without physically meeting the other party" (LAMA-S)

The preceding data extract indicates that cybercrime does not involve physical connection between the perpetrator and the victim. The social worker participants also had some more generalised definitions of cybercrime:

> “These are crimes behind the screen, where we deal with a lot of people we don't know, so it's easy to be faked behind the screen” (DALAL-SW).

The above perspective suggests that any onscreen activity that involves impersonating others or tricking them online is viewed as a cybercrime. DALAL’s quote expresses concerns over not knowing who you could be talking to in online settings, as individuals can easily set up fake profiles and trick others.

While most of the study participants defined cybercrime as a type of crime, there were others who indicated that this was not the case, but instead merely an insult over social media. Specifically, one participant MONA explained that:

> “From my point of view, it is not a crime […] I do not classify this as a crime, I think in the WhatsApp groups if someone insulted another one, he/she just report it! (MONA- SW).

The above excerpt suggests that insults occurring over social media does not reflect criminal behaviour. MONA further elaborates on her interpretation of online insults as poor social behaviour rather than criminal activity:

> “I do not see this (insulting) as crime, this is normal, it could be moral deviation but not crime that deserves to be punished for and reported, however a society must be made aware of it” (MONA-SW)

MONA's narrative provides an unexpected result, by suggesting that insults on social media are something that could be classified as a 'moral deviation' rather than a crime that needs to go reported to and punished by the authorities. This example was the only instance where insults were not considered to be classified as a cybercrime. Equally, MONA still recognised that insulting others on social media was a societal issue. In general, the results show that there was no one singular definition of cybercrime amongst the participants, with further differences showing between the results from the student participants and the social worker participants. For the social worker participants, there was a strong emphasis on financially motivated cybercrime, particularly extortion and impersonation to steal. The student participants placed a greater emphasis on interpersonal cybercrimes, but likewise made strong links between cybercrime and extortion. Blackmail featured strongly in both the student and the social worker responses, as well as online shopping scams. Additionally, an interesting finding was that multiple participants identified cybercrime as originating outside of Saudi Arabia, particularly when it was financially motivated. This indicates that Saudi Arabia's infrastructure is particularly vulnerable to criminals that operate outside of the Saudi Arabian legal system, suggesting that Saudi Arabia's strict legal punishments for cybercrime may be ineffective as cybercriminals operate outside of the jurisdiction of Saudi Arabia thus limiting the possibility for legal repercussions.

4.4. Research Question One: What role, if any, do social workers play in protecting female students at Saudi universities from cybercrimes?

This section relates to findings from the data which relate to question one: what roles, if any, do female social workers play in protecting female students at Saudi universities from cybercrimes? This set of results seeks to evaluate the extent of the roles which female social workers play in protecting female students from cybercrimes. This section will be ordered in accordance with the themes and subthemes identified in the thematic analysis. These themes are clarified in Table 4.3 below, along with the participant code of where the information was taken from. These themes are then discussed in more detail in the following section, including specific examples from the student participants.

4.4.1 The Role of a Social Worker

To answer the first research question – What roles, if any, do social workers play in protecting female students at Saudi universities from cybercrimes? – it was first necessary to understand how the student participants viewed the social worker role. Table 4.3 below features the main subthemes that were identified, along with a brief description and the student responses that aligned with the subthemes.

Table 0.3 Themes and subthemes related to the first research question

Main Theme	Subtheme	Description
The role of a	Social	Social workers play the role of a social counsellor who

social worker	counsellor	assists with academic, health, financial, or social problems (RAHAF-S, REEM-S)
	Social mediator	Playing a mediator role between individuals and authority figures (e.g., doctors, teachers, administration, family) (LANA-S, MAI-S, REEM-S, TALA-S)
	Problem solver	Social workers help solve social problems (e.g., financial, familial, societal, communitarian) (REEM-S, TALA-S, LULU-S, NORA-S)

The role of the social worker was divided into three main subthemes: social counsellor, social mediator, and problem solver. Each of these subthemes will be discussed in more detail in this subsection. A social counsellor is understood to be an individual who employs a counselling method in dealing with a variety of issues that students may have. A social mediator is understood to be an individual who mediates between students and a third party (e.g., family member, professor, doctor). The social worker as problem solver is understood to be an individual who helps students 'solve' problems they are encountering (e.g., financial, familial). These definitions of each role correspond to the responses provided by the participants listed in Table 4.3 above.

The first main theme in Table 4.3 above indicates that a social worker was perceived as a social counsellor. For participants who presented social workers as social counsellors, their role included assisting students with academic, health, financial, or social problems.

> “It can be an academic, health, financial or social problem, social workers are in each college to facilitate life for undergraduates by counselling them”. (RAHAF-S)

The excerpt from RAHAF places social workers as individuals who “facilitate life for undergraduates by counselling them”. Social workers were understood to be able to answer students’ questions about problems they may have. Thus, in this excerpt, social workers were seen as individuals who could offer guidance on a wide range of issues. REEM likewise described a social worker as a person who counselled school members to overcome the problems they faced, based on having a relative who works as a social worker:

> “Mm, my uncle is a social worker, and I know that they help individual people overcome problems, and they do this as social counsellors in schools”. (REEM-S)

Differing from RAHAF, REEM specifies that the counselling social workers offer is ‘social counselling’. This suggests that REEM understands social workers to be more involved in offering counselling that is geared towards offering social support more widely. Social counsellor was the least frequent role in the participant responses. Compared to the social counsellor role, the social mediator role was more common in the participant responses. In the excerpt below, LANA describes how social workers specifically help young girls:

> “They certainly help individual young women who have social

> problems. I have my internship in a hospital and face a lot of young women every day with social issues. For example, there is a divorced mother with her youngest child, and she is filing a lawsuit against her workplace because they fired her. I helped her with the report. They fired her because she did not go to work because she to attend to her child during kidney dialysis. Social problems often affect life and make it more complex. The presence of a social worker is necessary to alleviate these problems" (LANA-S).

The response from LANA shows how social workers can help individual young women who are having social problems. The response also shows how social workers can help play a mediator role between vulnerable individuals and authority figures, especially those in complex situations. Like REEM, LANA makes reference of first-hand experience with the social worker role in practice. Both REEM and LANA make explicit indication of social issues when discussing the role of social workers. Other participants also referred made reference to social workers as playing a mediator role between students and authority figures:

> "If a student had a problem that she presents... to the social worker, such as when there is a problem with one of the professors or doctors, she cannot talk to the teacher. So, she goes to a social worker to mediate between her and the professor or doctor, and they solve the problem. The social

> worker will play a role of liaise the student with the professor or doctor to solve the problem. Social worker can also refer to student to with and the administration to resolve the problem at management level.”. (MAI-S).

The response from MAI identifies social workers as intermediaries between authority figures such as professors and doctors. Social workers then, can be seen as an option for young women if they feel that they cannot talk to those in authority. MAI’s response positions social workers as intermediaries who allow students to solve their problems with greater efficiency. This was corroborated in another response:

> “I know that if a girl has a problem with register modules or issue with teachers, then they visit the social worker to solve it” (TALA-S).

Social workers, therefore, were seen to play an intermediary role when students had administrative issues or issues with others in authority.

Other responses focused on how social workers could help students with familial issues:

> “If there is a gap between a girl and her family, a social worker is the person she will go to bridge this gap. I mean, there is a professor who is a social worker here at the university, and most of the students go to her in case they need help”. (REEM-S).

This response from REEM shows how social workers could play the role of mediator between a young woman and her family. In the example given in the response, the social worker at the university is seen as an individual who can talk to family members on behalf of young women. Social workers were also seen by the participants to play a mediator role between students who had issues between themselves:

> "A social worker (is a person who) mediates between students who have failed to solve their issues between themselves". (MAI-S).

Another participant stated that social workers could help married students with relationship issues:

> "Social worker helps some of the married students to solve their marriage problems, especially when the students find that the problems are affecting their academic performance". (REEM-S).

Many of the responses that defined the role of social workers as mediators made reference of issues that occur within the academic context, including assisting with issues between students, family members, and married couples. This shows that generally, the role of social workers was understood to have a strong relation to academic issues, but also involve helping with interpersonal and familial issues. As has already been expressed in some of the responses above,

social workers were also characterised as problem solvers:

> “Social workers help you solve any social or economic family problems such as helping family members to settle misunderstandings in their social or economic life” (NORA-S).

In the response from NORA, social workers were identified as specifically helping individuals solve familial or economic issues. The understanding of social workers as helping with familial issues was particularly well-represented in the data by the students, with TALA also stating, “I think they can help in family issues”. This reflects trends in the responses to understanding the role of social workers in relation to their abilities to engage with social problems. Where the responses so far have focused on individuals, there were other respondents who noted the ability of social workers to engage collectively with communities and play a role in wider society. LULU stated that a social worker is a “social specialist for all groups of the society”. NORA also placed an emphasis on the role of social workers beyond helping students, describing a social worker as “a person who participates in the community by helping to expertly resolve various issues facing the community and are within the scope of social work”. Earlier excerpts from TALA and REEM also emphasise the role social workers play in problem solving on the individual level “they help individual people overcome problems” (REEM-S) and “they [students] visit the social worker to solve it” (TALA-S).

The responses do not make specific indication to how social workers help students with cybercrime related issues, despite the fact that the participant responses do demonstrate an awareness of how social workers can assist individuals in a range of problems. Fewer participants cited the role social workers played in wider society, though some did mention the role of social workers in communities and how they were available to help everyone in society. Generally speaking, social workers were seen to play a particularly important role in educational, familial, and financial issues. Social workers were most likely to be seen as social mediators and problem solvers, rather than just providing counselling to students. The student participants gave specific examples of different ways in which social workers fulfilled their role with students and other individuals, yet none of the responses specifically singled out support with cybercrime related issues.

4.5. Research Question Two: Are there any areas where this role could be improved?

Table 4.4 provides an overview of the main themes and subthemes identified in relation to the second question. This question sought to explore specific areas where the role of social workers could be improved. This section uses responses from both student and social worker participants, and outlines concerns from both social worker and student participants, as well as proposed solutions. The suffixes ‘S’ and ‘SW’ are attached to the participant pseudonyms in Table 4.4 to indicate whether they are a student or social worker participant.

Table 0.4 Themes and subthemes related to the second research question

Main Theme	Subtheme	Description
Difficulties faced by social workers	Students disinterested in seeking out social workers/unaware of their role	Students may feel that cybercrime will not happen to them, or are unaware social workers are there to help (MALAK-SW) General disinterest in social workers/lack of understanding of their role (MAHA-SW, JASMINE-SW) Preference for the help of security services in dealing with cybercrime (MAHA-SW) Lack of close interaction between students and social workers (LAMA-SW, MAI-S) Need for greater public awareness of the role of social workers in Saudi Arabia (SHAZA-SW, SAHAR-S, RAWAN-S)
	Lack of specialist/professional social work training	Issues with confidentiality and trust between social workers and students (SARA-S, RAWAN-S, ALAA-SW) Greater cybercrime research output needed to enhance understanding of cybercrime (JOLEEN-SW) Need for specialist training for social workers (AMAL-SW, SHAZA-SW, DALAL-SW)

		Social workers can raise awareness of cybercrime and inform young women of their legal rights (MAHA-SW, NOOR-SW, MALAK-SW, SHAZA-SW)
	Administrative and legislative barriers	Lack of clear cybercrime policy (DUHA-SW, MAHA-SW) Institutional bureaucracy (e.g., universities, government ministries) impeding the efficiency of tackling cybercrime (DALAL-SW, MAHA-SW, JASMINE-S, AMAL-SW) Need for greater integration of social workers with authorities such as the police, government, and security services for better co-operation when dealing with cybercrime (NOOR-SW, RADWA-SW, AMAL-SW, DALAL-SW)
Fears of young women	Difficulty coming forwards with cybercrime experiences	Concerns about being blamed/shamed by authorities (e.g., police, social workers, professors) for becoming a victim of cybercrime (ALAA-SW, RAWAN-S, SARA-S) Concerns about repercussions from telling parents or other family members about cybercrime (LAMA-S, LANA-S, ALAA-SW, SHAZA-SW, MAI-S, MONA-SW)

	Increased familial support for young women going through cybercrime (DUHA-SW, RAWAN-S) Social workers working as intermediaries between young female victims and their families/authorities (SHAZA-SW, RAWAN-S)

The results outlined in Table 4.4 above indicate that there were several areas for improvement in the role of social workers in general, and specifically in tackling cybercrime. The difficulties faced by social workers in effectively performing their role in addressing cybercrime was influenced by various factors, including the reluctance of young women in coming forwards. This was exacerbated by fears of confidentiality agreements being broken, worries that social workers could not protect them, and most of all, fears of shame or repercussions for having become victims of cybercrime. These findings are especially relevant to the present study, as they outline some of the key limitations to the role of female social workers in tackling cybercrime.

4.5.1 Difficulties Faced by Social Workers

I. Student and Societal Disinterest/Lack of Awareness

The results showed that social workers faced numerous challenges in doing their work efficiently and effectively. Repeated across the

responses are a concern that the role of social workers was not well understood by students or by wider society. This supports the findings from the previous section, where none of the student participants referred to of social workers specifically tackling cybercrime. MALAK/SW attributed this to two things: first, students may believe that they will not fall victim to cybercrime, and second, they do not know that social workers might be able can help:

> "It is possible that the girl has seen the contact numbers but may be under the impression that she is not going to face any of the cybercrimes. These are a large number of girls. They feel like they will not face such incidents, so they do not save the number. When she faces the problem, she does not realize that we are here to help her through the tough times" (MALAK-SW)

MAHA was likewise concerned that other authorities such as security services are often the first choice for young women, rather than social specialists such as social workers:

> "In principle, she (female student) reports to the concerned authorities in case of blackmail for photos, repute, or defamation or something like that, for example. I think she might resort to the social specialist, but in principle certainly she resorts to the security department because its authority is stronger, I mean our intervention is just a warning, or clarification, but for protection, it is possible to guide her to the security department"

(MAHA-SW)

The responses from MALAK and MAHA highlight some of the barriers facing social workers in Saudi Arabia. JASMINE also highlighted a societal lack of awareness of the social worker role:

> "The case of my little sister friend, I told you about, it was difficult because they are from the south of Saudi Arabia, uneducated, and completely uninformed about our role as social workers. They cannot support us to play our role generally and in relation to cybercrime in particular" (JASMINE-S)

JASMINE further elaborated on the excerpt above stating, "the community does not know anything about our specialisation, and they do not believe in it". These three responses indicate an underlying feeling of lack of awareness of the role of social workers, particularly in relation to their ability to assist with cybercrime. For MAHA, this was due to the fact that the security services were seen as an option with more authority and power to tackle cybercrime, when compared with social workers. MAHA-SW also stated that "there is general of lack of interest (in social workers) by (female) students", indicating that students may not seek out the help of social workers due to disinterest. JASMINE-S made links to regional differences, indicating that individuals in the south of Saudi Arabia may be less educated and 'completely uninformed' about the role of social workers. JASMINE stated that this lack of awareness made it difficult for social workers to

effectively complete their role. Later on in the discussion section there will be a discussion on how the stereotypes and assumptions of the female students held by social workers limit the effectiveness of their work.

The student participants had a different explanation, and possible reasons for their lack of interaction with social workers. LAMA indicated that there was little interaction between social workers and students unless the social worker was sought out:

> "I feel that the connection between the student and the social worker is very limited unless the student went and spoke to the social worker" (LAMA-S)

The quotation above suggests that social workers did not interact closely with the students, unless they were sought out. This indicates that social workers were not proactive. This limited connection was further demonstrated by the social workers' absenteeism as one of the study participants explained, "their (social workers') offices are always empty" (MAI-S). This further suggests that social workers may not be proactive in their role, as they were not in their offices to attend to the needs of students. Thus, this set of responses show how for some of the student participants, social workers did not appear to be an effective solution to their difficulties. Numerous studies on the social work sector in Saudi Arabia have pointed out that social work in educational settings is one area where social workers lack specialist

skills (Alessa et al., 2021; Sawmar and Mohammad, 2019). The responses from the students indicate that social workers in educational settings are not always available, and, in addition to this, do not take a proactive role in letting students know that they are able to help with any troubles they may face. This could be a potential reason as to why the student participants did not have a unified definition of the role of social workers.

The next section will discuss in greater detail how these roles could be improved with suggestions from the participants. The social worker and student participants both had ideas of how some of the difficulties could be addressed. Particularly, the participants agreed that there needed to be an increased level of public awareness of the role of social workers. SHAZA believed that this could be achieved through a more active role in communities:

> "I suggest that social workers can improve their role and become more active in communities if they educate the community about it through social media and other public sensitisation campaigns" (SHAZA-SW)

SHAZA's response contributes to the concerns expressed by MAI and LAMA that social workers do not take a proactive role. SHAZA believes that the role of social workers can be enhanced through community engagement and education. RAWAN similarly felt that improving societal understanding of the social worker role lay with social workers

themselves:

> “First thing, the social worker must introduce herself to society with her role in the university and explain she can help with this problem (cybercrime)” (RAWAN-S)

Student participants were more likely than social worker participants to suggest that social workers themselves need to take on a more active role (RAWAN, MAI, LAMA). SHAZA was one social worker exception In addition to educating the public about the role of social workers, another student participant emphasised the importance of raising awareness of social worker on a wider societal level:

> “I hope there will be more societal awareness of the role of a social worker because the more aware of this role society is, the easier and closer social workers’ work becomes to the people, including the students” (SAHAR-S)

In the excerpts above, RAWAN-S and SAHAR-S both state that increased societal awareness of the role of social workers will contribute to increased awareness of the abilities of social workers, trickling down to students in the university context. In another excerpt, however, RAWAN-S touched on issues of the professional reputation of social workers as a barrier to community involvement:

> “She (social worker) can improve her role in community by providing services in a professional way that improves her reputation. This means building professional trust between

herself and victims of cybercrime" (RAWAN-S)

RAWAN's response implies that the social worker role may not be elevated in the community, due to the need to build professional trust between social workers and cybercrime victims. . Thus, the excerpt suggests that social workers lack professional trust, impacting their reputation in the community, and thus reducing the possibility that individuals will seek out their services for issues such as cybercrime.

This is discussed in greater detail in the following section. These results have explored how lack of understanding/interest in the social worker role has been cultivated in Saudi Arabia, as well as the student perception that social workers were not engaged, reliable, or available to assist with their needs. Some of the student suggestions to address these issues were also explored. The next section explores lack of specialist/professional training as a potential reason for this.

II. Lack of Specialist/Professional Training

Both the social worker and the student participants were particularly concerned about the lack of specialist training and professionalism in social work. Several students and one social worker participant indicated that social workers had broken their confidentiality agreement with students, causing distrust.

> "I (student) might need someone's help with minimal losses and a high degree of confidentiality, which I think lacks in our social workers because they keep disclosing students' intimate

problems to other people among themselves, lecturers and even fellow students" (SARA-S)

The response from SARA indicates that social workers do not have a high level of understanding of confidentiality, stating that students' problems have been shared with multiple individuals, including other social workers, lecturers, and other students. Issues with the confidentiality of social workers was further stated by RAWAN:

> "I heard that there was a girl with a problem…, we were in face-to-face education when the social workers spoke out about this problem, and things like that happened, so the young women became afraid to go to them... Some young women are afraid to talk to anyone, so she stays silent about it. . . . In fright of her reputation, afraid that
>
> she is the one to be blamed in the end" (RAWAN-S).

Both SARA and RAWAN's responses highlight the fears of young women in coming forwards with their experiences due to the information being shared with third parties without their consent. This again indicates the prevalence of the problem of confidentiality in the social work sector in Saudi Arabia.

RAWAN and SARA's responses indicate that students may be hesitant to go to social workers for fear that confidentiality will not be respected, and that social workers will pass on their sensitive information to third parties, potentially harming their reputation. A social worker participant, ALAA, felt that it may be due to feelings of

‘embarrassment’ experienced by the female students:

> “I also told you that they are ashamed and embarrassed, and it does not come to her mind to ask for help in these issues to avoid embarrassment” (ALAA-SW)

The responses from the participants reveal that social workers may not be sought out due to issues with confidentiality, or feelings of shame and embarrassment. The responses from RAWAN and SARA indicate that there may be a deficiency in the professional training of social workers, as they both cite incidents where confidentiality was not maintained, impacting the professional reputation of social workers. This therefore identifies the professional competencies of social workers as an area that needs improvement. Social worker participants in particular had a number of suggestions as to how they could improve their professional skills. Conducting research was proposed as a strategy that could enable social workers to understand cybercriminals’ psychology, thereby applying remedies that would curb cybercrime faced by Saudi women. This strategy was suggested as follows:

> “As for the social workers, we use the aid of faculty members to do studies that show the results and appropriate treatment methods […] research of this nature needs to be encouraged as it put social workers in a better position to deal with this problem (cybercrime), thereby becoming more relevant in the

national system for tackling it" (JOLEEN-SW).

The above narrative illustrates how conducting research to understand the psychology of cybercriminals could enhance the involvement of social workers in the system for tackling cybercrime. Other recommendations for improving the skills of social workers in Saudi Arabia are listed under the 'Recommendations' subsection in Chapter 6. Thus, understanding psychological theory behind cybercrime will put social workers in a better position to deal with it. In addition to conducting research, another study participant proposed enlightening social workers about how to deal with cybercrime:

> "We need specialists to raise awareness campaigns, in courses, introductory sessions that they enlighten us about what things we can do... We might even be subjected to a cybercrime without us knowing. So, we need to be enlightened about it to be aware of how we can contribute to handling it or its victims. This will facilitate the role we play in controlling this crime in our university and kingdom at large" (AMAL-SW).

Through the use of the term 'we need specialists', AMAL's response indicates that social workers do not currently have the tools to address cybercrime and respond to victims of cybercrime. AMAL's response indicates a gap in social worker knowledge to effectively manage cybercrime. This is corroborated by two other social worker participants, SHAZA and DALAL:

> “We do not know much about this issue, so we as specialists, need training courses about it and its different forms. We took training courses at the Student Affairs Centre on how to deal with cases of harassment and the methods used but we did not go into the details of other forms of cybercrime and how they can be dealt with because it is a new issue” (SHAZA-SW)

> “Organising intensive training courses for us (social workers) on what is emerging in the society, especially about cybercrimes against girls, and how we can deal with the problem professionally can enable us participate in and even improve our country’s formal system for curbing this crime” (DALAL-SW)

SHAZA and DALAL both feel that they need to specialist training to keep up with emerging issues such as cybercrime. This shows how the social worker participants felt that they did not currently have the best professional tools to deal with cybercrime. In turn, this was hindering their abilities to be part of the formal system for dealing with cybercrime. These admissions from the social worker participants themselves could explain why some of the student participants felt that social workers were not effective. As has been demonstrated in the dataset, cybercrime occurs on several major social media platforms (Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram), indicating that cybercriminals have adapted well to the social media environment in Saudi Arabia. Thus, social workers will need to be kept up to date with the latest cybercrime methods to be better involved in the

management of cybercrime.

The participants felt that with a better knowledge of cybercrime, social workers would be able to play a better role in raising awareness and informing young women of their legal rights. The below response from DUHA places emphasis on how social workers can encourage young women to be mindful of their online behaviours, particularly on social media:

> "As social workers we have a role to help community members prevent problems. [...]. Young women should be informed that it is not wise to believe what people they meet on social media and those who contact them on theseplatforms and are not known tell them. [...]. If we as social workers do not help our young women on this issue, how else are we relevant to them" (DUHA)

In DUHA's view, social workers should play the role of cybercrime educators by making sure young women are aware of how to stay safe online. However, invertedly, DUHA is also implying that young women are unaware of these fundamental aspects of not trusting strangers online. As was identified in the accounts provided by the student participants and some of the social worker participants, cybercrime such as blackmail often occurred as the result of the breakdown of a trusted relationship (e.g., an intimate partner). Thus, this again demonstrates the limitations of social worker understanding of the

complexity and sophistication of cybercrime in the social media age. NOOR takes this further, indicating that young women can take better advantage of cybercrime legal protection if they feel more confident to come forwards and less ashamed:

> "Social workers should provide young women with information that changes their attitude and aligns it with the changes in the law, especially those that allow them to make their voice and opinion heard. Young women should not feel ashamed when they experience cybercrime but should make use of these changes. Even if cybercrime is due to mistakes she has made, she must confront it by expressing it freely and honestly so that a solution can be provided. Now, the laws serve young women more, and young women need to be informed about so that they are more expressive about cybercrime than before" (NOOR-SW)

Like DUHA, NOOR believes that the role of the social worker is one of education. NOOR feels that if social workers make young women aware of their legal protections, they will feel more empowered to come forwards and express their cybercrime experiences. However,

NOOR's response again implies that young women are perceived as at fault for not coming forwards, In spite of the new legal protections they are afforded. This therefore suggests that stricter legal protections are not necessarily encouraging young women to speak up about their experiences of cybercrime. NOOR's response is another

example of how social workers were invertedly critical of young women not taking agency and utilising new legal protections. NOOR also suggests that women should speak up even if cybercrime was due to ‘mistakes’ she had made, again highlighting the need for an ethical code of conduct in the Saudi Arabian social work system. The reasoning for this is that through this statement, NOOR is making an association between cybercrime and ‘mistakes’ made by young women, thus placing the blame with them rather than with the criminals. This an ethical breach, as young women are assumed to be responsible for experiencing cybercrime. Other results showed that fears of blame were a key reason for not coming forwards.

A similar sentiment was expressed by MAHA:

> “We need to raise awareness of cybercrime; most young women do not feel that they have the right to complain about the criminal, she sees that she is guilty sometimes with her confidence and ignorance in this topic. We have to play our role in this case by informing young women that they have the right to report any crime against them, including cybercrime to relevant authorities” (MAHA-SW)

Like NOOR-SW, MAHA-SW believes that social workers can play a role in helping young women understand that they can speak up and stand up against cybercrime without feeling ‘guilt’. Interestingly, MAHA-SW makes remark of the ‘confidence’ and ‘ignorance’ of young women when it comes to cybercrime. This draws parallels to the

response from MALAK-SW suggesting that young women do not believe they will become cybercrime victims, and that additionally, they hold the responsibility for their cybercrime experiences. In effect, MAHA- SW is engaging in victim blaming behaviours. In following the trend from the social worker participant responses, SHAZA-SW also believed that social workers could best improve their role by raising the awareness of young women to take advantage of new legal changes:

> "Now that the law has been changed to empower women to enjoy their rights, there is a way for girls to defend their right to justice by filing a lawsuit against cybercrime perpetrators. I feel society has developed and everything has developed. Use of electronics and online platforms is everywhere, but no one should enjoy this progress at the expense of others. As social workers, we can play our role better by encouraging girls whose rights are violated by cybercrime perpetrators to take legal action against them" (SHAZA-SW)

Thus, several of the social worker participants felt that they could improve their role by making young women aware of the rights and protections they have when they are exposed to cybercrime. However, they recognised the numerous administrative and legislative barriers faced by cybercrime victims and social workers dealing with cases.

These responses from the social workers highlight the problem of a failure to recognise the cultural challenges being faced by the young

female participants, as well as a tendency to focus on legal action rather than empathise with the emotional and psychological challenges brought about by cybercrime experiences. This again indicates the need for robust professional standards to ensure that social workers are able to develop relationships founded on core social work principles such as empathy with the target groups they work with.

Again, this is one area where generational differences could come into play, as well as cultural stereotype theory. The responses also raised questions in differences between the understanding of female agency between the student participants and the social worker participants. Returning back to the definitions of cybercrime provided by both the student and the social worker participants, it appeared evident that the social workers provided more generalised responses, whereas the student participants were more specific in their descriptions of the psychological harm inflicting by interpersonal cybercrimes such as cyber bullying, blackmail, and defamation. The social worker participant quotes featured above seem to indicate that young women in the current cultural landscape of Saudi Arabia should stop being silent due to the greater legal protections they now have. However, this reflects a limited capacity for empathy with the cultural reality of young women, as the results have indicated that despite the legal protections, sociocultural fears and pressures are still deeply embedded in Saudi Arabian culture.

Some of the barriers faced by social workers in delivering effective

services are elaborated upon in the next section.

III. Administrative and Legislative Barriers

DUHA and MAHA from the social workers participants group noted that the lack of a specific cybercrime policy was a key barrier to social workers' role in tackling cybercrime:

> "The policy is basically not clear, or it is possible that there is generalization in it. I do not know its goals, but I notice the continuous change in Saudi Arabia. You know I (have) never seen the social policy written even when I was a student in Bachelor or master. I wish there is something written anyone can see them and analyse them" (DUHA-SW)

> "The general social policy is concerned with helping the lowest income groups, but it ignores the role of the social worker to achieve a better quality of life for all groups of the society. I have not come across where it talks about how cybercrime can be tackled" (MAHA-SW)

Both of above the participants noted a lack of clear policy that addresses cybercrime. MAHA noted how although social policy is geared towards helping the lowest income groups, there is no reference of the role social workers play in achieving a better quality of life for all members of society, regardless of income. MAHA and DUHA both stated that they have not seen specific details on cybercrime in policy. DUHA recognises the extent of changes being

made in Saudi Arabia, however, identifies that this has not been accompanied by clear and accessible policy changes. Administrative and bureaucratic inefficiencies were cited by many social worker participants as a hindrance to their efficiency in tackling cybercrime, as well as a lack of integration of social workers with other authorities such as the security services, police, and government. These responses focused on a lack of integration of social workers into formal services:

> "Following the university in everything (slow speed of dealing with cybercrime), we cannot skip the university to communicate with other authorities and ministries, this sometimes hinders the speed of applying the appropriate procedures" (DALAL-SW)

As can be seen from the above extract from DALAL, the necessity to follow 'slow' university procedures, and the inability to go directly to authorities and ministries with cybercrime experiences was a barrier to dealing with cybercrime in an effective way. The bureaucratic nature of this reporting procedure in government was also articulated by MAHA "there are numerous points of weakness in government working protocol and bureaucracy through which solutions to cybercrime are provided". AMAL was another one of the social worker participants along with DALAL and MAHA who felt that there was a lack of co-operation between social workers and authorities:

> "We lack interconnection between the ministries, institutions,

> and civil institutions. This is a major problem. In other countries, private and civil institutions have a social responsibility and contribute programs and activities" (AMAL-SW)

AMAL compares the situation in Saudi Arabia to other countries, indicating that the lack of interconnectedness in Saudi Arabia was making it difficult to facilitate the handling of cybercrime, suggesting that this was due to a lack of 'social responsibility', as well as a lack of engagement in tackling the issue. One of the student participants, JASMINE, suggested that a significant barrier for young women was the guardianship system:

> "They (authorities) said, "but the girl is under 18 and we cannot do anything for her except in the presence of her family and their approval, and I understood that her family could harm her, and she was afraid of them." They said we can't do anything except when she comes with her father" (JASMINE-SW)

In the excerpt above, JASMINE notes that the guardianship system in Saudi Arabia can impede the ability of young female victims to get help. Under the guardianship system, the authorities cannot help young women under the age of 18 without family approval. The example from JASMINE illustrates some of the challenges faced by young women under the guardianship system, as they are unable to address any concerns without the presence of a guardian, limiting their autonomy and self-determination to take action. This shows how

legislative barriers such as the guardianship system can discourage young women from coming forward to authority figures. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Two social worker participants, NOOR and MALAK, believed that greater cooperation between social workers and young women, as well as the authorities, could encourage higher levels of awareness and reportage of cybercrime:

> "The role of a social worker is to prepare young women who fall victim to cybercrime to be aware of how they can report it to claim their rights, and to encourage them to share their ordeal with social workers who can guarantee the girls' right to self-determination, confidentiality, and acceptance" (NOOR-SW).

> "Social workers promote cooperation between them, government social service and social policy planners and implementers to design and execute plans for raising the awareness of the community about cybercrime in order to generate community momentum for fighting cybercrime" (MALAK-SW).

Other social worker participants had other suggestions as to how social workers could overcome administrative and legislative weaknesses:

> "Appointment of more female social workers in government can enhance their role in fighting cybercrime. This will particularly

> work when more women social workers are appointed in the research centre at the Ministry of Interior so that they can serve as a link between society and the government to facilitate the formulation and implementation of new social policies on cybercrime" (NOOR-SW).

In the above quote, NOOR believes that the best way to increase the influence of social workers in tackling cybercrime is through greater involvement in government, particularly, through the development of policy on cybercrime with the Ministry of Interior. NOOR's response demonstrates the tendency for the social worker participants to feel that the profession is not well-represented at the highest professional levels. However, the response fails to recognise the need for social work specific regulations and professional standards to more effectively handle cybercrime.

> "I think having more female social workers in the police force will increase their embedment in the system for preventing and controlling cybercrime. if more female social workers are hired into the police and security department, they will improve the handling of young women who face cybercrime and are afraid of opening up because of fearing for their reputation. Having more female social workers will improve the police's understanding of how to handle these young women in the security department as it is hospitals where social workers handle the psychosocial aspects of cybercrime causes professionally using preventive,

rehabilitative and restorative methods" (RADWA-SW).

In a similar way to NOOR, RADWA likewise believes that social workers need to become more involved in the police force. Given the student participants expressed fears of coming forwards to authority figures, RADWA's response again suggests that the social worker participants may not be sufficiently aware of the cultural challenges facing young women. Many of the student participants expressed that their fears began with those close to them, such as family members, so it is unlikely that they would feel safe discussing their issues with third parties such as the police.

NOOR additionally felt that weaknesses in the social work profession could be mitigated by the creation of a union for social workers:

> "If there is a body such as a union for social workers, it will be easier for us to cooperate and research on important and talked-about issues in society. An agency that includes all social workers and is affiliated with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs will strengthen their ability to participate more effectively in the prevention and control of cybercrime, and in rehabilitating its victims" (NOOR-SW).

Thus, the excerpts featured in this section show how social workers can face legislative and administrative barriers in delivering effective cybercrime services. The participants identified a lack of clear cybercrime policy, slow bureaucratic processes, and a lack of

interconnectedness between social workers and authorities and institutions as some of the main areas that needed to be improved. Participants suggested that greater co-operation between relevant authorities in cybercrime was one of the potential ways in which social workers could improve their involvement in cybercrime, as well as the creation of a social workers union. However, none of the participants recognised the professional limitations in the current social work system in Saudi Arabia, and failed to demonstrate awareness of the needs of the young women that they work with, who expressed fears around communicating their experiences to authority figures.

As has been mentioned before, Saudi Arabia is a high-power distance culture (Singh and Alshammari, 2021), characterised by respect and deference to elders and authority figures. Although the statistics have shown that this has reduced since 2017, power distance still remains relatively close to the extreme end of the scale in Saudi Arabia. This means that young women may find it particularly difficult to speak to authority figures. As traditional sociocultural norms expect women to embody principles of deference and submission, young women are likely to have internalised these ideas, and therefore been led to the conclusion that staying silent is a better option than coming forwards. Cultural stereotype theory does not just refer to stereotypes held about others, but also self-categorisation (Langenhove and Harré, 1994). Feelings of shame can be brought about by the violation of cultural norms, and this therefore discourages young women from coming

forwards. This could be the result of self-categorisation that is influence by dominant cultural stereotypes of Saudi Arabian women. In addition to this, due to the high-power distance, young women may additionally feel as if they cannot take an agentic role as they are expected to defer and respect authority figures. The stereotypes of Saudi Arabian women are complex (Omair, 2017), however, it appears that the social worker participants did not take these factors into consideration when providing their potential solutions.

4.5.2 Fears of Young Women

The most dominant theme across all participants was the feelings of fear, shame, and embarrassment that prevented young women from coming forwards with their cybercrime experiences. This was especially evident when it came to having to share cybercrime experiences with authority figures, as expressed by SARA:

> "If I face this problem (cybercrime), I will find it difficult to go to the police because of fear of the shame might be expose to" (SARA-S).

Feelings of 'shame' and 'embarrassment' were particularly common in the dataset:

> "Young women also like to be secretive instead of getting ashamed after revealing the cyber harassment, they rather only cry and stay silent" (ALAA-SW).

The examples from SARA and ALAA show how feelings of shame

prevent young women from getting help, as they may be exposed to further feelings of shame after the damage done by the crime itself. One of the student participants felt she could not report her experience to social workers because they could not protect her:

> "To be honest, I feared they (social workers) might not be able to protect me" (LAMA- S)

Both SARA and LAMA note how they feel that the authorities in place to handle cybercrime, the police and social workers, would either 'shame' them, or would not be able to protect them. This indicated a feeling of distrust in the ability of authority figures to help in the case of cybercrime. The feeling expressed by LAMA of not being protected is possibly linked to the confidentiality issues discussed in the previous section of this chapter. The student and social worker participants were more concerned about the repercussions from family members than authority figures such as the police or professors upon finding out about cybercrime:

> "Young women always avoid being judged by their parents, because they are afraid of their reaction" (SHAZA-SW)

SHAZA indicates that young women may remain silent out of fear for being 'judged' by their parents, as well as their subsequent reaction. This is supported by ALAA:

> "They (the girls) are afraid of their parents. They are afraid because they might get punished or face any penalty, which

may lead to them running away from home" (ALAA-SW)

Both social workers SHAZA and ALAA discussion girls being 'afraid' of their parents punishing them in some way. These responses suggest that out of this fear, young women may not share cybercrime experiences with their parents. Additionally, they were also afraid of telling others for fears of the information getting back to their family members. MAI noted that this may be exacerbated if the family are particularly strict:

> "I don't usually tell my father because he is uptight, and he could get my phone or cut off the WIFI" (MAI-S).

In MAI's statement, rather than offering support, her father takes away her phone or cuts off the Wi-Fi to resolve the problem. This was further supported by MAHA:

> "Strict parental control makes a girl hide that she is experiencing cybercrime, such as blackmail or something, which encourages it to continue happening to her" (MAHA- SW)

Strict parental control appeared to contribute to a weakened bond between young women and their family members, thus increasing the possibility that they may not choose to share their experiences with them and get support. In experiencing cybercrime, young Saudi women may have violated certain sociocultural norms (e.g., showing one's face), thus leading to feelings of shame. As has been expressed by multiple participants, this can be enhanced in the familial context.

Other participants also cited of how lack of communication between young women and their parents could contribute to recurring cybercrime experiences:

> "When (female students) face cybercrime, they don't communicate it to their parents to be helped because they fear them, they do not freely communicate their challenges to their families, which causes these challenges to recur to them" (DUHA-SW)

DUHA elaborated further on this, making comment of how the male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia may be making it more difficult for young women to communicate, corroborating the statement from MAI above:

> "The impact of the mother is absent and contributes to the occurrence of different types of this crime… Mothers do not have control over their daughters. The control lies with fathers and brothers who, tend to be too strict for the young women to
>
> communicate freely with. So, when young women are exposed to social media blackmail, they don't communicate it, which encourages this blackmail" (DUHA-SW)

DUHA's statement indicates that the power distance in the relationship between young women and male authority figures in the family makes it more difficult for them to come forwards with their experiences.

DUHA notes that the male guardianship system has led to the absence of the mother figure, who young women may find it easier to communicate with. TALA also made links to gender, discussing how families often take the side of the perpetrator, especially when it is a young man:

> "Families take the side of the opponent or perpetrator of the crime, especially when it concerns honour, or if there is a young man and a relationship, for sure, she will not say I was cheated or defrauded. If something happened to me, I would tell my close friends because they understand me and they know who I am, but I will not tell my parents because they will not understand that it is the boy in the wrong" (TALA-S)

TALA's response indicates that when the honour of the family is perceived to be at on the line, they may take the side of the perpetrator and blame their daughter instead. TALA's response again shows how the power dynamic between men and women in Saudi Arabia has also contributed to silence among young women experiencing cybercrime. TALA elaborated on this further, noting that the burden of young female victims could extend to wider society:

> "Even if someone... wronged her, she will have to bear the result. Like for example, if someone harassed a girl (online), she would bear the responsibility that she trusted him, and society will say that she is a traitor or a criminal. The real criminals use

this as a chance to blackmail the young women to extort money from them" (TALA-S).

For LULU, this wider societal blame had stronger psychological impacts than the actual crime itself:

> "This (social blame) will affect her psychology even more than what (the cybercrime) she has experienced, she might hear a blame, while she has enough for her, as well as some of the responses of the families who are conservative, strict or not communicating with their own children" (LULU-S).

These excerpts above indicate that both student and social worker participants were acutely aware of how fears in young women of being shamed and blamed for cybercrime, especially by family members, was preventing them from coming forwards with cybercrime experiences to social workers. Both sets of participants had several ideas of how social workers could improve on this situation and better assist young female victims of cybercrime:

> "I mean, they (social workers) play a role of explaining and clarifying to parents how their daughters fall into cybercrime, and they make the family aware that young women are victims, but not the cause of the problem as parents tend to perceive it" (RAWAN-S).

The statement above from RAWAN indicates that social workers can play an intermediary role between young female victims of cybercrime

and their parents by explaining how cybercrime happens, and by explaining that their daughters are victims of cybercrime, and not the cause of it. By operating in the mediation role, social workers can reduce the discomfort experienced by young women and ensure that they are understood by their family members. JASMINE stressed that this needs to be done with confidentiality, allowing victims to open up:

> "The main role of social workers is to provide care to the cybercrime victim while respecting necessary confidentiality. Playing this role makes it easier for the victim to open up about the cybercrime she is facing, which is a big breakthrough its containment; for a revealed problem becomes halfway solved" (JASMINE-S).

SARA had a simpler suggestion as to how social workers could help young female victims of cybercrime:

> "You can help a cybercrime victim by hearing her out. Hearing a person out encourages her to reveal details that can help track down the perpetrators. It is better than leaving the victims to tussle it out on their own" (SARA-S).

By listening to the experiences of cybercrime victims, social workers might be able to find out crucial details that can help them track down and prosecute perpetrators. The student participants quoted above, RAWAN, JASMINE, and SARA, all place a strong emphasis on trustworthy communication between students and social workers, indicating that this may be something that is currently lacking in their

relationships with social workers. Social worker participant SHAZA also echoed this sentiment:

> "A social worker can explain the situation of a girl who has been exposed to victim to her parents, with the girl's approval, to make them understand that she is not the at fault, but she is just the victim. A social worker can play this role for mostly young women who are so afraid of their parents that communication becomes very weak. As a specialist, a social worker can mediate between the two parties to combine efforts and fight the perpetrators of this crime" (SHAZA-SW).

Another social worker participant, MONA, stressed that not all families are unsupportive:

> "If it is a major thing (such as exposure to cybercrime) she will fear the family to shout at her, there is no understanding in some families, Riyadh is a sea of different classes and communities, coming from outside or from it, so we find some families do understand and others do not" (MONA-SW)

The results of this section have shown that fear in young women was one of the most significant barriers to tackling cybercrime in Saudi Arabia. Many of these fears prevented social workers from effectively tackling cybercrime, for the following reasons. First, several student participants noted that they did not trust social workers to maintain confidentiality, or they feared that social workers would communicate

their experiences to their family. Second, fears of being shamed/blamed by wider society for the crime prevented young women from communicating their experiences of cybercrime to anybody at all. The social worker participants expressed concern over the inability of young women to talk to their families, especially in the cases of strict households. Student and social worker participants both felt that an effective way to manage this situation was to build effective communication and trust between social workers and young women, allowing them to express themselves safely and without fear of their confidential information being revealed to third parties, particularly family members.

The majority of the participants also discussed the societal restrictions on women in Saudi Arabia, yet there were some differences between the responses from the social worker participants and the student participants. The responses from the student participants placed a strong emphasis on the societal bias towards young men in Saudi Arabia, whereas many of the social worker participant responses focused on the changing nature of Saudi Arabian society and restrictions placed on women. This indicates the influence societal restrictions on women have in wider Saudi Arabian society, and how these restrictions have made women especially vulnerable. For several of the student participants, a core part of the problem was the societal bias towards men, often at the expense of young women:

> “Certainly, I mean, for example, girls are subjected to extortion

more than boys. Young men may be subjected to extortion, but girls are more because they fear for their reputation and boys know how take care of themselves. Not like girls, they need help. For example, if I am blackmailed, I am afraid to go to the police by myself, while the boys are not" (MAI-S)

MAI states in the above excerpt that "boys know how to take care of themselves", making them able to have greater levels of independence and confidence in handling difficult situations. This is also an assumption and stereotype that may limit the ability to work effectively work with others. As part of this stereotype, young women believe that they have lesser autonomy than young men, potentially impacting their ability to come forwards and handle any situations that arise. For MAI-S, this is due to the fact that young women are afraid of their reputations becoming damaged, which is less of a concern for young men. RAHAF-S mentioned that men did not have to deal with societal restrictions at all:

"I do not think that there are restrictions on men as well" (RAHAF-S)

When discussing the differences between the treatment of men and women, many participants noted that men seldom had to take responsibility for their actions or receive blame in the same way that women did:

"Even the boys, they use the fact that society never blames them even if he does immoral behaviours like engaging in social

media blackmail, extortion or harassing a girl. Ever heard of a boy who was slandered? Of course not, but young women face slanderers, bullying and even stalking via social media, and those putting the young women through all this are not blamed. Instead, the blame goes to the girls" (LAMA- S)

"Our society shows a woman's mistake is a big thing, but a man has no mistake. We mainly brought up this principle, a man is normal if he does a mistake with a girl as he will grow up and gets mature, with God willing, but just a mistake by a girl will end her" (RAWAN-S)

"Honestly, females are affected more because the common convention in society is "a man carries his shame!" (NADA-SW)

"Of course, as girls feel afraid and ashamed, even if she is the victim and did nothing wrong, as what is known, Men Carry Faults, and this is it, this is the society culture" (SANA-SW)

In each of the excerpts above, the participants state how women are more vulnerable to being blamed or slandered than men, due to societal conventions. LAMA-S indicates that even when young men are engaging in criminal behaviour, they are often not blamed. Several participants, including RAWAN-S, SANA-SW, and NADA-SW above, also made mention of societal norms that ensure that men are free from blame or repercussion even if they make mistakes. RAWAN-S indicated that in the case of men, making mistakes was seen as part

of the process of maturing, however, if a young women did the same, it could “end her”. NADA-SW echoes this sentiment, suggesting that men are free from taking responsibility for actions that may be seen as ‘shameful’. SANA-SW likewise states that men are able to carry their own faults, making them less vulnerable to feelings of shame. TALA-S noted that many of the restrictions were more cultural than enforced through law, and often were due to a desire to protect young women

> “Yes, women have restrictions in our Arab societies, but not usually real restrictions, I mean parents feel like they have a greater responsibility to protect their girls from others” (TALA-S)

TALA’s response suggests that parents in Saudi Arabia may feel a greater responsibility to protect young women, and this may motivate restrictions placed on young women as a form of protection. These excerpts show how the gender bias towards men in Saudi Arabian society is an issue that affects women on a daily basis, linked to gendered constructions of the role of men and women. The excerpts indicate that men are rarely blamed, and that women are disproportionately blamed. Furthermore, parents might feel that they are protecting their daughters through restrictions.

A related issue identified in the participant responses was the complications brought about by the male guardianship system, which often impeded the independence of women:

> “Without a doubt, there are social restrictions that are stronger than legal. This helps that women violate their rights. I mean, now, to give you an example, I once wanted to go to Winter Wonderland in Riyadh, but my father totally refuses to go with my friends and wait for my older sisters to come and take me. This is the simplest example” (SARA-S)

In the excerpt above, one of the student participants SARA comments how her father did not allow her to go to entertainment place in Riyadh with her friends, instead insisting that her older sisters took her. SARA implies that social customs in Saudi Arabia are sometimes stronger than legal protections. This was corroborated by other participants:

> “Even the ID card in some places asks to cover your picture, even if you do not cover or ask your guardian to agree to something. I see that there are restrictions on women that expose them more to cybercrime. I went for a while to an institution of Social Security. I am not covering my face. The person asked for my identity and when I gave him the ID, he covered my picture. With all the development in the country and you still face people like this who need rehabilitation” (LANA-S)

In this example, LANA again shows that social customs and norms are sometimes stronger than the legal changes that have been introduced in Saudi Arabia, even in government institutions such as Social Security. LANA discusses how even if you have permission from your

guardian to do certain activities, this may not be enough. For SANA, the recent changes to the male guardianship system in Saudi Arabia allowed young women to have greater independence:

> “I mean, basically after the lately decisions in many cases, for example, I do not want to live with my family, I want to live on my own, after a decision was made that guardianship and independence of a woman is government's decision, so it is possible to rent a house independent of her family, it becomes possible for her at age of 18, some of them I remember was saying that her relationship with her family was way good, but this is it, she left to live with a girlfriend in an apartment, from the area do you know what I mean?” (SANA-SW)

SANA discusses a case of a young women who stated having a good relationship with her parents, yet still decided to leave the area and live in an apartment with a friend. SANA’s response suggests that there are cases where young Saudi Arabian women are able to make independent choices, such as choosing to live alone away from the familial home. Other respondents also discussed how the male guardianship system could make it difficult for young women to come forward with problems or issues. Other participants discussed how being restricted to the home setting in accordance with social customs may have had negative impacts on women. Particularly, women may not have as much experience in dealing with the world outside the home, making them more vulnerable or less experienced:

> “Mmm, the woman will not go to complain, I mean, because she is always at home and has no experience, I mean, it is not like the young men who come out and mix with people and understand” (NORA-S)

NORA discussions how lack of ‘experience’ may be preventing women from speaking up about problems that they may be experiencing. She compares this to young men, who are more socially mobile and therefore more experienced in mixing in society with different types of people outside of the familial unit.

> “Like my sister who paid for a Twitter account that claims she could get her practical test for driver's license done without training! I mean female are more influences and believes for those things and maybe men as well. However, female always looking for the easier and faster way” (NADA-SW)

The excerpt from NADA above corroborates this, recalling a situation that happened to her sister. NADA relates her sister’s response to her belief that women are more susceptible to these kinds of scams when compared to men. Reading this response aligned with positioning theory (Moghaddam and Harré, 2010), it can be argued that some of the stereotypes associated with women (vulnerable, gullible, submissive) and men (protector, authority, respected) in the Saudi Arabian context may have influenced the interpretations of the participants. It can also be viewed as a commentary on how social

restrictions on women have led for women to seek easy and fast ways to do things such as seek a driver's license. Women have only been able to drive recently (Wheeler, 2020), and NADA sister's vulnerability may have been the result of lack of awareness of legitimate processes to obtain the driving license.

Driving license related scams were also said by MONA:

> "Many social media account users claim to issue you a Driving License, at lowest cost of course, I applied for a Driving License, it cost me 2500SR for school training and 500SR fees, while 500SR fees only for young men, this made a girl searching an easier and cheaper way to get a Driving License duped" (MONA-SW)

The excerpts from NADA and MONA indicate how women in Saudi Arabia are vulnerable to crimes related to social restrictions, in this case, the lifting of restrictions on women driving. Due to having been restricted from driving previously, women may be unaware of the process of getting a driver's license, and therefore may be less able to identify scams. DUHA mentions how young women in Saudi Arabia live a closeted life before university in two separate excerpts:

> "[…] and I tell you, the Saudi women here, she lives most of her life in a closed community, and then she goes to college and finds a new world" (DUHA-SW)

> "When they come from secondary schools with their rules, they

found out the university is a different place. More open. There will be contradiction" (DUHA-SW)

In both excerpts, DUHA notes how the transition from the sheltered upbringing and 'rules' of secondary school to university life can often have impacts on young women, who then go on to discover a 'new' more 'open' world, creating contradictory experiences. These excerpts show how the sheltered upbringing of young Saudi women can leave them more vulnerable,

as they may not have the experience or awareness of how to safely navigate wider society. Linked to this, some of the participants felt that women were particularly easy targets:

"Yes, because our culture sees women as weak, and easy to target" (LANA-S)

"It is possible for women to be subjected to more extortion because it is easy to blackmail them" (RAHAF-S)

"It is possible that the nature of a woman is shy and aspires to idealism in the matters of her life, making her an easy prey. Girls do not like facing problems" (NOOR-SW)

"[…] Our problem is that girls are afraid and sensitive. It hurts them to express themselves freely and show honesty" (NOOR-SW)

"I feel yes it could be that a girl can be blackmailed more, both are equal to the rest, and this is because of the way they have

been brought up and the society" (RAWAN- S)

"Young women are… emotional…" (MALAK-SW)

The excerpts above indicate that women are perceived as 'easier' targets. LANA indicates that this is a cultural idea, which believes women are 'weak'. This is corroborated by RAHAF, who states that women are more likely to be subjected to extortion as it's 'easy' to blackmail them. NOOR expresses a similar sentiment, suggesting that the reasoning for this is that women are 'shy' and 'idealistic', meaning that they do not wish to face up to problems. In a separate extract, NOOR suggests that young women in Saudi Arabia are fearful and sensitive, making it difficult for them to express themselves freely and with honesty. Again, many of the participants are engaging in negative stereotyping of Saudi Arabian women. These results indicate that these stereotypes are internalised, especially in regard to women being seen as 'weak' and 'fearful'. Where LANA and RAWAN, both student participants, link this to culture and society, the responses from the two social worker participants, NOOR and MALAK, instead made links to the 'nature' of women. These results indicate that the social restrictions placed on young women have created an environment that differs considerably from the one that young men grow up in, thus creating sociocultural inequalities.

In addition to this, the results also indicate some of the social workers' perceptions of younger women, which seemed to be geared towards adjectives and descriptive language that indicated 'weakness',

submissiveness, avoidance, and emotional vulnerability: ‘weak’, ‘easy to target’, ‘shy’, ‘idealistic’, ‘an easy prey’, ‘afraid and sensitive’, ‘emotional’. This contrasts with the student participants, who did make more explicit links to the impacts of society on these attitudes and indicates that some of the social workers might themselves hold stereotypical views of young women in Saudi Arabian society. Some of the adjectives and descriptive language listed above upholds the stereotypes of Saudi women as ‘submissive’ and with a lack of awareness and ability to take care of herself (Omair, 2017). This highlights the need for a feminist approach to tackling these issues in Saudi Arabian society. Young women are afforded limited autonomy and agency in part due to the male guardianship system, which has been heavily criticised by feminists from Saudi Arabia and abroad. Going against the male guardianship system can draw heavy punishment, such as fines or arrest (Weiner, 2020). Although the student participants were aware of the restrictions of the male guardianship system and articulated them with clarity, the social worker participants appeared to victim blame the student participants instead. This is perhaps indicative of the negative impact of the sociocultural changes as discussed by Hoza (2018). The social workers appeared to be of the mindset that young women were not taking an agentic role, however, in assuming this, they were failing to recognise the profound difficulties faced by the young women in adopting such a position.

Participants were particularly afraid of disclosing their experiences for fear of shame from family members or wider society. Furthermore, young women often felt that they would be blamed for what happened to them, even if they had been the victims of cybercrime. Participants noted that young women often had to bear the repercussions of what happened to them:

> "Even if someone made wronged her, she will have to bear the result. Like for example, if someone harassed a young woman, she would bear the responsibility that she trusted him, and society will not say that he is a traitor or a criminal. Of course, not in all cases, but most of them. The sanctions are not strict in the case of cybercrimes. Also, with all that, young women are now more aware than before" (TALA-S)

In the excerpt above, TALA notes that even if a young woman is harassed, she will be the one who has to take responsibility for trusting him in the first place, rather than the perpetrator. TALA also references that the perpetrator would not be judged in wider society. This sentiment was echoed by another student participant, RAHAF:

> "Fear. I mean, girls are from society and parents. Even if they are the victims, they might get punished. One of my friends contacted (All of our security) for the Ministry of Interior application. They did not answer her. Someone was threatening my friend through the social networking account, he knew her

face and he knew about her personal life. He threatens her to use her social media account and when she reported him, no one answered. He used to contact her through Twitter and harass her then he disappears. She is still facing this issue, but I don't know any more details. She told me that when she reported the incident, no one responded. Maybe the police caught him. I don't know" (RAHAF-S).

The excerpt above shows how even when young women share their experiences of cybercrime, there might not be the authorities in place to help with the situation. This illustrates how barriers to tackling cybercrime in Saudi Arabia may not only occur with young women coming forwards, but also, by a lack of response when they do. Additionally, a lack of response from authorities may discourage other young women from coming forwards with cybercrime experiences, as they may feel that the authorities might not be responsive to their experiences.

Both of these excerpts indicate that young women are often blamed or punished even if they are victims. LEENA corroborates this in another excerpt:

> "For example, in the case of blackmail, the parents will blame the girl for sending her pictures and trusting the young man, so you may not understand this thing. Even if he harassed her in a public place, the parents would blame her for going to the place,

not blaming the man" (LEENA-S)

In the excerpt from LEENA, she notes that parents may blame young women for getting themselves into crime, rather than understanding that they are victims. These excerpts indicate that there may be an underlying culture of victim blaming leveraged towards young women. Many respondents noted that fears of familial and/or societal repercussions/blame were a reason for young women choosing to stay silent:

> "I tried to convince her to talk to her family. She said, "They will either kill me or arrange my marriage." She added him on Snapchat because she thought he was a girl who played PUBG with. She posted a picture, and he took a screenshot and blackmailed her. I told her to explain to her family the exact situation and what happened. She said: No, they will not believe me. Her only solution was that she would delete her account" (JASMINE-S)

> "It is an embarrassing and sensitive issue, and most of them remain silent or solve it amicably because they do not want the scandal to stain their reputation, that is why I have not never faced this issue" (ALAA-SW)

> "Shyness and shame of this happening, as she fears to disclose, she is subjected to pressure every time, more and more pressure, also girls could be exploited to commit a crime,

she fears being in scandal, thus she does not like to disclose, and keep it quiet like a secret, I mean" (RADWA-S)

"The family must be close to the girl first. Sometimes the families take the roles of the opponent, and according to the crime, if it concerns honor, or if there is a young man and a relationship, for sure, she will not say I was theft or fraud. If something happened to me, I would tell my close friends because they understand me and they know me" (TALA-S)

"They are afraid of reporting the crime because of their reputation. Some of them are afraid that it will be passed on to the parents; although I expect the competent authorities to guarantee privacy, girls are always afraid of their parents" (LEENA-S)

Each of the excerpts above make statement of silence as a tool of protection from shame or familial/societal repercussions. JASMINE notes how despite giving advice to another young woman to speak to her family, the young woman was fearful that they would 'kill her' or 'arrange her marriage', after it was found out that she was in contact with an individual on the battle royale style mobile game PUBG. When the situation escalates to photo-based blackmail, there is a fear that family members will not 'believe her'. This is another example of how fears around familial involvement in cybercrime may discourage young women from sharing their experiences. Rather than being able to get

adequate support and seek for repercussions for the perpetrator, the young woman described by JASMINE had to instead delete her account. JASMINE's response shows how young women cannot speak up about their experiences with family members due to fears of the potentially serious repercussions. TALA and LEENA also make specific mentions of fears of telling their parents or other individuals who might go on to pass the information on to their families. TALA indicates that sometimes families themselves can go against their daughters, and this may discourage communication, especially when the crime involves family honour or a relationship with a young man. LEENA similarly states that 'girls are always afraid of their parents'. RADWA and ALAA further note that silence is often seen as a way of avoiding potential negative consequences. These excerpts show how young women may resort to silence due to fear of more serious consequences from family members or wider society. Another respondent noted that this behaviour was the result of a culture of shame in Saudi Arabia:

> "In terms of the customs and traditions of society and social customs, I see that Saudi women are affected more by cybercrimes than Western women because of our customs and traditions. Especially the society has the traditions of shame such as judging what does she wearing, and what she says, but they talk and criticize each other" (REEM-S)

REEM makes direct mention of the 'traditions of shame' in Saudi

Arabia, discussing regulations and restrictions on women, and compares these attitudes to those in the West. This indicates how some Saudi women may believe that customs and traditions in Saudi Arabia may be making them more vulnerable than other women in other countries, demonstrating an awareness of how the issue of cybercrime is handled in a better way outside of Saudi Arabia.

This was also discussed by SHAZA:

> "Young women are still being judged by society, and they are also afraid of their parents. They are afraid of society's reaction and their reputation" (SHAZA-SW)

> "Because in our country, you will prefer if you die rather than having a personal photo leaked, even if it is a passport photo. When I contact young women who are facing extortion and I ask them about the photo, most of them says that the photos of her sitting and it is a normal photo" (MALAK-SW)

The responses from SHAZA and MALAK show how fears in young women manifest in everyday life. MALAK suggests that even taking a passport photo can have serious consequences if leaked. Likewise, SHAZA recognises that despite the changes made in Saudi Arabia, young women are still 'judged' by society and afraid of their parents. Thus, this set of results demonstrates how the combination of tradition, societal customs, and gender norms have contributed to everyday difficulties experienced by young women in Saudi Arabia. The results

place a specific emphasis on fears young women have in communicating with family members for fear that they might instead be blamed or punished.

4.6. Research Question Three: How could these findings be applied to other areas of Saudi society?

Using the results relating to cybercrime as a basis, the third question explores how these findings could be applied to other areas of Saudi society. As this is a relatively broad question, and in line with the adoption of feminist theory as a theoretical framework for this study, the specific focus for this research question will be on female agency. This is due to the fact that there was a wealth of responses from the social worker participants that indicated that they may be upholding oppressive attitudes towards young women. It is recognised that this may be the result of the limited agency afforded to women in Saudi Arabian society, thus leading to internalised oppression. Internalised oppression is a term used in social justice theory to refer to the process by which marginalised groups (in this case, women) absorb oppressive perspectives of their own group (e.g., dominant narratives that Saudi women are submissive or in need of protection through male guardianship), thereby consequently internalising negative self-stereotypes.

Generational differences between the social workers and student participants were most evident when it came to discussions of agency, as the student participants demonstrated a greater sense of agency,

highlighting a link between female agency and cybercrime blame.

Furthermore, the results indicate that beyond cybercrime, social workers may be able to work as mediators in other areas. The social worker as social mediator was one of the most common understandings of the social worker role as identified by the student participants. and was also identified as a key area for improvement. Social workers were seen to be able to play a role in mediating the relationship between young women and various authority figures, including their families, teachers, doctors, or police and others in official positions. In a hierarchical society such as Saudi Arabia, characterised by a high-power distance, the role of social worker as mediator can help ensure that young women can feel supported and not 'afraid' when engaging with authority figures.

4.6.1. Social Workers Upholding Internalised Oppression

There were a number of examples of responses from social worker participants that highlighted the lack of a code of ethics in the social worker industry in Saudi Arabia. For comparison, the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) Code of Ethics has underpinned social worker practice since being formulated in 1975. Under section 2 of the Code of Ethics, Values and ethical principles is stated the following "social workers should make judgements based on balanced and considered reasoning. They should maintain awareness of the impact of their own values, prejudices and conflicts of interest on their practice […] social workers should be aware of the

impact their presence can have on people who use social work services and their relationships with others" (British Association of Social Workers, 2021). Although this is a facet of social work that is further established in the academic literature, many of the social worker participants in the present study gave responses that upheld potentially harmful stereotypes of young women in wider Saudi Arabian culture and society. In addition to this, they also demonstrated a limited understanding of confidentiality, which is another core aspect of social work as outlined in the BASW Code of Ethics "they [social workers] should ensure that they protect privacy and confidentiality across agencies and professions but also that they share information professionally where it is necessary by law" (British Association of Social Workers, 2021).

Some of these responses demonstrating internalised oppression are presented and analysed below:

> "Nothing. The victim and the criminal are the same. The criminal is someone who is gifted with intelligence or talent that he uses in a bad way. The victim is someone who trusted the wrong person" (DUHA-SW)

DUHA's response above reaffirms societal trends of victim shaming and blaming in Saudi Arabian culture. Instead of considering how the victim may have been exploited by the perpetrator, DUHA notes that the victim 'trusted the wrong person'. This viewpoint places the

criminal and the victim at the same level of fault for crime, thus suggesting a level of a victim blaming mentality. Women have been found by some to be particularly vulnerable to victim blaming due to a “powerful women-blaming culture that will be very hard to break down [,,,] [factors in victim blaming are] all working together simultaneously to support victim blaming and encourage women and girls not only to blame themselves, but to blame other women and girls too” (Taylor, 2020: p.75). Under a victim blaming mindset, women are seen as having ‘invited’ the crime to occur. In the dataset, the social worker participants commented on the perceived ‘nature’ or ‘personality’ of women as playing a role in their vulnerability to crime/reluctance to come forwards:

> “Sometimes they rebel against the parents' authority, university students are annoyed by their parents' control” (MAHA-SW)

> “Also, how the girl's personality is, some are strong and knowledgeable, so she gets her right, some are weak, with militant and close-minded family” (LAYLA-SW)

> “There are rational girls of course, but the older ones. The age that we have in our university are more impulsive and passionate” (MALAK-SW)

> “I got a student who was very submissive and scared, I knew that she was subjected to violence, she has weak personality, so again I suggest discussion sessions” (NAYA-SW).

In the responses above, there are several statements of young women being ‘weak’, with social workers particularly declaring it as a personality trait. Another response uses the word 'submissive', with another describing students as ‘impulsive and passionate’. In the case described by NAYA above, the young woman was given the help that she needed More positive attributes of young women are described as ‘strong’ and ‘knowledgeable’. Many of these words focus on perceived emotional states or personality traits of young women, thus failing to recognise potential prejudice-based stereotypes of young women being assumed. As part of ethical practice, social workers should question their prejudices and how they may be perceived as oppressive by the groups that they are working with. Some of the responses also hinted at potential attitudinal assumptions among the social workers that young women were immature. MALAK states that where there are ‘rational’ girls, they are ‘older’, and that the young ones are more ‘impulsive’ and ‘passionate’. This response indicates that MALAK believes younger women have less agency when compared to ‘older’ ones as they act with stronger emotions and with less rational thinking.

In addition to this, some of the social worker participants expressed ideas that as young women now had more agency through legislative changes, they should be taking advantage of them, instead of remaining silent. Several social worker participants were understanding of societal shame, however, felt that now was the time for young women to speak up. One of the social worker participants,

NAYA, even suggested that it was now worth having your name out in a ‘scandal’ due to legal gains. This was rarely expressed by the student participants, who instead expressed that they were trapped under both societal and parental restrictions.

This further suggests that the introduction of a code of ethics in Saudi Arabia could ensure that social workers are able to respond in sensitive and professional ways without making judgements based on stereotypical perceptions of young women. However, there is currently no required code of ethics for social workers. There were also responses that indicated a misunderstanding of the difficulties faced by young women: “I don't get why most of them are afraid when the picture is not obscene. Girls should not allow others in their own lives or control their lives by blackmail because of a picture” (MALAK-SW)

These examples explore how show how stereotypes of Saudi women as submissive and deprived of opportunity (Hoza, 2018) were upheld in some of the social worker responses, further reflecting how the lack of an ethics code in the social work profession in Saudi Arabia could be leading to the influence of personal bias in handling sensitive social issues. MALAK’s account is contrasted by several student and social worker accounts that detail harassment or blackmail from otherwise harmless photos, such as passport photos, or photos where individuals are in appropriate religious clothing. This indicates a possible disconnect between the attitudes of some of the social workers towards young women and the experiences of young women

themselves, who have been identified by both social worker and student participants to be highly fearful of the repercussions of cybercrime.

4.6.2. Young Women's Agency and Blame

One of the participants, MONA-SW, expressed the following opinion towards young women:

> "It is about the intellectual immunity as female students at this age can be guided and influenced by campaigns we see on Twitter, most of the revolutions and sit-ins are made by young people, because they are eager for change, so we must be aware of this aspect, before they deviate from the right path, by external parties, as they fuel public opinion on simple issues that are not considered phenomena, such as feminism, a group of young people are attacking the kingdom's political positions and demanding rights that are inappropriate for a conservative society like ours" (MONA- SW)

This excerpt indicates one of the possible reasons for the occasional disconnect between social worker and student participants. As many social workers explored previously in this chapter, recent societal changes in Saudi Arabia as a result of Vision 2030 have led to some differences in the lived experiences of all women, and additionally, differences in how they respond to these changes generation. The results of this study indicate that this might have led to contrasting attitudes between the social worker participants (who now feel

liberated due to the lifting of oppressive social restrictions) and the student participants (who still feel fearful and restricted).

As MONA-SW expresses above, some of the social worker participants felt that young people were desiring of ‘change’ in a way that did not correlate with the conservative values of Saudi Arabian society. This is reflective with previous studies (Hoza, 2018) that have found that for some Saudis, concepts such as feminism may be seen as Western imports and a form of through the re-application of a western-centric lens. Additionally, it expresses some of the concerns social workers had in relation to the influence of the internet on younger people. Although social media has been found to be an effective tool for women to communicate and have their voices heard in Saudi Arabia (Wheeler, 2020), MONA singles out the social media platform Twitter as exposing young women to campaigns that then influence them to take political action. However, as was expressed by many of the student participants, social media also allowed them to express their agency when experiencing cybercrime such as harassment or blackmail online. MONA also makes mention of a ‘right path’, indicating an attitude that younger people are deviating from societal norms.

There were multiple excerpts where social worker participants compared the current status and legal protections afforded to women with those of the past. In some cases, these changes were seen as the reason for more tension:

> “Even the changes in the law to free women from suppression are not observed effectively because of the social restrictions. This is a contradiction” (DUHA-SW)

The excerpt from DUHA above suggests that societal restrictions prevent women from receiving the benefits of legal changes, creating a contradictory environment. Other participants made similar statements:

> “It is true that the legal restrictions have eased, but the social restrictions are still definitely going to change because the law is stronger than customs and traditions, in my opinion” (SHAZA-SW)

According to SHAZA’s viewpoint, customs and traditions (social restrictions) are continuing to have an impact on the effectiveness of policy changes in Saudi Arabia, though she believes that eventually this will change. The examples above show that there are still contradictions between customs and tradition in Saudi Arabia and new legislative changes brought in to empower women, such as the removal of some social restrictions and adaptations to the male guardianship system. The examples also imply that some of the social worker participants believe that young women might not be seeing the benefits of legislative change due to the strong influence of customs and tradition. DUHA and SHAZA both make links between social customs and traditions in Saudi Arabia and the implementation of the

law. The responses from DUHA and SHAZA indicate that female agency remains an issue of customs and tradition, with legal interventions to empower women remaining ineffective.

Another participant, AMAL-SW, felt that although the law was restrictive, “it might be traditions” instead that cause difficulties for women.

There were, however, many more participants who felt that young women now had more protections than they had at a similar age, making them more able to handle difficult situations and receive help and support:

> “Girls are still being judged by society, and they are also afraid of their parents. Girls are afraid of society’s reaction and their reputation. But now the law is very fair, with restrictions and penalties. There is no difference. You can say that Saudi Arabia has moved from one place to another in terms of laws and everything” (SHAZA-SW)

> “Now, there is compensation by law against Cyber-bullying, this may encourage people to complain about the compensation, before it exists, she used to say what worth my name in scandals, but for a compensation, so worth it even if her name comes out, especially with a change of economy after Corona (laugh)” (NAYA-SW)

Both SHAZA and NAYA recognise that there have been legal changes

in Saudi Arabia that have introduced greater penalties and legal protections for young women. However, NAYA's statement that the compensation offered if a perpetrator is caught is worth the scandal is contradictory to the responses from the student participants. Many of the student participants felt that their agency was greatly hindered by the possibility that they would instead be blamed for having become victims of cybercrime. None of the student participants expressed that it was worth pursuing a cybercrime case for financial recompense, and instead, were more fearful of blame. This again shows how there was a lack of correlation between the perceptions of the social workers and the experiences of the students. Many of the social worker participants further recognised that young women now had more protections, with some feeling that some had more power than young men:

> "On the contrary, there is no restrictions that make possible the society and shame culture. I mean young women are considerably different. Now Saudi Arabia has changed every month (laugh) it is unusual, and young women have more power than young men" (LAYLA-SW)

> "Now having a lot of laws that serve women, there are bodies (legal agencies that are promoting) women's rights... this has encouraged our university young women to become the ones who harass young men by blackmailing them; now all laws are with women..." (LAYLA-SW)

In both comments from LAYLA, she asserts that young women have now become more empowered than young men. She further notes that there are no restrictions that are in place that are perpetuating the culture of 'shame' as experienced by young women in Saudi Arabia today. However, we can also read LAYLA's perspective as failing to understand wider contextual factors behind the experience of women in Saudi Arabia. Some of the student participants were aware of their legal protections and authorities they could seek out to address cybercrime issues, however, did not feel as if they were taken seriously or heard by authority figures. In addition to this, they did not feel like they could trust authority figures, including social workers. LAYLA ascribed young women a level of agency that young women did not necessarily feel that they had. In addition, rather than advocating for young women addressing cybercrime experiences, LAYLA instead indicates that young women are now themselves allowed to engage in blackmail against young men. Once more, this shows how the increased agency afforded to young women in contemporary Saudi Arabian society has been received by some social worker participants.

In addition to this, many of the student participants felt that they were held to more scrutiny than young men in Saudi Arabian society. It was not uncommon in the student responses to find stories of how their families would be more likely to side with a young male perpetrator than with their own daughter. This was identified by the student participants as one of the key reasons that they/other young women didn't come

forwards. Again, these social worker responses indicate how there is need for training on how to be more sensitive to complex issues.

Further SW participants data discuss societal changes and the impacts:

> “I got videoed by one of some men using his mobile phone, I told him to put the video down or I invoke the harassment law to sue him… The law has made young women
> ... strong. They can boldly tell anyone who has taken their photos on phone to delete or be sued.” (MONA-SW)

> “In the past harassment was widespread and the society used to deny it, but there was no clear law criminalizing harassment […] how young men used to chase you in their car while you were in yours with the driver, harassing you with all kind of bad words and you do nothing […] I parked front of a coffee shop, where young men sitting, It was something new that woman driving a car, they were turning around to see a girl driving, so I said 'May Allah Forbid' that I got videoed, to the extent one of them using his mobile phone, put it down, as the harassment law was acted so I can sue him, do you know what I mean?” (MONA-SW)

In both of these excerpts, MONA mentions how she now feels she has the agency to discourage young men to harass her by taking photos of her without consent through her awareness that she can now ask for the photos to be deleted or sue the individual. These excerpts from

MONA show how she now feels greater empowerment as a result of the legal changes, yet MONA does not attribute this increased confidence to her position as a mature person, indicating that there is a lack of empathy towards other individuals in the social work profession in Saudi Arabia. Empathy is one of the cornerstones of the social work profession, and these responses further highlight the need for a code of ethics. In the excerpts, MONA implies that it is the law that has made young women ‘strong’, however, it might be her position as a mature person with more confidence to confront young men harassing her that makes her able to make this assumption.

These expressions of agency from MONA could be the result of feeling more empowered as a result of now having more freedom. These kinds of feelings, however, were rarely expressed by the student participants, who instead expressed sentiments that they were powerless to go against young men. Additionally, as social worker participants are trained in social work, there is an expectation that they will demonstrate a level of sensitivity when it comes to individuals experiencing social problems. The social worker participant responses often did not correlate with the student responses, indicating that they were out of touch with the individuals they are expected to support. Many of the student participants indicated that they would prefer to stay silent as their decision to take agency and confront the situation may lead to them being subject to blame either way.

The social worker responses also placed heavy emphasis on legal

protections as the predominant reason for young women having increased agency. These results shown how social workers may be less aware of the complex intersecting factors behind social issues faced by young women in Saudi Arabia. Student participant responses seemed to suggest that seeking the help of authorities did not always solve the issue. Additionally, student participants indicated that silence was often the best protection, as even social workers themselves could relay sensitive information to other family members without the consent of the student. It was not surprising to see that the student participants were afraid of being blamed for taking action when experiencing social issues such as the cybercrime. There were multiple examples of how a lack of clarity and regulation in the social work industry in Saudi Arabia was impacting social worker responses.

Social workers operating in complex sociocultural environments such as Saudi Arabia need to be fully aware of how contextual factors can be impacting on issues of agency and blame. Agency should allow individuals to be better able to take creative action using available resources and in the context of the environment in which social work occurs (Parsell, Eggins, and Marston, 2017). Social workers therefore need to increase positive outcomes of young women's agency in relation to social issues they may experience. Currently, the results of this study show that agency is often associated with negative blame for female students yet seen as a given with new legal changes for the social worker participants. Social workers need to be responsive to the

needs of the groups that they serve, and these results indicate that there is a need for societal change that promotes female agency as a positive change.

Overall, this set of results pertaining to issues of female agency highlight how ideas of gender norms and stereotypes of women as 'weak', 'submissive', and 'easy to target' need to be addressed on a much wider societal level. Alharji (2020) found that these issues were particularly marked in women who held onto more conservative views, finding that some women believed that social change could "destroy moral and social values" (Alharji, 2020, p.153). The findings in the present study have shown that while the social worker participants were on some level aware of the difficulties faced by young women with coming forwards, they were of the belief that issues of female agency were solved by legal protections. Many of the social worker participants indicated that they themselves felt more empowered with legal protections, however, failed to recognise that this empowerment may be a direct result of their age. In alignment with the findings of Alharji (2020), this study also found that younger participants were more likely to be critical of the male guardianship system, likely a result of the shift towards individualist thinking, which values autonomy and independence.

The tendency for social worker participants to victim blame further indicated that they were not sensitive to the complex experiences of the young female participants. Although they encouraged young

women to take more agency and come forwards with their experiences, the students reported that social workers were often absent, and additionally, expressed deeply internalised fears about discussing their personal issues for fear of confidentiality breaches, indicating that the social workers did not take the fears or concerns of the student participants seriously. This knowledge indicates that these are some of the problems that need to be addressed in other areas of Saudi Arabian society. Notably, many of the changes of Vision 2030 have been implemented on the legal and economic level, however, there appears to be less of a consideration on how this process could be better streamlined to ensure that generational divides are addressed. Many of the fears expressed by the young women speak for the fact that Vision 2030's goals have not gone far enough to ensure that women feel they have agency and independence in Saudi Arabian society. It also again highlights the need for greater specialisation and professional standards in the social work profession in the Saudi Arabian context, as the results indicate that the social worker

participants were not sufficiently trained to deal with the needs of the young women they work with.

4.6.3. Social Workers as Mediators in Other Areas

The results indicated that the young female participants appeared to experience difficulty in communicating with their families. In particular, daughters found it particularly difficult to communicate with their

fathers. In an excerpt from the section above, social worker participant LAYLA made mention of ‘close minded families’. Another social worker participant, MAHA, also discussed how strict and controlling parents could prevent young women from coming forward with cybercrime, thus allowing it to continue. Lack of communication between young women and their parents was also identified by DUHA, another social worker participant. These results suggested that social workers were aware of the difficulties young women faced in confiding in their parents. Some of the student participants expressed fears of serious consequences, such as the friend of JASMINE who was afraid her parents would ‘arrange her marriage’ or ‘kill her’ if they caught that she had been playing a mobile game with an unrelated male who had threatened to blackmail her. The awareness of this difficulty on both sides indicates that familial mediator is an area of Saudi Arabian society where social workers can play an important role. Social worker and student participants both mentioned familial mediator as one of the potential roles social workers could adopt to help younger women who might find it difficult to communicate with their family members. In addition to this, several social worker and student participants considered how social workers could also play a mediator role on the wider community level. If social workers were better integrated into local communities, they could play a role in mediating community disputes, through awareness of the norms and regulations of certain communities.

The results of the study show that social workers are already playing a mediator role in the university context, in particular, by allowing students to resolve situations with authority figures such as supervisors and professors. Moreover, social workers can mediate between students and administration when they have problems. Although this was the case, students were critical of the current roles social workers had in the university context. Student participants noted that there were high levels of absenteeism, and a lack of confidentiality.

These issues would need to be improved and addressed for social workers to be able to play a more effective role as mediators when handling social issues.

Thus, this concludes the results section. The results to the third research question highlight some concerns with the social work profession in the Saudi Arabian context. The responses from several social worker participants indicated that they may be exhibiting internalised oppression in their perceptions of young women. This is linked to wider sociocultural traditions and norms that have historically restricted the role of women in Saudi Arabian society outside of the household. In some responses, social worker participants victim blamed young women, and in others, young women appeared to self-categorise themselves as particularly vulnerable due to their reduced position in society. Social worker participants appeared to believe that agency was gained through legal protections, yet the student

participant responses provided no evidence for this, as many felt shame on the more immediate level of family members in the same household. This indicated that legal protections do not go far enough in Saudi Arabia, and that there is a need for societal change. This has to begin with appropriate education and continuous training of social workers, along with the introduction of an ethical framework for the social work profession in Saudi Arabia. Should this be introduced, social workers will be able to deliver a more

effective and appropriate service, thus ensuring that they are

trusted figures that young women can talk to.

CHAPTER 5- DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The results of the study indicated that social workers currently occupy a limited role in tackling cybercrime in Saudi Arabia. There was no general consensus amongst the student participants on the role of social workers, and some of the participants noted that they found it difficult to access social worker services. The most common understanding of the role of the social worker was as a 'social mediator'. The results of this study therefore showed that the role of the social worker was not well understood by the student participants. There were multiple areas in which the role of social workers needed to be improved. Student participants made mention of breaches of confidentiality, and social worker participants felt they lacked sufficient training and specialisation skills to tackle contemporary social issues. Additionally, social worker participants felt that their profession was not respected, and that they lacked integration with other authorities and institutions. The results of the study showed how social restrictions and societal norms and customs had created gendered inequalities in Saudi Arabian society and made young women particularly vulnerable. The results, therefore, offered an insight into other areas of Saudi Arabian society. This section will be ordered in accordance with the specific research questions, which will be repeated at the beginning of each subsection. These subsections will further be ordered in

accordance with the main themes and subthemes discussed in the results section.

5.2 The Role of Social Workers

This subsection discusses the findings which relate to the first research question: what roles, if any, do social workers play in protecting female students at Saudi universities from cybercrimes?

The results showed that the students perceived social workers in three distinct ways: as social counsellors, social mediators, and problem solvers. There were also a few participants who felt that social workers had no role at all in the university context, or were more absent than present. Generally, the dominant student perception of social workers was somebody who solved problems, although there was no unified consensus on how exactly they achieved this, suggesting a potential lack of clarity on the specific role of social workers and the specific ways in which they can help young women. The core finding in the present study was that neither the social worker participants nor the student participants appeared to have a clearly defined understanding of the role of social workers. In addition to this, the responsibilities of social workers were not well understood. This finding supports existing findings about the limitations of the social work role in the Saudi Arabian context, and again reinforces the need for a social work regulation body in Saudi Arabia.

The findings further showed that the role of social workers in protecting

female students from cybercrime was extremely limited. None of the student participants made specific mention of how social workers could help with cybercrime related issues. In addition to this, few of the social worker participants mentioned having direct experience with handling cybercrime. The results also indicated that many of the social worker participants had a limited general understanding of cybercrime. Social worker descriptions of cybercrime were generalised, and when compared to the student participants, they rarely made mention of the psychological impacts of cybercrime, rather, they tended to list common cybercrimes and reported more financially motivated cybercrime than interpersonal. These attitudes are at odds with the arguments made by Marganski (2020) and the European Centre for Gender Equality (2024), who have argued for the inclusion of more feminist approaches in tackling cybercrime, as women are disproportionately affected, especially when it comes to interpersonal cybercrimes.

This is where the lack of specialist and professional training in the social work sector in Saudi Arabia was particularly evident. Sawmar and Mohammad (2019) have argued that there has not yet been significant investment in the specialisation of social workers in Saudi Arabia. Many of the social worker participants demonstrated that they lacked the specific skills to deal with cybercrime, presenting a significant problem for the Saudi Arabian government, who have identified social workers as the frontline for handling cybercrime (Ali,

2019). The social workers were aware of their lack of specialist training to handle cybercrime, yet, equally, their absence and lack of proactive attitudes in seeking out students indicated wider problems with the social work system in Saudi Arabia.

This research then has shown that the role of social workers in the university context is not clear for the students they are intended to support Most interestingly, the results have indicated that social workers in the university context are most typically associated with academic issues such as changing modules or resolving exam problems, rather than assisting with social problems. Where social workers were understood to help with financial and familial issues in the university context, none of the respondents made mention of the role social workers could play in tackling cybercrime. These results therefore generate new contributions to the literature by showing how the role of social workers amongst university students studying social work is limited. One of the participants even noted that she ‘had not heard’ of social work before specialising in social work. These results therefore suggest that the lack of public recognition of social work may even extend to those who are studying social work. These results also indicate that issues of the recognition and role of social work in Saudi Arabia go much further than cybercrime, as there appeared to be a lack of cohesive knowledge of the role of social work in general, including amongst social workers themselves. This therefore indicates that the role of social workers needs to be well conceptualised and understood

on a wider societal level.

5.3 Improving the Role of Social Workers

This subsection discusses findings that relate to the second research question: are there any areas where these roles could be improved?

The results showed that there were significant barriers to the effective delivery of social work services. First, the lack of public awareness of the role of social workers was one of the most pronounced findings. Social worker participants felt that there was little to no societal awareness of the role of social workers, and for this reason, students may not come forward when experiencing cybercrime. The social workers felt that the raising of this awareness did not just lie with authorities and institutions, but also with social workers themselves, as they could be charged with ensuring that students and the public were aware of the scope and limits of their role in tackling cybercrime. Clarifying the role social workers can play in cybercrime prevention, control, and management is especially important as it can assist in ensuring that social workers become trusted figures in society and are able to do their work more effectively without stigma and with recognition. This correlates with existing studies (Albrithen and Yalli, 2012) which found that the social work sector was not understood to be the primary way of dealing with social problems.

The lack of awareness was compounded by the professional weaknesses of social workers. Social worker participants felt that they

did not have strong relationships with students, and they did not often interact directly with them. Some students however rebutted this, instead stating that the reason for their lack of interaction with social workers was the fact that their offices were often empty, and that they were difficult to get a hold of. Students additionally felt that social workers did not respect confidentiality arrangements and that they were disclosing the intimate and private issues of other students to lecturers, other social workers, and even other students. This concern over privacy suggests concerns amongst students that social workers may not be trusted people that they can confide in. Despite this, a number of the social worker participants noted that rather than the lack of engagement being the result of confidentiality concerns, it was instead the result of concerns of shame and damaged reputation as a result of being a victim of cybercrime. These were some of the most concerning ethical issues identified in the present study. As was discussed in the literature review, the goal of social work globally is enhancing human wellbeing and bolstering the ability of these individuals to meet both complex and basic needs. The lack of an ethical framework was evident from the social worker responses. Social workers are expected to be responsive to the needs of the individuals they work with, and, critically, are expected to be aware of the impact of their own judgements and values when dealing with specific groups.

The social worker participants in the present study appeared to be of

the belief that legal protections, the government, and security forces (e.g., the police) were more well equipped to deal with the needs of young women, thus appearing to indicate that they were not apt to deal with complex social issues, despite being social workers. In addition to this, none of the social workers made mention of their lack of availability, despite the fact that it was mentioned by several student participants, indicating that they were perhaps unaware of their lack of professionalism. Most concerning was the tendency to deflect blame onto the student participants, as many of the social participants engaged in harmful stereotyping of young women. This offers a new contribution to the existing research, as few existing studies have explored the interpretations of social workers from the perspectives of the groups that they work with.

Despite these allegations from the student participants, the social worker participants demonstrated a strong level of awareness of their need for specialist training to deal with an issue such as cybercrime. Multiple social worker participants were aware of the gap in their knowledge and stressed the need for intensive training and awareness programmes to enable them to better tackle the issue. This, however, is the first of several findings where differences between the student participants and social worker participants were identified, representing new knowledge on how students and social workers understand and relate to each other.

Students strongly identified the role of social workers in the university

context with academic matters, however, social workers felt that they had a much larger role to play in society. Some students felt that social workers couldn't help them at all with cybercrime, and some of the social worker participants felt that they often couldn't help as students would not come to them. Some of the social worker participants exhibited a tendency to blame young women for their situation, reflecting the need for social worker training that placed an emphasis on sensitive approaches to approaching young female victims of cybercrime, and a clear ethical code for social workers to follow. Where social workers placed a strong emphasis on their concerns about professional and specialised training in improving their role in tackling cybercrime, the student participants placed a greater emphasis on trustworthy communication between students and social workers. This offers a new contribution to the research, showing the potential disconnect between social workers and the individuals they support in Saudi Arabia. Students were deeply concerned about their privacy being maintained and building a relationship of trust with social workers, yet social workers themselves made no mention of any of these issues, instead focusing on administrative, legislative, and professional barriers to effectively doing their jobs. One of the social worker participants, SHAZA, did however mention that any intervention proposed by social workers should first be approved by the victim, to ensure that any familial involvement was not instigated without approval. Building trust between students and social workers was

therefore one of the key areas in which the role of social workers in universities could be improved.

A further issue identified by the social workers was the lack of integration with other authorities, making it difficult for them to escalate cases of cybercrime. When it came to how to increase the presence of social workers in tackling cybercrime, the participants had a number of different suggestions, again implying that understanding of the role of social workers in Saudi Arabia was highly individualised. While some participants felt that it was best to appoint more social workers at the governmental level, for example, in the Ministry of Interior, others felt that there should be more social workers in the police force and security services. Another social worker participant stated that collaboration with the computer science department would allow them to learn more about how to trace cybercrime perpetrators and instruct students on how to prevent cybercrime that involves breaching security, such as being hacked. One of the participants proposed a social worker union affiliated with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and explicitly mentioned the active participation of social workers in the prevention and control of cybercrime as well as the rehabilitation of cybercrime victims. In each of these examples, social workers were viewed by the participants as needing to collaborate with others (e.g., other social workers, the computer science department, the police, the Ministry of Interior) to be able to increase their presence. These results offer a new contribution to the literature by indicating

that social workers themselves may not be aware of the best way in which they can integrate themselves with other authorities and institutions to tackle cybercrime.

In addition to this, the tendency for social workers to believe that they needed greater integration with authority figures is perhaps reflective of the high-power distance in Saudi Arabian society, and how this can lead to self-conceptualisations of inferiority. Albrithen and Yalli (2012) have argued that social work in Saudi Arabia is often not understood to be the primary means of dealing with social problems, thus creating stigma around social work. Further stigma is generation through the fact that social work is for some individuals seen to represent Western values and theories, and therefore is seen as infiltrating and displacing local Saudi Arabian and Arab values. Due to these stigmatisations, social worker participants may feel powerless to be able to improve their roles within the field of social work itself and may feel the need to align with more powerful authority figures in order to get their voices heard.

This study further generated new knowledge by finding that Saudi women seemed to be unaware of the international nature of cybercrime. In excerpts provided by three social worker participants which detailed cybercrime that had occurred to others, each mentioned that the perpetrator was non-Saudi, hailing from other Arabic-speaking countries such as Yemen, Lebanon, and Kuwait. In each of the cases, the victims were young women who were looking to make purchases

online or make financial investments. In many of these cases, the victims did not realise that the perpetrator was non-Saudi until confronting them. This points to a lack of awareness amongst young women of how to stay safe online, particularly on social media, therefore identifying how social workers could improve their role in assisting with cybercrime by ensuring that female university students are made aware of protective measures. Additionally, online shopping was identified as a common avenue for young Saudi women to experience cybercrime.

This is a significant finding, potentially explaining why the connection to shame is felt so keenly when young women are involved in online shopping related cybercrimes. As has been discussed extensively in this study, Saudi Arabian culture is shame-based, and the restrictions that are placed on women can lead them to feel shame when they are in violation of social norms (Alaoui et al., 2017). Therefore, choosing to engage in online shopping as a means of aligning with a less restrictive lifestyle could lead to feelings of shame, especially for young women from more conservative families.

Another particularly striking finding from the dataset is the lack of consensus social workers had on how they could tackle cybercrime. Many of the solutions involved collaborations with other individuals, and there was a lesser focus on the psychological needs of female students. Only one of the participants directly mentioned therapeutic intervention, despite several of the social workers mentioning that the

psychological impact of cybercrime could have more serious ramifications than the crime itself. Despite the strong emphasis in the responses on the potential fear of family responses to cybercrime, the social worker respondents engaged with the barrier of the family in a limited way. Several participants mentioned that they would attempt to explain to family members that young women were not at fault for cybercrime, however, many of the student participants indicated that they would not be believed even if they had obviously not done anything wrong. Social workers proposed more solutions that involved third parties (e.g., security, university lawyers, the police, computer science), potentially indicating that they may not feel confident in their abilities to handle the complex issue of cybercrime.

The participants identified a number of limitations and challenges faced by social workers in facing cybercrime as experienced by young women in Saudi Arabia. Multiple social worker participants felt that one of the most significant barriers to their ability to support young female victims of cybercrime was feeling ignored by students. Social workers felt above all else that young female students did not have a clear and well-defined awareness of their specific roles, and for this reason, they did not come to social workers when they experienced cybercrime. In some cases, they noted that students preferred to go directly to seek help from security services or the authorities, as these were deemed to be more effective solutions. The work choice suggested that young female students may not have a clear perception of the role of social

workers in the management of issues relating to cybercrime. This belief was extended beyond the students, with other social worker participants suggesting that lack of awareness of the role of social workers was a wider issue on the community and societal level.

The lack of awareness was compounded by the professional weaknesses of social workers. Social worker participants felt that they did not have strong relationships with students, and they did not often interact directly with them. Some students however rebutted this, instead stating that the reason for their lack of interaction with social workers was the fact that their offices were often empty, and that they were difficult to get a hold of. Students additionally felt that social workers did not respect confidentiality arrangements and that they were disclosing the intimate and private issues of other students to lecturers, other social workers, and even other students. This concern over privacy suggests concerns amongst students that social workers may not be trusted people that they can confide in. Despite this, a number of the social worker participants noted that rather than the lack of engagement being the result of confidentiality concerns, it was instead the result of concerns of shame and damaged reputation as a result of being a victim of cybercrime. This again highlighted the need for enhanced specialist training opportunities for social workers, as well as the introduction of an ethical code of conduct and professional standards. The social workers consistently engaged in victim blaming, and it was evident that many of the social worker

participants held on to stereotypes of young women, demonstrating a lack of empathy for their struggles. Although the student participants had on several occasions mentioned finding it difficult to come into contact and seek the help of social workers, none of the social worker participants mentioned this, suggesting a gap between the expectations of the student participants and the availability of the social workers.

This was supported by the student participants, with several noting that they felt that authorities such as the police and social workers would not be able to help them with their experiences of cybercrime. Some of the students expressed that they would be worried that a social worker would tell their parents, further reinforcing the complications behind involving the family in sensitive issues in the Saudi Arabian context. Concurrent across the responses from both social worker and student participants was the fear that parents or other family figures finding out about experiences of cybercrime, would lead to repercussions that could potentially be more severe than the experience of the cybercrime itself. This suggests that any strategy to integrate social workers into the handling of such a sensitive issue such as cybercrime needs to follow stringent victim confidentiality practices to encourage more young female victims of cybercrime to come forward and seek support from social workers.

Social worker participants were critical of the fact that Saudi Arabia lacked clear policy and legislation when it came to social work, with

policy characterised by generalisation and a lack of specialisation. Additionally, there were concerns that existing policy and legislation made no mention of cybercrime, slowing down bureaucratic processes and making legal processes more difficult and prolonged, thus causing greater distress to cybercrime victims. Many of the social worker participants also expressed the lack of collaboration between social workers and other relevant ministries, institutions, civil services, and authorities, making it difficult to provide a coherent and effective response to issues of cybercrime. These responses can be understood by applying cultural stereotype theory (Langenhove and Harré, 1995) and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Stereotypes of Saudi Arabian women are the result of a complex intersection of religious, cultural, and social factors (Omair, 2017). The research suggested that both student and social worker participants felt that young women were particularly vulnerable to cybercrime. This could be a result of cultural stereotypes around young Saudi Arabian women, who were sometimes described by both social worker and student participants as becoming victims of cybercrime due to inexperience, a desire to seek ‘fame’, or being too ‘emotional’. These results suggest that Saudi Arabian women may have a tendency to categorise both themselves and other women in negative terms. This indicates that potential intervention needs to take into account the specific cultural structure of Saudi Arabia, and ensure that both student and social worker participants can build a sense of trust and

solidarity, bearing in mind that some women may still prefer women-only spaces, thus illustrating the potential importance of women-to-women solutions between young female students and social workers.

The research showed that student and social worker participants alike felt that increasing social worker awareness of cybercrime was an efficient way of integrating social workers into cybercrime mitigation and management strategies. Several of the social worker participants stressed that they lacked the specialist knowledge to deal with cybercrime, in part due to the fact that it is a relatively new issue that is not covered by existing training courses. The social worker participants further stressed that this kind of training needed to occur on a national and professional level, to ensure that cybercrime training was a core part of social worker educational practices. As was shown in the results on the root causes of increasing cybercrime as experienced by young women, there also appeared to be a number of differences in the understanding of cybercrime between the social workers and the students. One approach to address this is the introduction of an intensive training course. This could would not only educate social workers on the identification and management of cybercrime, but would also provide training on how to provide appropriate support to young female victims.

The difference between the attitudes of the social worker and the student participants as explored in this study sheds new light on how Saudi Arabia's rapidly changing society may have contributed to a

generational divide, especially in the understanding of the younger generation, reflected by the admission of the social worker participants that they lacked the necessary training to combat cybercrime. This was particularly evident in the social worker responses to the new legal protections afforded to women. The social worker participants had very positive attitudes to their increased empowerment due to the lifting of certain social restrictions such as driving restrictions, yet, they failed to understand that these increased feelings of empowerment may be the result of their maturity and age. Rather than demonstrating a robust awareness of how social media may be complicating the lives of young women and increasing their vulnerability, the social worker participants were instead critical of the younger generation's use of social media, with one participant even stating that young women were using social media solely for 'fame'. This indicates a need for social workers to become educated on how to develop greater empathy and understanding for the needs and concerns of the younger generation.

This reflected a need for intensive social worker training that placed an emphasis on sensitive approaches to young female victims of cybercrime, as some of the responses from the social workers invertedly employed elements of victim blaming, suggesting that young women were experiencing more cybercrime based on stereotypes of young women as emotionally vulnerable and immature, or characterising them as bringing cybercrime upon themselves by seeking 'fame' on social media or engaging in activities such as online

shopping. Although many of the responses recognised the challenges young women faced in speaking up, many of the social worker participants were adamant that existing legal protections were enough, and that young women were not taking advantage of them. Many of the social workers made reference to the more oppressive sociocultural conditions they had lived under, indicating that the lack of empathy afforded to the young women may be the result of the perception that the lifting of certain restrictions alone was enough to encourage young women to be more outspoken. However, these responses failed to recognise that many of the challenges faced by young women appear to be deeply ingrained in Saudi Arabian culture and society, necessitating a support system that goes beyond legislation and policy alone. Additionally, many of the social worker participants were more pessimistic than the student participants when it came to the potential benefits of social media and technology in tackling cybercrime, suggesting that they may lack the required knowledge to tackle the complex and rapidly evolving nature of cybercrime.

Social worker participants felt that they could improve their role in tackling cybercrime by providing and encouraging solutions to cybercrime as experienced by young women in Saudi Arabia. Suggestions included encouraging students to block any accounts that they suspected were engaging or attempting to engage in cybercrime, as well as collaborating with IT services to stay alert for possible cybercrime experiences. Outside of the technical level, several of the

social worker participants felt that managing the response of the family of the victim was more important. Social workers felt that when young female cybercrime victims lacked familial support, they were likely to experience difficulties that could be mitigated through the intervention and support of a social worker. The fathers of young women were mentioned as a particularly difficult barrier for young women coming forward with cybercrime experiences. As a result of this, the social worker participants suggested that increased communication with mothers could be an effective solution.

However, some of the participants were opposed to any type of family intervention, instead feeling that the potential risk of victim blaming may cause more emotional damage to young female victims of cybercrime than the actual crime itself. The social worker participants expressed the view that recent laws that focused on the empowerment of women could be beneficial in enabling young female victims of cybercrime to come forward with their experiences and receive the necessary legal help that they needed. The social workers recognised that changes had been made in Saudi Arabian society had accommodated this process, however, they recognised that they were not fully equipped to hold cybercrime perpetrators responsible for their actions.

Besides assistance for victims of cybercrime, other social worker participants felt that strategies needed to include tackling the root causes of cybercrime, by advocating for more stringent punishments for cybercriminals. This was also expressed through a desire for social

workers to have greater influence on the governmental and legislative level, through developing community awareness and educational programs that could discourage potential cybercriminals from committing crimes and offer them relevant community support. The student participants felt that social workers could also make themselves known to the students as individuals who could help with cybercrime, thus building a stronger relationship of trust between students and social workers.

Across the results, there was concern that a lack of cybercrime awareness, coupled with online and social media inexperience were another major cause of increased cybercrime faced by young Saudi women. According to the social worker participants, some of the cybercrimes most commonly associated with inexperience online were fraud, extortion, and scams. Younger people were thought to have less experience which made them more vulnerable to falling victim to scams, extortion, and fraud. Again, some of these responses risked falling into stereotypes of younger people, as many of the student participants felt that they were able to effectively stay safe online, with some recognising that influencers and online personalities were playing a role in educating young women on scams and how to avoid them. Additionally, there was frequent mention of cybercrime victims having the inability to distinguish between official and fake accounts on social media platforms. As social worker participants further recounted, there was a tendency for young women to trust strangers

online and get involved in scams and fraud. . This often occurred in cases when young women were tricked into believing they were purchasing a genuine service or product such as driver's licences, before realising that they had been scammed.

Unlike the social worker participants, the student participants were markedly more concerned with a lack of awareness of the potential implications of sharing photos online, with a particular emphasis on how this could lead to blackmail. Students felt that their peers shared photos on social media in a way which exposed them to being blackmailed, rather than opting to share them with their close friends only. Where it was recognised that many young women wished to join social media to expand their networks, this intention was often marred by the risk of falling fall victim to scams, blackmail, and fraud. The student participants were particularly concerned about the public exposure of their social media profiles, including credit card details, location, and photos. It was recognised that these types of cybercrimes could occur even if the individual had a private social media account, as blackmail and harassment were experienced by young women on social media regardless of their attempts at privacy. The greater reach of social media was also attributed to the increase in cybercrime as a result of a lack of awareness. Several student participants felt that as social media and online networks had opened up the possibility of communicating with individuals outside of their immediate geographical range, this had further increased the chances of being

involved in cybercrime, as it may increase the possibility of coming into contact with criminals. As can be seen from the results, there were again differing attitudes between the social worker participants and the student participants in regard to how inexperience played a role in the increased experience of cybercrime. Where the social workers largely felt that this inexperience was related to youth, the students felt that the inexperience of cybercrime victims was more linked to the diversity and sophistication cybercrime that could be experienced on social media.

Both the social worker and the student participants felt that a large percentage of cybercrime was the result of a lack of awareness of how common scams, extortion attempts, fraud attempts, or other crimes operated. The findings of this study therefore support previous research in finding that the lack of large-scale cybercrime awareness or educational programs in Saudi Arabia is one of the key drivers of the increased incidence of cybercrime (Al-Sulami, 2023). There was an awareness from the participants that multiple mitigation and educational factors (e.g., never sharing credit card/personal/location details online, making sure to use official social media pages) could help in driving down the number of cybercrime incidents as experienced by young women in Saudi Arabia. Interestingly, there was evidence that the cybercrime as experienced/recounted by the participants in the study was specifically tailored to a Saudi Arabian audience. Several social workers mentioned a scam where young

women were tricked into getting a driver's license, a practice that was only recently approved in Saudi Arabia (Khalil and Storie, 2021). This illustrates how cybercriminals have found ways to specifically target Saudi Arabia. Many of the participants also noted when discussing cybercrime that the perpetrator had been an individual based outside of Saudi Arabia, but usually in nearby countries. This suggests the importance of considering the sociocultural context of Saudi Arabia in developing cybercrime awareness and education material. Much of Saudi Arabia's initial social work professional framework was taken from abroad, and this therefore highlights the need for a country specific framework to address cybercrime challenges.

Both social worker and student participants made frequent mention of online shopping scams and fraud, a common form of cybercrime experienced by young women. There was further mention of young women falling victim to impersonation and extortion. The social workers made associations between young women, online shopping, and falling victim to fraudulent purchases or impersonation scams, however, the student participants remained adamant that they knew how to avoid scams and fraudulent purchases and were able to successfully identify them before getting into any kind of trouble. This indicates the need for enhanced understanding between student and social worker participants.

Thus, there were a number of areas in which the role of social workers in tackling cybercrime faced by young women could be improved. Most

importantly, there were serious concerns from several students about social workers breaching confidentiality agreements, making it difficult for students to feel trust. Social workers also faced significant administrative, bureaucratic, and professional barriers in their work, making it difficult to deliver effective services. The students and the social workers had a number of suggestions on how to amend this situation.

5.4 Applying These Findings to Other Areas of Saudi Society

This subsection discusses the findings in relation to the third research question: how could these findings be applied to other areas of Saudi society?

It was evident from the findings of the study that despite legal protections and the ambitious goals of Vision 2030, women are still subject to sociocultural restrictions and a deeply embedded culture of shame, often with no avenue of opening up about societal issues that they may be experiencing. The results also illustrate that there is a need for greater understanding of the needs of the younger generation in a rapidly changing Saudi Arabia. The majority of Saudi Arabia's population are under the age of 60 (Saudi Census, 2022b), yet the results of the present study indicate that traditional ideas and conservative values still hold strong in Saudi Arabia, and are deeply internalised, especially by women, who have been subject to social restrictions on how they dress, behave, and act. The core changes of Vision 2030 have been stipulated as reducing the economic

dependence of oil and reverting to a more moderate form of Islam, however, it is evident that some aspects of Saudi Arabian culture, particularly, the experience of women, continues to remain restrictive. It is evident that continued adherence to traditional religious and social thought remains at odds with the needs of a rapidly globalising and modernised Saudi Arabia.

The findings of the present study support the results of Song (2019) by finding that many of the participants behaved (or chose not to) in accordance with societal and cultural norms in Saudi Arabia. Young women were afraid to speak due to fears that they would be blamed for their experiences, leading to further feelings of shame. Thus, many preferred to suffer in silence, especially for fear of repercussions within the family. With such strong ties to women as extensions of the family in Saudi Arabian culture, young women were afraid that their experiences would cause shame to the entire family. The family unit is of special importance in Saudi Arabian society, and bringing shame upon the family is a greater disruption to societal and cultural norms than suffering in silence. This therefore discourages communication of sensitive issues. This suggests that the family unit can play an important role in addressing some of the issues with societal and cultural norms in Saudi Arabia. Working with the family unit can help unpack some of the held beliefs about the role of women, and help build stronger communicative ties within the family based on mutual understanding, and not stereotyping. It was also evident that many of

the participants harboured negative internalised stereotypes of women, necessitating addressing these stereotypes.

The examples point to the complicated positions and feelings that Saudi Arabian women go through as they negotiate their positions in an ever-changing country. Where younger Saudi Arabian women are defying strict gender norms as imposed by the complicated intersection of culture and religion, many of the most conservative ideas are still held by older individuals who may not be as open and embracing change. Despite the lifting of certain restrictions that had been placed on women and the desire to present a moderate version of Islam in Saudi Arabia, the arrest of activists supporting women's right to drive has raised concerns that much of the change in the country is top-down rather than bottom-up, and perhaps not reflective of the lived reality of the public in Saudi Arabia.

There were several examples from the social worker responses that indicated that they may be upholding oppressive stereotypes of young women. Some of the social worker responses indicated elements of internalised oppression, in which negative stereotypes of Saudi women constructed in wider society were internalised and then projected back out onto young women. Young women were described as 'impulsive', 'sensitive', 'easy to target', and 'emotional', with these perceived personality traits contributing to their experiences., The cultural stereotypes of Saudi women have been shaped by complex intersecting factors such as religion, cultural, and societal factors

(Omair, 2017). Several of the social worker participants made mention of how when they were university students, they were subject to much more oppressive restrictions. This led social worker participants to believe that some young women were not taking advantage of the agency they were now afforded through new legislation and protections.

These attitudes held by the social workers are likely to have been influenced by the previous social restrictions on women. Social worker participants were of the belief that young women today were empowered and had increased agency, especially when it came to defending their rights and speaking up against issues they were being affected by, possibly influenced by internalised comparisons to their own experiences with the more restrictive laws. As a result of internalised oppression from having experienced stricter restrictions, some of the social worker participants experience negative responses to displays of agency by younger women, particularly when it violates societal traditions and customs. Thus, the reduced agency afforded to the social worker participants contributed to internalised oppression of young women in the study. This study also highlights the internalisation of sociocultural regulations such as customs and traditions in Saudi Arabia. As these attitudes are formed on the societal level, we can assume that these attitudes may be replicated across other areas of social work in Saudi Arabia that deal with women.

This result is a particularly notable finding in the present study as it

highlights the need for the introduced of a code of ethics into the social work profession in Saudi Arabia. Prejudices and biased attitudes some of the social workers had towards younger participants appeared to further be a contributing factor to strong feelings of indifference expressed by student participants when questioned on the role social workers could play in helping with social issues. Student participants felt scrutinised and fearful of talking about problems, most notably, they did not want to be blamed for having become victims of cybercrime. Upholding ethical standards is of critical importance in social work, ensuring that social workers do not play a role in contributing to the difficulties faced by individuals experiencing sensitive social issues, but currently this is not possible in Saudi Arabia

In addition to this, there were contrasting opinions about female agency between the students and the social worker participants. Although several of the social worker responses indicated that they felt legislative changes were enough to empower young women to have more agency and confront issues that were happening to them, this was disputed by the student participants, who still felt that they were restricted and limited by societal norms. In

Stereotypes position Saudi women as ‘submissive’ (Hoza, 2018), and the male guardianship system has positioned women as needing the protection and approval of a male guardian (Weiner, 2020). Thus, using positioning theory (Moghaddam and Harre, 2010), The researcher can theorise that some of the participants might have

positioned themselves in a sociocultural context that has historically expected women to the be restricted to the household (Wheeler, 2020). However, the changes introduced by Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia have given women more freedom and greater levels of social mobility. Controversial aspects of Saudi Arabian society such as the male guardianship system have been altered, and it is within the context of these changes that young women are situated. These results offered a valuable insight into the value differences between social workers and young female students in the Saudi Arabian context. Fewer of the social worker participants than expected were aware of the unique needs faced by the younger generation, and many of the respondents tended to believe that young women were prone to being ‘idealistic’ or ‘impulsive’. Some of the student participants themselves also mentioned that teenagers were ‘reckless’ and less aware of repercussions than adults. Although Saudi Arabia has seen changes in several of Hofstede and Bond’s (1984) cultural dimensions, one that has remained on the higher end of the spectrum is power distance, indicating that this is an area of Saudi Arabian society that needs greater attention. As a result of this high-power distance, social worker participants, being the more senior in the social relationship, may believe that they are in the position to comment on their attitudes towards the behaviour of young female students. Likewise, young female students may also feel aware of their own position being seen as lower, in relation to older authority figures such as social workers,

family, teachers, and doctors.

In addition to this, the study further supported the idea that the male guardianship system was potentially harmful for young women, who, have been identified in studies (Alaoui et al., 2017) to be shifting away from collectivism and towards individualism. Many questions of female agency were raised from the results of the present study, and the student participants lamented their limited agency when compared to young male counterparts. This study contributes to concerns over the legal interpretation of the male guardianship system, as, rather than protecting young women from potential harm, it appears to be contributing to harm by providing a barrier to seeking out information or help for social issues or complicated circumstances. The male guardianship system has positioned women as needing the protection and approval of a male guardian (Weiner, 2020), which is at odds with the increasing levels of individualism in the country. The guardianship system has only recently been amended to reduce its limitations from life to over the age of 18, however, it is evident that the need to seek approval for basic tasks such as traveling, attend university, marry, or receive medical care has likely contributed to young women choosing to remain silent instead of sharing any social concerns.

There was also evidence to suggest that legal protections and the lifting of social restrictions were not deterring young men from engaging in potentially harmful behaviours against women. Some of the social

worker respondents noted that they had received reactions from young men when they were out driving, despite the fact that it is now legal for women to drive in Saudi Arabia (Wheeler, 2020). This confirms Hoza's (2018) argument that the increased social mobility of women may have made them more vulnerable to harmful behaviour by men, due to associations drawn between the lifting of social restrictions and Western ideas of feminism. This is certainly an important point to consider, as any interventions need to be appropriate for the context in which they occur. Any interventions that address the status and mobility of women in Saudi Arabia must consider the importance of the Islamic religion in Saudi Arabia, whilst equally ensuring that women feel empowered and that they have agency. It was evident in the results of the study that the complex intersection of religion, culture and tradition and a rapidly changing society were proving to be difficult to manage in the Saudi Arabian context.

The findings further revealed that many of the concerns the participants had about cybercrime experiences were related to other societal factors, particularly the societal restrictions placed on women in Saudi Arabia, and the culture of shame. The most pertinent finding across the dataset was the communicative difficulties between young women and their families. Despite legal protections and the removal of certain restrictions on women, the results of the study showed that the student participants were deeply fearful of being shamed by family members or wider society, whereas the social worker participants

provided responses that suggested they felt women were now more empowered and able to confront issues without fear of shame. Thus, despite the empowerment of women largely being seen as a positive step forward for Saudi Arabia (Hoza, 2018), the findings of this study indicate that it has not been without complications.

As the status of women in Saudi Arabia has changed in recent years, evidenced by increased social mobility and empowerment, in some cases, this has been accompanied by a greater vulnerability to gender motivated abuse and crime (Hoza, 2018). Additionally, even if society has changed and greater legal protections have been introduced, women who experienced the previous era of social restrictions may still identify with that lifestyle and find it hard to accept the sweeping changes that the country has undertaken.

These examples further show how cultural stereotype and feminist theory intersect in this analysis section. Women and men have previously occupied different positions in Saudi Arabian society, influenced by social, cultural, and religious factors. There were contradicting viewpoints on whether recent legislative changes were enough to challenge the strong influence of sociocultural norms and traditions. In addition to this, the results of the study indicated that many of these difficulties with navigating tradition and modernisation appeared to be very keenly felt by the young female participants. As was mentioned in the results sections, many of the social worker participants engaged in victim blaming, particularly in relation to ideas

of the age (interpreted to equate immaturity or lack of awareness) of the young female students. They also appeared to demonstrate internalised oppression (Taylor, 2020), as there is a strong culture of both shame and blame in Saudi Arabia. Feminist theory stipulates that women are particularly vulnerable to elements of victim blaming as due to internalised stereotypes that have been shaped by these aspects of Saudi Arabian culture. This was one of the most concerning findings when it came to the state of social work in Saudi Arabian society, as it indicates that there is a lack of empathy on the part of the social workers.

As has been stated by Marganski (2020), crimes that occur online are often the result of existing offline dynamics, and the results showed a worrying trend in the attitudes the social workers adopted towards young women. The lack of an established ethical code for social workers in Saudi Arabia is evidently a necessity, as many of the ethical practices outlined, for example, in the BASW Code of Ethics, have been in place since 1975 (British Association of Social Workers, 2021). The social workers did not appear to take the potentially damaging impacts of cybercrime seriously in the study, so it is hard to assess whether they are capable of taking other types of interpersonal crimes seriously either. The social workers evidently were affected by other factors that were outside of their control, such as administrative and managerial barriers in delivering effective service, however, many of these difficulties are characteristic of social work in general. Hence, the

bigger concern identified in the results from the present study was the lack of a professional governing body, the lack of specialist training for social workers, and the possibility that social work education in Saudi Arabia was not preparing social workers for developing empathetic and professional relationships with the individuals that they work with.

A study by Albrithen and Briskman (2015) had touched upon many of these issues, finding that despite ethical practices being foundational to professional social work practice, ideas that the expansion of the social work profession in Saudi Arabia was threatening local values, customs, and traditions was threatening the ability for the profession to develop, and additionally, as of the time of writing this present study almost a decade later, it is still evident that there is no desire to introduce a code of ethics for more robust standards of social work delivery. Although social work in Saudi Arabia is aligned with Islamic values, such as charitable giving to those who are less fortunate, traditional ideas of family values and maintaining problems within the familial unit appear to be hindering the development of social work in the country. This study confirmed earlier findings by Althumali (2021), who found that social workers in educational settings were largely expected to handle academic affairs that could prevent students from completing their chosen degrees.

However, these findings speak for a gap in the current social work provision in Saudi Arabia. Social workers are confined to specific settings (e.g., educational institutions and hospitals), and could benefit

from better integration into the wider system of healthcare provision, or embedded into local authorities in a similar way to how social work operates in the United Kingdom. Although student participants had noted that they had sought out the assistance of social workers in the educational setting, they reported that social workers were either unavailable to help, or, that when they were available, it was through sharing the confidential information of other cases with the students. One potential avenue for developing social work in Saudi Arabia further could be by integrating social work with the strong ideas of community cohesion in the country. Young women may not feel comfortable seeking out social workers in the academic setting for issues that go beyond academic concerns, due to fears of confidentiality not being maintained. Integration of social workers on the local, community level can assist in building their positive reputation amongst communities, as well as alleviate some of the fears outlined by Albrithen and Briskman (2015), such as concerns that social workers were disrupting local community values and taking the place of community leaders. There appeared to be no unified understanding of social work, including from the social workers themselves, and the students in the study who were studying social work identified that they did not know was it was until they started their courses. This highlights the need for a greater societal level understanding of the role of social workers, that could be brought about by greater integration with local communities. Additionally, it was

evident that the social work profession in Saudi Arabia needs to shift its focus away from research, and more towards practice. The reasoning for this is that in the study by Almaizar and Abdelhamed (2018) discussed in the literature review, the distribution of social work research was not proportionate across different vulnerable groups in a society, with an overwhelming focus on professional practices in social work.

Another key factor to consider in how these findings could be applied to other areas of Saudi Arabian society is understanding that social work is largely understood to be a profession for women in Saudi Arabia (Alharji, 2020). Despite this, the results of the present study indicated that the social worker participants engaged in victim blaming based on stereotypes of Saudi women, thus appearing to embody elements of internalised oppression. It is evident from studies such as Hoza (2018) that adopting a feminist approach to this issue from a Western framework could cause problematic for the sociocultural context of Saudi Arabia, where Islamic and Arabic values are the cornerstone of almost every aspect of society. However, it is evident that women in particular represent a vulnerable group in Saudi Arabian society, as corroborated by the findings of the present study. Thus, there is a need for social workers who are specialised in the specific area of women, as it was clear from the social worker participants that they too had experienced gender-based discrimination or stereotyping on the basis of being women. Additionally, where some of the participants did not

mention specific incidents that had happened to them personally, a large majority of the participants made mention of the experiences of other women (e.g., friends or family) who had experienced some form of harm on restriction on the basis of their gender. This therefore highlights the needs for a social work sector that provides specialised services for women, where they can feel safe and that their confidentiality will be maintained. Hoza (2018) and others have suggested that some women in Saudi Arabia may prefer gender segregated spaces, as they may feel safer. Therefore, providing specialised social work services that handle challenges exclusive to women may enable women who are afraid of coming forwards to feel safer and more able to get the necessary support to improve their situations.

CHAPTER 6- CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter of the thesis will be structured as follows. It will begin by outlining some of the key findings of the research, such as the need for a robust ethical framework in the social work profession in Saudi Arabia, and the implementation of continuous professional training for social workers. Following on from this, the implications of the new knowledge generated by the present study will be discussed in greater detail. The results of this study found that despite having features that were characteristic of social work around the world (e.g., staff shortages, bureaucratic issues), social work in Saudi Arabia was being negatively impacted by the lack of a code of ethics. Social workers contributed to the problems experienced by young women by stereotyping them and blaming them for their situation, and in turn, young women felt that they did not trust social workers and were additionally afraid that their confidentiality would be breached. Despite these findings, the results of the study indicate that the social work system can be improved in Saudi Arabia following a list of recommendations in the next section of this chapter. Finally, the last section will address the limitations of the present study and avenues for further study.

6.2 Contributions to Research

One of the most surprising new contributions made by the present

study is the significant ethical breaches identified by the students or committed by the social workers themselves. Previous qualitative research on topics pertaining to social work in Saudi Arabia have largely focused on the perspectives of the social workers, yet in this study, it was the student perspectives that were particularly revealing. Several student participants made references to occasions where social workers had shared sensitive personal information with a third party, breaching confidentiality. Privacy and confidentiality are core aspects of the social work profession, and form part of the ethical responsibility social workers have with their clients. None of the social workers themselves reported problems with the ethics of the social work profession in Saudi Arabia, but their responses indicated that they had some pre-conceived notions about the young women that they support.

This highlighted the importance of needing to introduce an ethical framework and code of conduct into the social work profession in Saudi Arabia. Social workers made frequent mention of how young women tended to stay silent instead of coming forwards with their problems, however, at the same time, they tended to demonstrate a lack of understanding as to why despite the increased legal protections. This leads into the next contribution made in this study. Although the Saudi Arabian government have been keen to demonstrate the vast social changes happening as a result of Vision 2030, especially in relation to women's empowerment, the results of this study show that

policy changes have not made a difference in the face of strong customs and traditions. This suggests that one of the biggest challenges in the social work profession in Saudi Arabia will be managing the balance between customs and traditions embedded in culture and emerging societal issues.

Another contribution was the finding that new legal protections and the easing of social restrictions have not necessarily made women feel like they have more agency, or are better protected. When discussing how they mitigated cybercrime, the student participants focused on how influencers could help identify cybercriminals, or being aware of cybercrime through communication with other young women. When applied beyond the specific issue of cybercrime, this suggests that young women felt more comfortable in talking to and discussing issues with other young women, rather than going to the authorities and exercising their legal rights. One of the student participants explained that how when a friend of hers went to the police, she wasn't listened to, leading to a continuation of her harassment. The responses from the student participants indicated that rather than feeling empowered, they felt that they could not go to authority figures. They also felt that the legal process would drag out, and that nothing would be done to help them. This therefore contributes to literature that explores the impacts of Saudi Arabia's sweeping social changes.

Another contribution made to the existing research is on the topic of female agency and the empowerment of women in Saudi Arabia. The

social worker participants, having grown up in a societal environment with more restrictions, felt that they had become significantly more empowered with the easing of social restrictions. The social worker participants at times responded that they did not understand why young women were not choosing to take advantage of their legal rights. One of the participants repeated in two different excerpts that she thought young men now had more rights than young women. The student participants did not feel empowered, and they expressed deep feelings of shame and fear of being blamed. What is particularly significant about this finding is that these feelings of shame and fear were mostly coming from the family. In the results from the student participants, there was a greater level of fear leveraged towards family members (particularly the father) than towards criminals. In other words, the students did not seem to be as afraid of becoming victims of cybercrime as they were their families finding out. This finding is surprising, finding that movements to empower women might not be favourably viewed all the time.

This links to the next contribution from the present study. The results showed that due to the complex nature of the status of women in Saudi Arabia, influenced by a mix of religious, cultural, social, and political factors, both the social worker and student participants in the study appeared to exhibit elements of internalised oppression. The social worker descriptions of young women in their responses portrayed them as immature, lacking awareness, reckless, and

emotional. Likewise, the student participants tended to self- identify themselves as vulnerable, feeling that they were hopeless if they faced situations such as cybercrime. These results show how the sociocultural structure of Saudi Arabia may be influencing how women view themselves and other women, again suggesting that any interventions need to take into consideration how to manage harmful or restrictive stereotypes about women in Saudi Arabia.

6.3 Implications for Social work Practice in Saudi Arabia

This research has shown that there are significant issues in the social work profession in Saudi Arabia that need to be addressed for effective social work practice. The results were reflective of the lack of a code of ethics to be followed by social workers to ensure that they are aware of their responsibility and duty of care to their patients. In addition to this, it was evident from the results that there was a need for continued professional training in the social work profession to allow social workers to become informed on new and emerging issues. Furthermore, the social worker participants did not seem to be aware of legislation relating to cybercrime, indicating that there was a significant gap in their professional knowledge, despite cybercrime seeming to be widespread according to the responses. For social work to be able to function effectively in Saudi Arabia, social workers need to participate in continuous training to ensure that they are sufficiently informed to provide social work services. The introduction of a code of conduct will likewise ensure that social workers are respectful of the

needs of vulnerable members of society, rather than contributing to their challenges. Social workers will also need to sure that they are aware of legislation and policy relating to social work, so they are able to advise and support their clients.

6.4 Recommendations for Social work Practice

As has been discussed above, there are several areas where social work could be improved in Saudi Arabia. These will be listed and discussed in more detail below:

- Introduction of a code of conduct/ethics in the social work profession

There is no ethical framework in place in the social work profession in Saudi Arabia, making it difficult to ensure that social workers are operating in a way that is empathetic and sensitive to the complex needs of the individuals or the groups that they support. As there is a strong culture of shame in Saudi Arabia, individuals who do come forwards may already be feeling fearful and vulnerable, necessitating a response that integrates empathy with effective communication. Introducing regulations on accepted social work terminology to refer to vulnerable groups could also ensure that social workers do not invertedly reproduce and participate in harmful stereotypes. The introduction of a code of ethics will also ensure that social workers are made aware of the core values and principles of the social work profession. This code of ethics should be updated regularly, in line with the latest professional guidance and to reflect emerging issues. This code of ethics must be developed in consideration with international

guidelines on best practice, and ensure that social workers are aware of the ethical implication of the role, for example, respecting confidentiality agreements.

- Introduction of a professional social work organisation/body

Social work in Saudi Arabia is currently handled by government industries, and as a result of this, involves large amounts of bureaucracy. There is little collaboration between different government departments nor the police, and this can hinder the effectiveness of social worker's jobs as they need to deal with administrative problems and paperwork. The introduction of a professional social work governing body has several benefits. First, a social work governing body can ensure that the code of ethics is being adhered to, and can provide the relevant updates to the code where necessary. Second, a social work governing body can provide training placements and offer courses for social workers at all level of the profession. It can also play in introducing a standardised entry requirement for social work, ensuring that all qualifying social workers have the necessary skills to be able to work as social workers. Additionally, a social work governing body can ensure that social workers also have somewhere to turn if they experience problems. The introduction of a professional social work body can therefore also ensure that social workers are protected and aware of their rights

- Increase awareness of the role of social workers in the community

Saudi Arabia is a country where the community is valued particularly

highly. For this reason, increasing public awareness of the role social workers can play in the community can help improve the social work profession in Saudi Arabia. Social work is still a relatively new profession in Saudi Arabia, and there is still a general lack of awareness of the role of the social worker. In addition to this, many aspects of social work in other countries such as the UK (e.g., caring for older people) are considered to be the responsibility of the family in Saudi Arabia. This recommendation is intended to ensure that families can have a choice of whether to resolve a situation within the family or with the help of a social worker. In achieving this recommendation, the government could ensure that the role of social workers is well defined and that the public have access to further information or social work services near them. The establishment of a clear definition for the role of social workers could also ensure that social workers are aware of their responsibilities as social workers.

- Introduction of social work specific training/specialisation

The social work profession in Saudi Arabia takes a generalised approach to social work education and does not require social workers to have practice-based skills before qualifying as social workers. Social workers work with some of the most vulnerable groups in society, and for this reason they need to be sensitive and use the most appropriate methods when dealing with each case. Understanding the contextual factors behind each case is important and can make the difference between a social worker making assumptions based on pre-

conceptions and responding in a sensitive and appropriate way to a situation. The Saudi Arabian social care system does not require a social work specific diploma/certification for qualification as a social worker, and this recommendation suggests for the introduction of social work specific training to ensure that potential social workers are aware of the need to be adaptive to the circumstances of the individuals they support. More practice-based training and assessment can also ensure that social workers are assessed before they qualify as social workers, as well as expose them to social work in a real-life environment.

- Inclusion of social media-based cybercrimes in the ACCL

Saudi Arabia's Anti-Cyber Crime Law is currently very limited in scope when it comes to definitions of cybercrime. Many of the interpersonal 'crimes in the machine' cybercrimes identified in Phillips et al.'s (2022) taxonomy are currently not stipulated as forms of cybercrime in the law. It appears evident that many Saudi Arabian individuals are also falling victim to financially based cybercrimes on social media platforms, as well as becoming victim to interpersonal cybercrimes such as cyberbullying, online harassment, and trolling. Where some of these crimes are recognised under the Anti-Harassment Law, the ACCL needs to be updated to reflect the more sophisticated nature of cybercrime on social media. Saudi level of internet penetration and social media usage has increased significantly in the past decade, and the legislation is currently outdated, having not been updated since

2015. Social media platforms and online shopping have since then become much more popular, putting more individuals at risk to social media-based cybercrimes. The legislation currently still makes vague mention of ‘computers’ and ‘information networks’, necessitating an update that stipulates that reflects the increase of social media-based cybercrime, especially those of an interpersonal nature. The law does not currently make any specific mention of widespread digital technology such as smartphones or social media. In addition to this, the focus in the legislation is on identity theft or illegal access of data for financially motivated purposes, and does not include identity theft or illegal access of data for psychosocial motivations such as defamation, or to humiliate. Introduction of specialist social work services for women

Women have been identified to be a particularly vulnerable group in Saudi Arabian society, despite the lifting of social restrictions and enhanced legal protections. Due to deeply embedded cultural stereotypes of women and expectations of how women should behave or dress, combined with the male guardianship system, women may find it particularly difficult to seek help for any issues they are experiencing, especially when these issues may violate societal norms. Therefore, it is recommended that the social work sector in Saudi Arabia introduce social work services that are specifically tailored to the needs of women, to allow them to feel as they have a greater agentic role, and are able to take care of any issues they may

come across with a trusted professional. This would also necessitate the training of social workers in issues that are more frequently faced by women in Saudi Arabia, such as sexual harassment, feelings of shame and fear, and difficulties with communicating with their husbands for fear of further repercussions such as blame

- Modernisation of the social work profession

The social work profession in Saudi Arabia is relatively new, and appears underequipped to deal with the emerging challenges posed by a rapidly changing Saudi Arabian society. Where many of the changes stipulated in Vision 2030 have been geared towards diversifying the economy and adopting a more moderate form of Islam, some of the more drastic changes introduced by Vision 2030 have faced difficulties in acceptance. The social work sector in Saudi Arabia is in need or a realignment with some of the changes that have occurred in Saudi Arabian society, in order to bring itself in line with these changes. Emerging challenges need to be understood and integrated into the social work profession, along with the input of both social workers and the individuals that they work with. Social work need to be taken seriously as a profession, and needs to evolve along with Saudi Arabian society.

6.5 Limitations and Further Study

There were some limitations to the present study. First, the questions for the interviews took a strong focus on cybercrime due to the initial set of research questions, however, the research focus was shifted

during the process of the study. During the course of the study, the focus was shifted away from solely cybercrime as some of the issues with social work were identified. It was clear through the initial data collection process that some of the responses were identifying problems with social work and challenges in Saudi Arabian society that went beyond cybercrime alone. This meant that the data could have been improved to make for a more robust dataset. Second, not all of the participants were studying social work. To allow for a more robust interpretation of the data, as well as understanding how social work is being understood and taught in the Saudi Arabian context the study could have improved with more students who had direct knowledge of the social work practice. It became clear in the study that there were serious issues in the social work sector in Saudi Arabia, and as the dataset had a more distinct focus on cybercrime, it would have been better if there was an opportunity to collect data related to some of the key issues such as ethical concerns and the lack of professional regulations in the social work sector in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, In Saudi Arabia, social science disciplines, especially social work, have not been sufficiently investigated and advanced through academic research. Consequently, aspects of social work practice require more focused attention in order to be better understood.

6.6 Recommendation for further research

After the changes made to the study to explore in greater depth the agency of young women, it became evident that this was an avenue of

enquiry that could provide a valuable insight into the cultural landscape of Saudi Arabia for young women today. Many existing studies on feminism and the status of women in Saudi Arabia have largely focused on social restrictions and aspects such as dress codes and driving, however, few have explored the topic from a perspective that integrates the changes made by Vision 2030. Exploring how the growing individualism of young women and their potential for adopting more globalised mindsets through increased social media use in relation to feelings of agency could be an interesting future topic for discussion. The results of this study offered a glimpse into the changing landscape of Saudi Arabia as it seeks to achieve the goals of Vision 2030.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Female Social Worker's Demographic Information

Appendix B: Students' Demographic Information

Appendix C: Ethical Approval letter

Appendix D: Consent Form

Appendix E: Participants Information Leaflet S

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Appendix G: Interview guide for S

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Appendix I: Anti Cyber-Crime Law

Appendix A: Female Social Worker's Demographic Information

Participant	Academic Qualifications	Training in social work	Type of work	Years of Experience	Cybercrime experience	College name	Department
ALAA	BA & MA (Social Work)	Self-directed training	Administrative & Research for social work	12	-	Arts	-
RADWA	BA (Social Work)	Deanship skills development	Administrative (student affairs)	27	Daughter and I defrauded	Arts	-
NADA	MA (Social Work)	Social work training	Administrative & social service practice	12	Young sister defrauded	Arts	-
DUHA	BA & MA (Psychological Counselling)	Training in psychosocial therapy	Administrative (student affairs)	12	-	Education	Education

DALAL	BA (Social work)	On job training	Direct social work practice & Research	21	Dealt with victim of online fraud	Applied Sciences	-
MAHA	BA (Social work)	On job training	Administrative, research, social service practice	11	-	-	-
SANA	BA (Social Work)	Social work training, self-development	Direct social work practice (training students	10	-	-	Guidance Counselling (Student Affairs
LAYLA	BA (Social Work)	Pre-service training	Administrative and management	10	-	Applied Studies & Community Service	-

MONA	MA (Social Work)	Pre-service & self-development	Direct social work, training students and research	10	Defrauded through social media	-	Guidance Counselling (Student Affairs
MALAK	BA (Social work)	Pre-service training	Administrative & direct social work practice	11	Dealt with victims of hacking	Applied Studies & Community Service	-
NOOR	BA (Social Work)	Training through self-development	Administrative & social work practice	9	-	Faculty of Pharmacy	-
SHAZA	BA (Social Work)	Pre-serving training	Social work & Guidance and Counselling	10	-	Science	-

AMAL	BA (social work)	On-job training	Direct social work practice	10	-	Computer &Information Sciences	-
NAYA	MA (Social Work)	Pre-service training	Administrative, Research, social work	10	-	-	Student Affairs
JOLEEN	BA, MA (Social Work), PhD (Sociology)	Career growth training	Social work & administrative work	12	Had a friend who was a victim of fraud	Arts	-

Appendix B: Students' Demographic Information

Student	**Age (years)**	**Marital status**	**College and Department**	**Level (Semester)**	**Region**	**Cybercrime experience**
NORA	23	Single	College of Arts - Social Work Department	Fifth	Riyadh	Sister duped into extortion
SARA	23	Single	College of Arts - Social Work Department	Last	Riyadh	Exposed to scamming
LANA	22	Single	College of Arts - Social Work Department	Last	Al-Qassim	-
TALA	20	Single	College of Arts – Media Department	Fourth	Riyadh	Exposed to scamming
TOGA	19	Single	College of Arts – Sociology Department	Fifth	South side	-
MAI	19	Single	College of Arts - Social Work Department	Fourth	Riyadh	-
LAMA	19	Married	College of Arts - Social Work Department	Third	Riyadh	Friend's image smeared
RAHAF	20	Single	College of Arts – Sociology Department	Fifth	Al-Qassim	-

LULU	19	Single	College of Arts - Social Work Department	Fifth	Riyadh	-
RAWAN	22	Single	College of Arts - Social Work Department	Seventh	Najd	-
FARAH	19	Single	College of Arts - Social Work Department	Fifth	Riyadh	Exposed to Hacking
REEM	27	Married	College of Linguistics – English	Sixth	Khobar	-
LEENA	21	Single	College of Arts – media Department	Fourth	Riyadh	-
SAHAR	20	Single	College of Arts - Social Work Department	Seventh	Riyadh	-
JASMINE	22	Single	College of Arts - Social Work Department	Last	Riyadh	-

Appendix C: Ethical Approval letter

15/07/2024, 11:04

Application for Ethical Review ERN_21-0355

Susan Cottam (Research Support Services) <s.l.cottam@bham.ac.uk>

Wed 25/08/2021 14:42

To:Tarsem Cooner (Social Work and Social Care) <T.S.Cooner@bham.ac.uk>

Cc:Tarfa Aldoweekh (PhD Soc Work + Soc Care FT) <TMA808@student.bham.ac.uk>;Joy Fillingham (Department of Social Work & Social Care) <J.Fillingham@bham.ac.uk>

Dear Dr Cooner

Re: "Cybercrimes against Females: A Scrutiny of Social workers' Role in Saudi Arabia"
Application for Ethical Review ERN_21-0355

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project, which was reviewed by the

Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.

On behalf of the Committee, I confirm that this study now has full ethical approval.

I would like to remind you that any substantive changes to the nature of the study as described in the Application for Ethical Review, and/or any adverse events occurring during the study should be promptly brought to the Committee's attention by the Principal Investigator and may necessitate further ethical review.

Please also ensure that the relevant requirements within the University's Code of Practice for Research and the information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (available at https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support- Group/Research-Ethics/Links-and-Resources.aspx) are adhered to and referred to in any future applications for ethical review. It is now a requirement on the

revised application form (https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-Forms.aspx) to confirm that this guidance has been consulted and is understood, and that it has been taken into account when completing your application for ethical review.

Please be aware that whilst Health and Safety (H&S) issues may be considered during the ethical review process, you are still required to follow the University's guidance on H&S and to ensure that H&S risk assessments have been carried out as appropriate. For further information about this, please contact your School H&S representative or the University's H&S Unit at healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

Kind regards

Susan Cottan

Tel: 0121 414 8825

Email: s.l.cottam@bham.ac.uk

Appendix D: Consent Form



Consent Form

Title of the proposed study **Investigating cybercrime amongst female students in Saudi Arabia and identifying how social work can respond to the challenges.** This research project investigates how female students may become victims of cybercrime and the role of social workers in responding to cybercrime against female students in Saudi Arabia. The researcher undertaking this study is a PhD student, and will produce published and oral academic work exploring the findings of the research. The information which you supply and that which may be collected as part of the research project will be stored on a secure University computer system or personal password protected laptop and/or encrypted USB of the researcher. The data will only be accessed by authorized personnel involved such as the researcher and/or the supervisors. Personal information

such as name and contact details (i.e., email /Microsoft ID) etc will not be shared by the researcher with anyone. This information is only collected by the researcher for the purposes of contacting the participants for collecting data or sharing the findings of this study. The information will be retained by the University of Birmingham and will only be used for the agreed research purposes. By supplying this information, you are consenting to the University storing your information for the purposes stated above. The information will be processed by the University of Birmingham in accordance with the provisions of the UK Data Protection Act 1998. The researcher will ensure the confidentiality of the data during collection, storage and analysis. Personal information such as name and contact etc. will be destroyed following transcription of the recorded data. The transcription will be archived in BEAR share system for 10 years before it is destroyed. Data saved will only be accessed by authorized personnel involved namely the researcher with supervision.

Key: ✓ = consent

☐ I have been given a full explanation of the project and I have read and understood the information given to me above.

☐ I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study with the interviewer and have understood

the advice and information given to me.

☐ I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand this participation and answering any question is completely voluntarily in this study.

☐ I understand that I can decline answering question without giving any explanation to the researcher of this study.

☐ I understand that I can withdraw my consent any time before 2nd of January 2022 when data analysis begins, the data will be destroyed.

- ☐ I understand that I can withdraw my consent any time before 2nd of January 2022 when data analysis begins, the data will be destroyed.
- ☐ I am aware that the interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. I understand that if I do not wish to be recorded, I can inform the researcher.
- ☐ I am willing for the researcher to use the results of my participation in the study but not my name or anything that could identify me.
- ☐ I understand that I can ask for further instructions or explanations about the research at any time.
- ☐ I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study without having to give a reason.
- ☐ I understand that during the project, all data will be stored in a secure location and accessed only by the researcher and/or supervisors.
- ☐ I understand that the audio data will be securely disposed of after the completion of this study, and I will not be identifiable in any remaining data.
- ☐ I understand that the researcher may be required to report any issues that may raise concerns of significant harm. I agree that such harm annuls the principle of confidentiality.
- ☐ I understand that outcomes of the research will be published in a PhD thesis, academic conferences, journals and other academic outputs.

Name, signature and date
Name of participant.....
Date..... Signature.....
Name of researcher: Tarfa Aldoweekh
Email: tma808@student.bham.ac.uk
Date: **Signature:**
Supervisors:
Dr Tarsem Singh Cooner
Email: t.s.cooner@bham.ac.uk

Dr Joy Fillingham
Email: j.fillingham@bham.ac.uk

Appendix E: Participants Information Leaflet S



Participant Information Leaflet for female students

Title of the proposed study **Cybercrimes against Females: An exploration of the social workers' Role in Saudi Arabia**

You are invited to take part in a research study being undertaken by a PhD student in social work and social care at the University of Birmingham.

Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you want to take part.

I understand that if I consent, this interview will be audio recorded if

you do not want to being recording the researcher will take a note.

Please bear in mind that, following the data collection, you have up to 2nd January 2022 to decide whether you want to withdraw from this research study.

The aim of the research to investigate the role of social workers in protecting female student against cybercrime attacks in Saudi Arabia.

Why have you been invited for the interview?

You are invited to take part in this study as you are Female University Student. Your participation will help in exploring the following aspects: reasons behind cybercrime against women in Saudi Arabia and the role of social workers to solve this issue. You can decline to answer any question or withdraw from this interview before the 2nd of January 2022.

What would you experience in the study?

If you choose to take part in the study, you will need to tell the researcher a suitable time to book a hall in the university to do the interview. In case the Covid-19 restrictions remain, you will be asked

to be part of an online interview that can be stored in either BEAR Research Data Share or personal password-protected laptop and/or encrypted USB of the researcher. The duration of the interview will be approximately 60 minutes. Your participation in interviews is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time during the data collection session. You can seek further clarification from the researcher if there is anything that you do not understand prior to participating. You will be audio recorded during the research where the recordings will be destroyed after transcribing the data. If you disagree to be

recording, notes will be taken. The researcher of this study will know the identity of the participants but will not disclose this to anyone else.

Anonymity the researcher will ensure that pseudonyms will be used throughout and in demographic table and findings section so that the participants personal information should not be traceable for anyone. The participants can withdraw from this study before the 2nd of January 2022 which is the date after which analysis of the data will take place and then researcher will ensure that they securely destroy field notes and audio

How Your data Will be Used

The data collected will be analysed to develop my research findings. However, the data collected will be stored on either BEAR Research Data System (RDS) or a personal password-protected laptop /encrypted USB of the researcher. Only the researcher and the supervisors will have access to the data which will be stored securely and will be disposed of after the completion of the study. Personal information such as names and contacts (i.e., email/skype ID/Microsoft ID) etc will not be shared by the researcher with anyone. This is only collected by the researcher with the purpose of contacting participants for either collecting data or sharing the findings of this study.

Will you be paid for participating in the research?

No payment will be made for taking part in the research. Participants will not incur any costs in the taking part and will be provided with an outline of the findings.

Will the outcome of research be published?

The outcome of research be published in a PhD thesis, academic conferences, journals and other academic outputs.

Contact for further information:

PGR: Tarfa Aldoweekh

Email: tma808@student.bham.ac.uk

Supervisors:
Dr Tarsem Singh Cooner
Email: t.s.cooner@bham.ac.uk
Dr Joy Fillingham
Email: j.fillingham@bham.ac.uk

Appendix F: Participants Information Leaflet SW



Participant Information Leaflet for female social workers

Title of the proposed study **Cybercrimes against Females: An exploration of the Social workers' Role in Saudi Arabia**

You are invited to take part in a research study being undertaken by a PhD student in social work and social care at the University of Birmingham.

Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you want to take part.

I understand that if I consent, this interview will be audio recorded if you do not want to being recording the researcher will take a note.

Please bear in mind that, following the data collection, you have up to 2nd January 2022 to decide whether you want to withdraw from this research study.

The aim of the research to investigate the role of social workers in protecting female student against cybercrime attacks in Saudi Arabia.

Why have you been invited for the interview?

You are invited to take part in this study as you are Female social workers. Your participation will help in exploring the following aspects: social workers who can suggest what initiatives are required to improve their performance with respect to prevent/tackle cybercrime prevail among Saudi females. You can decline to answer

any question throughout the interview and end the interview at any time. Participants can withdraw from the research up until before the 2nd of January 2022 when the researcher analyses the data.

What would you experience in the study?

If you choose to take part in the study, you will need to tell the researcher a suitable time to book a hall in the university to do the interview or prefer to do it in your office. In case the Covid-19 restrictions remain, you will be asked to be part of an online interview that can be stored in either BEAR Research Data Share or personal password-protected laptop and/or encrypted USB of the researcher. The duration of the interview will be approximately 60 minutes. Your participation in interviews is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time during the data collection session. You can seek further clarification from the researcher if there is anything that you do

not understand prior to participating. You will be audio recorded during the research where the recordings will be destroyed after transcribing

the data. If you disagree to be recording, notes will be taken. The researcher of this study will know the identity of the participants but will not disclose this to anyone else.

Anonymity The researcher will ensure that pseudonyms will be used throughout and in demographic table and findings section so that the participants personal information should not be traceable for anyone. The participants can withdraw from this study before the 2nd of January 2022 which is the date of analysis of the data will take place and then researcher will ensure that they securely destroy field notes and audio

How Your data Will be Used

The data collected will be analysing to develop my research findings. However, the data collected will be stored on either BEAR share system or personal password protected laptop /encrepted USB of researcher. Only researcher and the supervisor will have access to the data which will be stored securely and will be disposed after the completion of the study.Personal information such as name and contact (i.e., email/skype ID/Microsoft ID) etc will not be shared by researcher with anyone. This is only collected by researcher with the purpose of contacting with participants for either collecting data or sharing the findings of this study.

Will you be paid for participating in the research?

No payment will be made for taking part of the research. Participants will not incur any costs in talking part and will be provided with an outline of the findings.

Will the outcome of research be published?

The outcome of research be published in a PhD thesis, academic conferences, journals and other academic outputs

Contact for further information:

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Appendix G: Interview guide for S

interview guide for female students

Demographic information

Age:

☐18 -20

☐ 21-23

☐ 24-26

☐ 27 and above

Marital status:

☐ single ☐ Married ☐ Divorce

☐ Separated ☐ Widow

☐ Prefer not to say

College:

……..

Department:

…….

Level you are in?

☐ foundation 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

GPA:

☐ 0-1

☐ 1-2

☐ 2-3

☐ 3-4

☐ 4-5

Which region of Saudi Arabia do you came from?

…….

In which district of Riyadh do you currently reside?

……

1. **Perspective on Cybercrime**

1.1. From your perspective, how do you define a cybercrime?
1.2. In your opinion, with the spread of technology, how easy or difficult do you think it is to be exposed to a cybercrime?
1.3. What do you think motivates cybercrime?

2. Factors that impact Cybercrime

2.1. In your opinion, does using online means to do things like studying, researching, etc. makes it easy to exposure to a cybercrime?
2.2. Do you see a relationship between unemployment and cybercrime? (If so, why do you think this is?

3. Female and Cybercrimes

3.1. In your opinion, does being a female makes you more vulnerable to Cybercrime?
3.2. From your experiences, does exposing your social media profile to the public makes a female easier target for cybercrime? Do you think this is motivated by any specific factors(s)?

4. Female students and social workers

4.1. From your perspective, how do you define social workers? do you know about their role in your college?
4.2. With relation to cybercrime, what role would the social worker play to tackle/prevent it? How do you think they can support? How do you think they can support? Can they limit amount of cybercrime?

What might prevent you from discussing or sharing a cybercrime that you experienced with a social worker, family member or the wider society?

Appendix H: Interview guide for SW

interview guide for social workers

Demographic information

Are you qualified Social Work?.....

Are you undertaking training to be a qualified social worker?.....

Does your work involve

☐ **Administration**

☐ **Research**

☐ **Direct practice**

☐ **Other areas you wish to include**

Department: ……

Year of experience: ……

☐ **1-5**

☐ 6-10

☐ 11-15

☐ 16-20

☐ 21 and above

Which area of Saudi Arabia are you from:

……..

Which area from Saudi Arabia you came from

…….

1. **Perspective on Cybercrime**

1.1. From your perspective, how do you define a cybercrime?

1.2. In your opinion, with the spread of technology, how easy/difficult to fall for a cybercrime?

1.3. What do you think motivates cybercrime?

2. **Factors that cause Cybercrime**

2.1. How do you think that current online technologies impact upon cybercrime in a university setting?

2.2. In your opinion, how effective is the existing social policy in terms of preventing cybercrime? Can things be improved and in what ways?

3. Role of Social Workers and Cybercrimes

3.1. In your opinion, what role do you play in preventing/tackling cybercrime?
3.2. Do you believe that the legal and social limitations placed upon Saudi woman puts them at greater risk be becoming victims of cybercrime?
3.3. What do you think, are the motivating factors of students having public social media profile?
3.4. From your experiences, how does having a public social media profile as a Saudi female impact on becoming a target for cybercrime?
3.5. From your experience, what are the nature of cases that you face with relation to cybercrime? How frequent are these cases?
3.6. What might prevent or encourage a female student from discussing or sharing a cybercrime that she experienced with a social worker, family member or the wider society?
3.7. From your perspective, how different are cybercrime-related cases in comparison to other cases that you deal with it as a social worker?
3.8. Do you take any different measures when dealing with cybercrime cases?
3.9. With relation to cybercrime, as a social worker, what do you see as your obligations to inform a victim's or potential victim's parents or family about a particular incident? What prevents or encourages you to do so?

Appendix I: Anti- Cyber Crime Law



شـعبـة الـتـرجـمـة الرسـمـيـة
Official Translation Department

Anti-Cyber Crime Law

Royal Decree No. M/17
March 27, 2007

Translation of Saudi Laws

NOTE:

The translation of Saudi laws takes the following into consideration:

- Words used in the singular form include the plural and vice versa.
- Words used in the masculine form include the feminine.
- Words used in the present tense include the present as well as the future.
- The word "person" or "persons" and their related pronouns (he, his, him, they, their, them) refer to a natural and legal person.

Anti-Cyber Crime Law

Article 1

In this Law, the following terms shall have the meanings assigned thereto, unless the context requires otherwise:

1. **Person**: Any natural or corporate person, whether public or private.
2. **Information System**: A set of programs and devices designed to manage and process data, including computers.
3. **Information Network**: An interconnection of more than one computer or information system to obtain and exchange data, e. g. Local Area Network (LAN), Wide Area Network (WAN), and the World Wide Web (Internet).
4. **Data**: Information, commands, messages, voices, or images which are prepared or have been prepared for use in computers. This includes data which can be saved, processed, transmitted, or constructed by computers, such as numbers, letters, symbols, etc.
5. **Computer Programs**: A set of commands and data which contain instructions or applications when run on computers or computer networks and perform required functions.
6. **Computer**: Any electronic device whether movable or fixed, wired or wireless, which is equipped with a system to process, store, transmit, receive, or browse data, and which performs specific functions according to programs and commands.
7. **Unauthorized Access**: The deliberate, unauthorized access of any person to computers, web sites, information systems, or computer networks.
8. **Cyber Crime**: Any act which involves the use of computers or information networks, in violation of the provisions of this Law.
9. **Web Site**: A site providing data on an information network through a specific Uniform Resource Locator (URL).
10. **Reception**: Illegally viewing or obtaining data.

Article 2

This Law aims at combating cybercrimes by identifying such crimes and determining their punishments to ensure the following:

1. Enhancing information security.
2. Protecting rights pertaining to the legitimate use of computers and information networks.
3. Protecting public interest, morals, and common values.
4. Protecting the national economy.

Article 3

Any person who commits any of the following cybercrimes shall be subject to imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year and a fine not exceeding 500,000 riyals, or either penalty:

1. Spying on, or interception or reception of data transmitted through an information network or a computer without legitimate authorization.
2. Unauthorized access with the intention of threatening or blackmailing any person to compel him to take or refrain from taking an action, be it lawful or unlawful.
3. Unauthorized access to a web site, or hacking a web site to change its design, destroy or modify it, or occupy its URL.
4. Invasion of privacy through the misuse of camera-equipped mobile phones and the like.
5. Defamation and infliction of damage upon others through the use of various information technology devices.

Article 4

Any person who commits any of the following cybercrimes shall be subject to imprisonment for a period not exceeding three years and a fine not exceeding 2,000,000 riyals, or either penalty:

1. Acquisition of movable property or bonds for oneself or others or signing such bonds through fraud or the use of a false name or identity.
2. Illegal access to bank or credit data, or data pertaining to the ownership of securities with the intention of obtaining data, information, funds, or services offered.

Article 5

Any person who commits any of the following cybercrimes shall be subject to imprisonment for a period not exceeding four years and a fine not exceeding 3,000,000 riyals, or either penalty:

1. Unauthorized access with the intention of canceling, deleting, destroying, leaking, damaging, altering, or redistributing private data.
2. Causing an information network to halt or breakdown, or destroying, deleting, leaking, damaging, or altering existing or used programs or data.
3. Obstructing access to, distorting, or causing the breakdown of services by any means.

Article 6

Any person who commits any of the following cybercrimes shall be subject to imprisonment for a period not exceeding five years and a fine not exceeding 3,000,000 riyals, or either penalty:

1. The production, preparation, transmission, or storage of material impinging on public order, religious values, public morals, or privacy, through an information network or computer.
2. The construction or publication of a web site on an information network or computer to promote or facilitate human trafficking.
3. The preparation, publication, or promotion of material for pornographic networks or gambling activities which violates public morals.
4. The construction or publication of a web site on an information network or computer to trade, distribute, demonstrate methods of use, or facilitate dealing in narcotic and psychotropic drugs.

Article 6

Any person who commits any of the following cybercrimes shall be subject to imprisonment for a period not exceeding five years and a fine not exceeding 3,000,000 riyals, or either penalty:

1. The production, preparation, transmission, or storage of material impinging on public order, religious values, public morals, or privacy, through an information network or computer.
2. The construction or publication of a web site on an information network or computer to promote or facilitate human trafficking.
3. The preparation, publication, or promotion of material for pornographic networks or gambling activities which violates public morals.
4. The construction or publication of a web site on an information network or computer to trade, distribute, demonstrate methods of use, or facilitate dealing in narcotic and psychotropic drugs.

The sentence may provide for the publication of its summary at the expense of the convicted person in one or more local newspapers or in any other appropriate medium, depending on the type, gravity, and impact of the crime committed, provided that such publication is executed after the judgment becomes final.

Article 7

Any person who commits any of the following cybercrimes shall be subject to imprisonment for a period not exceeding 10 years and a fine not exceeding 5,000,000 riyals, or either penalty:

1. Establishing or publicizing a web site on an information network or computer for terrorist organizations to facilitate communication with the leaders or members of such organizations, finance them, promote their ideologies, publicize methods of making incendiary devices or explosives, or any other means used in terrorist activities.
2. Unauthorized access to a web site or information system directly, or through an information network or computer to obtain data that threatens the internal or external security of the State or its national economy.

Article 8

The imprisonment and the fine may not be less than half the maximum if the crime is coupled with any of the following:

1. The crime is perpetrated through organized crime.
2. The offender holds a public office and the crime perpetrated is related to this office, or the offender perpetrates the crime using his power or influence.
3. The luring and exploitation of minors and the like.
4. The offender has been previously convicted of similar crimes within or outside the Kingdom.

Article 9

Any person who incites, assists, or collaborates with others to commit any of the crimes stipulated in this Law shall be subject to a punishment not exceeding the maximum punishment prescribed for such crimes, if the crime is committed as a result of said incitement, assistance, or collaboration, and he shall be subject to a punishment not exceeding half the maximum prescribed punishment if the intended crime is not committed.

Article 10

Any person who attempts to commit any of the crimes stipulated in this Law shall be subject to a punishment not exceeding half the maximum punishment prescribed for said crimes.

Article 11

The competent court may exempt any offender from such punishments if he informs the competent authority of the crime prior to its discovery and prior to the infliction of damage. If the culprit informs the competent authority after the occurrence of the crime, the exemption from punishment shall be granted if the information he provides eventually leads to the arrest of other culprits (if any) or the seizure of the means used in the commission of the crime.

Article 12

Application of this Law shall not prejudice the provisions of relevant laws, especially those pertaining to intellectual property rights, or relevant international agreements to which the Kingdom is party.

Article 13

Without prejudice to the rights of *bona fide* persons, equipment, software, and means used in perpetrating any of the crimes stipulated in this Law or the proceeds generated therefrom may be confiscated. In addition, the web site or venue where the service is provided may be shut down permanently or temporarily if it is the source for perpetrating the crime and the crime is committed with the owner's knowledge.

Article 14

The Communications and Information Technology Commission, pursuant to its powers, shall provide assistance and technical support to competent security agencies during the investigation of such crimes and during trial.

Article 15

The Bureau of Investigation and Public Prosecution shall carry out the investigation and prosecution of the crimes stipulated in this Law.

Article 16

This Law shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall enter into force 120 days after the date of publication.