

Contribution of Social Work Interventions to Patients' Healthcare Outcomes in Tanzanian Zonal Hospitals: A Biopsychosocial Model Perspective

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Abstract: Social work marked a significant evolution in healthcare, emphasizing holistic care by integrating social, psychological, and biological aspects. This study examined the contributions of social work interventions to patients' healthcare outcomes in Tanzanian zonal hospitals. Objectives included assessing the relevance and impacts of social work interventions in healthcare. The study was guided by the biopsychosocial model, employing a mixed-method approach with a convergent design. A sample of 106 participants (67 doctors, 16 social workers, 5 administrators, and 18 patients) was selected through stratified, simple random, purposive, and convenience sampling. Data collection tools included questionnaires and interview guides. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Results were presented using tables, narratives, themes, and quotations. Necessary permits and informed consent were obtained before data collection. The study revealed that an overwhelming majority of medical doctors (92.2%) acknowledge the importance of integrating social work into healthcare and great majority (87.78%) agree that these interventions significantly improve patient healthcare outcomes. Additionally, key informants (Social workers and Hospital Administrators) confirmed these responses and opined that social work interventions contribute significantly on patients' overall healthcare outcomes. The study concluded that the role of social workers remains vital to holistic healthcare delivery hence recommend continue improvement in social work practices to enhance their contribution to the healthcare outcomes.

Keywords: Social Work, Medical Social Work, Holistic healthcare, Biopsychosocial Model

1.0 Introduction

Concentrating mostly on biomedical determinants as the main drivers of health outcomes, traditional healthcare delivery models sometimes ignore the role of non-medical elements on health outcomes. Still, empirical data shows that non-medical elements including social risk factors and socioeconomic needs have a stronger influence on health outcomes than medical treatment taken by itself (Bako, 2021). Medical social work, one of the main branches of social work profession, is increasingly important in promoting comprehensive and patient-centred care globally whereby Medical social workers also known as hospital social workers plays a vital role by recognizing the interaction between social factors and health outcomes in recent decades (Bell et al., 2020; Bryson and Bosma, 2018; Miller, Glasby, and Dickinson, 2021; Scottish Government and COSLA, 2022).

By adopting a person-in-environment perspective, considering biological, psychological, social, and spiritual domains (Lacks & Lamson, 2018; Dobos et al., 2020), medical social workers offer tailored services including psychosocial and economic assessments, discharge planning, counseling, advocacy, and addressing social determinants of health (Okoye, 2019; Muhingi et al., 2022). Their work goes beyond conventional medical procedures; it provides a safety net for vulnerable people, guides them over the complexity of the healthcare system, and offers emotional support at trying circumstances. Emphasizing the importance of thorough treatment that covers all spheres of a person's life, this holistic approach to healthcare acknowledges the interdependence of many life factors and their effect on general well-being (WHO, 2022).

Tanzania, like many of its neighboring nations, recognizes the importance of integrating social work services into healthcare systems. This integration aims to address not only medical needs but also the social determinants of health, fostering a holistic approach to patient care. However, the role of Medical Social Workers, commonly referred to as hospital social welfare officers remains ambiguous within Tanzanian healthcare settings. Many stakeholders lack a clear understanding of their responsibilities and contributions to healthcare delivery (Muhandiki, 2016). Moreover, there is a scarcity of recent empirical and theoretical research on medical social work practice in Tanzanian hospitals. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the impact of social work interventions in Tanzanian zonal hospitals, highlighting their contributions to patient care and overall healthcare outcomes.

2.0 Theoretical Literature Review

This study was steered by the Biopsychosocial Model of Healthcare, inspired by George L. Engel in 1977 as a whole method to comprehend health and disease. The model posits that a junction of biological, psychological, and social aspects defines both health and disease. Psychological parts of healthcare must first take front stage since physical health is highly influenced by psychological issues including stress, emotions, and mental well-being (John et al., 2019). The strategy also acknowledges the way in which social elements including socioeconomic level, educational background, healthcare access, family support, and cultural background play in health. A person's health as well as their access to necessary medical treatment are much influenced by these factors. Even in the development of medical therapies, the biopsychosocial model helps to take a whole approach including various elements. Emphasizing the concept of tailored treatment, the biopsychosocial model acknowledges that every person's health experiences are shaped by a special combination of psychological, biological, and social elements (Kusnanto et al., 2018). It provides medical and social experts from several backgrounds team-wise great importance and fosters interdisciplinary interaction. This different method guarantees a whole treatment plan addressing all aspect of patients' well-being and helps them to fully grasp their health. Realizing the complex interaction of psychological, biological, and social aspects in health and disease, the biopsychosocial model of healthcare challenges the accepted traditional biomedical paradigm in the end (Khalid & Naz, 2020).

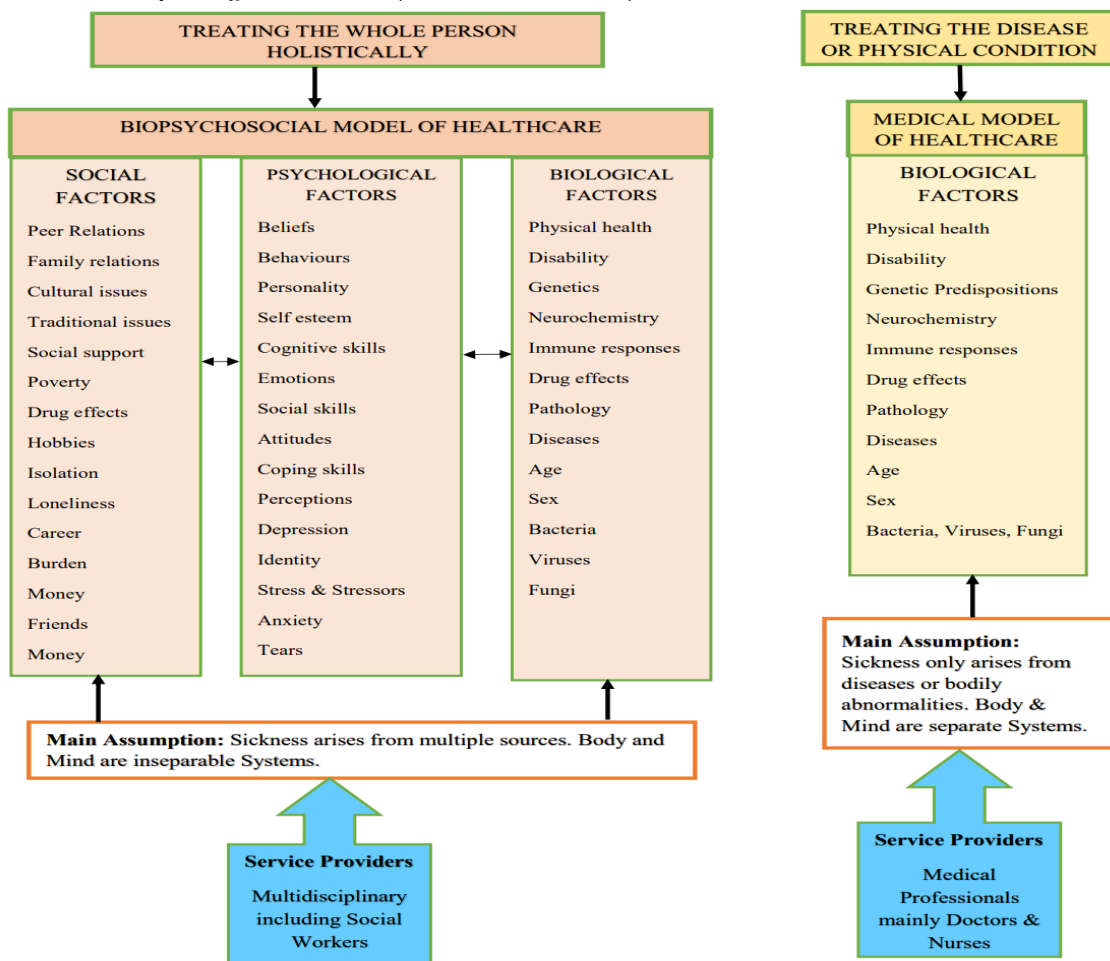


Figure 1: Diagram showing the usefulness of Biopsychosocial Model for holistic Healthcare as opposed by the Medical Model

Source: Modified by the Researcher from Engels, 1977

3.0 Empirical Literature Review

Unlike doctors, social workers have a unique capacity to skilfully address patient social hazards and requirements. Social workers' training and operational practices help them to negotiate the complexity related to social needs. Crucially, social workers approach meeting patients' social needs from several angles including person-in-environment, ecological, and biopsychosocial viewpoints (Bako and Vest, 2019). These approaches concentrate on making sure that services are economically priced, easily available, safe, ethical, grounded in evidence, consistent (PEPFAR, 2020). Supporting different patient groups in several spheres including mental health, addiction, chronic diseases, and geriatric illnesses is mostly dependent on social workers (McGregor et al., 2018). They cover housing problems, financial strains, and a broad range of basic psychological disorders. Social workers assess, provide counselling, help medical interventions, promote health, coordinate care, handle cases, enhance provider-patient relationships, support team-building, and support provider education in primary healthcare environments (Ashcroft et al., 2018).

Light's (2022) conducted a study in Cambodia, specifically focusing on assessing the services offered by social workers within a Cambodian national health centre. Through a combination of open coding of interview transcripts and observational data, the study identified six core responsibilities of medical social workers: information gathering, patient and family education, emotional support and counselling, referrals, discharge planning and linkages, and the provision or coordination of material resources. While Light's (2022) work offers valuable insights into the duties of medical social workers, it does not explore how these roles impact patient health outcomes. (Light, 2022).

In Ontario, Canada, Tadic et al. (2020) looked at how social workers might be included into interprofessional primary healthcare teams. Their study sought to ascertain the degree of social work services provided in Community Health Centres and Family Health Teams. The study found that social work's inclusion increased the spectrum of services offered in primary healthcare, hence enhancing individual and population health outcomes. While highlighting these potential benefits, the study emphasised the necessity for additional data to conclusively demonstrate the relevance of social work services on care processes and patient outcomes (Tadic et al., 2020). In response to Tadic et al.'s (2020) call for further data on the precise influence of social work services on patient outcomes, the present study filled this gap specifically by assessing the effectiveness of various interventions and initiatives designed to enhance patient care and health outcomes.

In Singapore, Noi (2021) examined the development of Social Work in Healthcare, presenting medical social work as an integral and key profession at the forefront of health and social service delivery. While Noi (2021) emphasises the essential role of medical social work in Singapore's healthcare system, a gap was noted in lack of detailed exploration into the specific impact of these interventions on patients' healthcare outcomes. This gap was filled by the current study by involving a comprehensively understanding of how medical social work interventions contribute to and influence the overall health outcomes of patients in the Tanzanian healthcare delivery systems.

Orlu (2021) conducted research on Medical Social Work Practice and Patient Satisfaction at Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital, in Bayelsa. Important results of this study underlined the benefits of multidisciplinary teams in improving patient satisfaction and showed that patients are happy with the services they receive at Niger Delta Teaching Hospital, Bayelsa State, by medical social workers. Although Orlu's (2021) research offers valuable empirical support for the pivotal role medical social workers play in enhancing patient satisfaction within healthcare settings, the findings leave a need for further investigation to gain a granular understanding of specific social work roles and interventions, and how they directly contribute to improved patient health outcomes. Without clearly delineating the precise actions of medical social workers, it remains difficult to definitively assess their impact on patient well-being and overall healthcare outcomes. This study addressed this gap by offering a comprehensive examination of the specific interventions performed by social workers and investigating how these contribute to improving patient health outcomes.

Examining social work practice in the medical contexts of Jimma Medical Centre and Shenen Gibe Hospital in Southwest Ethiopia, Eba et al. (2021) undertook a qualitative, exploratory case study. Deepening knowledge of the tasks and obligations of medical social workers in healthcare environments was one of the main goals of the study. Important results showed that medical social workers actively participated in multidisciplinary healthcare teams to fulfil patient requirements and gave patients vital psychosocial support. To improve their contributions to patient care even more, the study advised the hospitals to support the professional growth of medical social workers. Despite these significant findings, it remains a notable knowledge gap in the literature. The study's findings provided a general overview of the role played by medical social workers and their involvement in multidisciplinary teams to address patients' needs, yet there is a lack of detailed exploration into the specific types of services provided and their direct impact on patients' health outcomes and overall well-being. Therefore, the current study filled this gap by investigating specific services rendered by medical social workers and their related impacts on patient's health outcomes.

Using secondary data to clarify this subfield of social work, Muhingi and Machani (2022) undertook worthwhile research on Medical Social Work in Kenya. Especially in light of Kenya, their study sought to establish the scope, relevance, and value of medical social work. These researchers contended that although medical social work is the most common activity in healthcare environments around the nation, its whole scope and importance are still poorly known and appreciated. The study Emphasized the requirement of extra efforts to pinpoint particular practice environments and expected results of implementing medical social work in Kenya (Muhingi and Machani, 2022). Building upon the conclusions drawn from Muhingi and Machani's (2022) study, which highlighted the inadequate understanding and recognition of medical social work's scope and significance in Kenya, and their recommendation for further research to identify specific practice settings and expected outcomes, the present study filled this knowledge gap. employing a comprehensive approach, incorporating both primary and secondary data, to illuminate the effectiveness of medical social work interventions in promoting patient well-being and improving overall health outcomes within Tanzanian healthcare settings.

4.0 Research Methods

The study combined a quantitative qualitative and approach using a convergent design within a pragmatic philosophical worldview. A total of 106 medical doctors (n=67), social workers (n=16), administrators (n=5), and patients (n=18) from Bugando Medical Centre and Benjamin Mkapa Hospital were recruited using stratified, simple random, purposive, and convenience sampling techniques. Questionnaires, interview guides, and document analyses guides were used for data collection. Descriptive methods were used for quantitative data analysis while qualitative information was subjected to thematic analysis. Findings were compiled in the form of tables, narratives, themes and quotations.

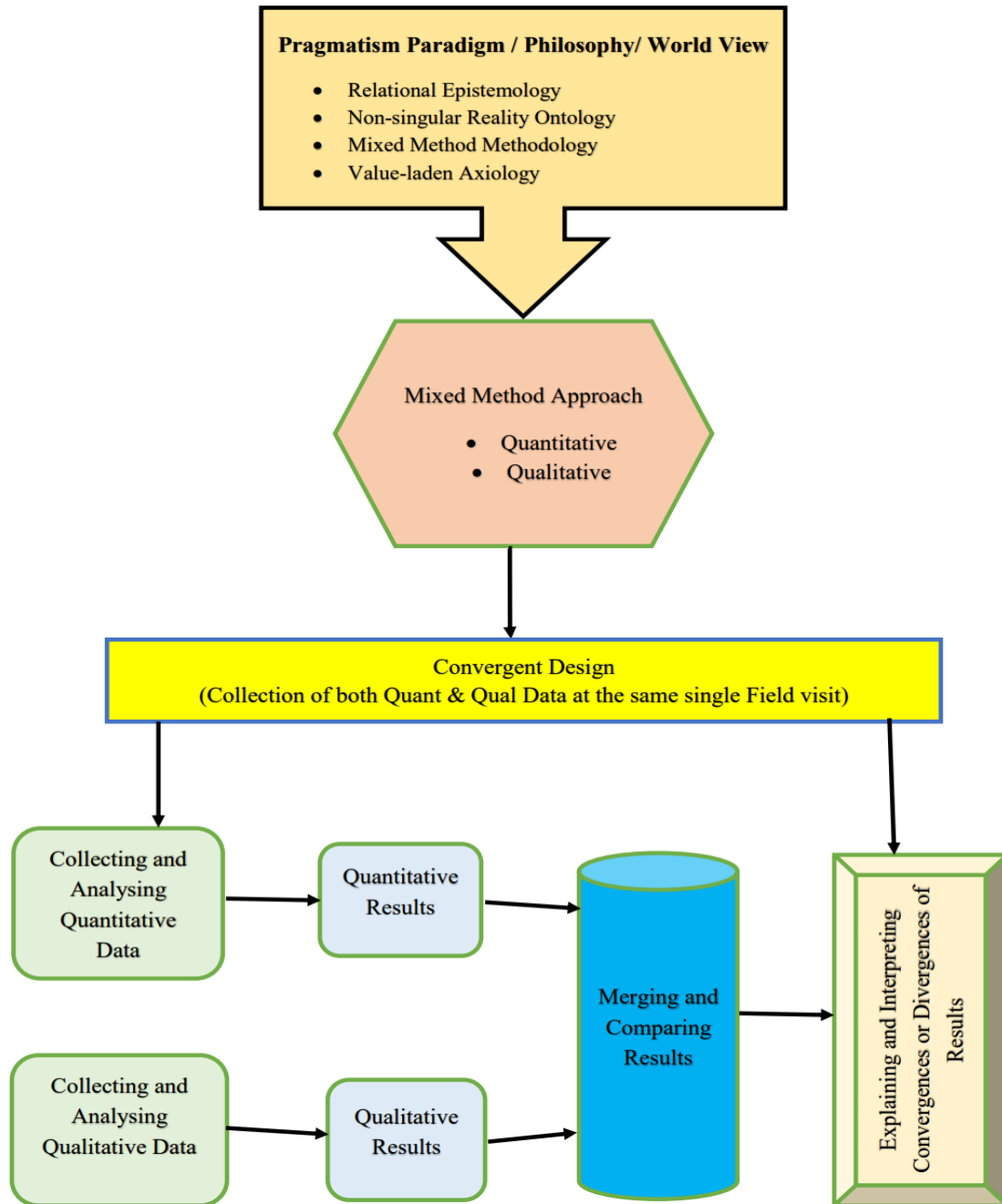


Figure 2: Diagram of the Applied convergent Design within a Mixed study Approach

Source: Modified by the Researcher from Creswell, 2014

5.0 Findings and Discussion

The second objective of this study was to assess the perceived relevance and contributions of medical social work interventions to healthcare outcomes in Tanzanian zonal hospitals. Acknowledging the importance of comprehensive healthcare, the study evaluated how integral medical social work services are to patient care, the specific services provided, and their impacts on both patient outcomes and the well-being of significant others. This analysis also examined the role of medical social workers within healthcare teams, focusing on how their interventions influence the quality of patient care. The biopsychosocial model of health served as the foundation for this analysis biopsychosocial model, emphasizing the importance of addressing biological, psychological, and social factors in patient care. The findings related to this objective are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Contribution of Medical Social Work Interventions to Healthcare (n=67)

Statements	SD (%)	D (%)	U (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean
Medical social work interventions significantly contribute to improving patient healthcare outcomes.	5(7.5)	1(1.5)	2(3)	18(26.9)	41(61.2)	4.33
Collaborating with medical social workers has no value to overall quality of patient care in healthcare settings.	38(56.7)	12(17.9)	1(1.5)	3(4.5)	13(19.4)	2.12
Medical social workers effectively address psychosocial factors impacting patient health and well-being.	4(6)	1(1.5)	1(1.5)	18(26.9)	43(64.2)	4.42
Integrating social work interventions into healthcare and treatment plans help to deal with mental health issues.	5(7.5)	1(1.5)	0(0)	24(35.8)	37(52.3)	4.29
Patients receive better comprehensive care due to the involvement of medical social workers.	4(6)	3(4.5)	1(1.5)	23(34.5)	36(57.7)	4.25
Medical social work interventions help reduce hospital readmission rates.	4(6)	6(9)	0(0)	17(25.4)	40(59.7)	4.24
Social workers play a significant role in enhancing emotional wellbeing of patients.	4(6)	1(1.5)	0(0)	25(37.5)	37(55.2)	4.34
Hospital Social workers provide essential services that complement medical care in zonal hospitals.	4(6)	2(3)	2(3)	25(37.3)	34(50.75)	4.21
Social workers contribute to improving patients' adherence to their medication regimens.	5(7.5)	1(1.5)	0(0)	24(35.2)	37(55.2)	4.30
Weighted average						4.056

Key: SD =Strong Disagree D= Disagree U = Undecided A= Agree SA= Strong Agree

5.1 Relevance of Medical Social Work Interventions to Healthcare

Data in table 1 indicates that an extreme majority of medical doctors (92.2%) agree or strongly agree that patients receive better comprehensive care due to the involvement of medical social workers. Furthermore, a great majority (88.1%) of medical doctors agree and strongly agree that integrating social work interventions into healthcare and treatment plans helps address mental health issues. Conversely, a great majority of medical doctors (74.6%) disagree and strongly disagree with the statement that collaborating with medical social workers has no value to the overall quality of patient care in healthcare settings. This demonstrated a strong consensus among medical doctors regarding the relevance of social work interventions in healthcare landscape. This relevance aligns with the biopsychosocial model of healthcare, which emphasizes the interplay of social, psychological, and biological factors in overall health. The implications of these sentiments from medical doctors is that social work interventions are

perceived as highly needed for optimal and holistic healthcare in zonal hospitals as social workers play a crucial role in these teams.

To triangulate the information gathered from medical doctors through the questionnaire, the researcher conducted interviews with hospital administrators to solicit their views on the perceived relevance of medical social workers and the interventions they provide in healthcare settings. Responses from interviewees revealed that medical social workers in Tanzanian zonal hospitals are regarded as vital members of healthcare teams, and the services they offer are considered highly relevant to patient care.

This acknowledgment of the relevance of medical social workers and the interventions they offer was affirmed by two administrators, who expressed that:

Their placement into healthcare settings are relevant as their interventions are very important for welfare of patients and even medical staff. For example, talking to a patient requires skills, and they have the training for that. Not everyone can talk to a patient in the conditions they are normally in. We also receive people of all kinds; some are unruly and don't want to follow procedures. Through the Hospital Social Welfare department, they can advise them and ensure they follow procedures (02-AD-M-BN).

Yes, our social welfare officers play a vital role in both this hospital and lower-level healthcare facilities. Known in the community as "compassionate people" or "Bwana Huruma," in Kiswahili language, they make daily ward rounds to identify and address healthcare, social, and family challenges faced by patients. Their work includes educating clients, helping them navigate difficulties, and providing comfort and support to patients, relatives, and healthcare providers. Their contributions are essential in managing stress and enhancing the overall healthcare experience (04-AD-M-BM).

The quotes from hospital administrators emphasize the relevance of medical social workers in healthcare settings. These insights suggest that medical social workers are vital to the healthcare system, facilitating communication, providing emotional support, and addressing complex social issues that affect patient outcomes. These findings align closely with the existing literature that highlights the essential role of social workers in enhancing healthcare outcomes. For instance, McGregor et al. (2018) emphasize that social workers provide critical support across various patient populations, addressing not only mental health and addiction issues but also tackling financial stressors and housing challenges. Similarly, Ashcroft et al. (2018) highlight the multifaceted contributions of social workers in primary healthcare settings, including conducting assessments, delivering counselling, and coordinating care. Furthermore, Tadic et al. (2020) reveal that the integration of social work expands the range of services available in healthcare, leading to improved health outcomes for both individuals and populations. These studies resonate with the strong agreement among medical doctors and hospital administrators in this study regarding the relevance of social work interventions, suggesting that their inclusion in healthcare teams can enhance the overall effectiveness of healthcare delivery.

5.2 Contributions of medical social work interventions to healthcare outcomes

Data in table 1 revealed that great majority of medical doctors (88.1%) agreed and strongly agreed that medical social work interventions significantly contributed to improving patient healthcare outcomes. Additionally, of great majority medical doctors (85.1%) agreed and strongly agreed that these interventions helped reduce hospital readmission rates. Furthermore, great majority of medical doctors (87.78%) agreed and strongly agreed that hospital social workers provided essential services that complemented medical care in zonal hospitals. Lastly, extreme majority of medical doctors (90.4%) agreed and strongly agreed that social workers contributed to improving patients' adherence to their medication regimens. These findings demonstrate a strong consensus among medical doctors regarding the significant contributions of medical social work interventions to healthcare outcomes. The high agreement on the effectiveness of these interventions suggests that medical professionals view social workers as essential members in the healthcare teams. Their role is particularly noted in reducing hospital readmission rates and addressing social determinants of health, highlighting the importance of effective discharge planning and ongoing support for patients transitioning from hospital to home. Furthermore, the recognition that social workers provide services complementary to medical care reinforces the interdisciplinary holistic nature of patient care. This implies that medical treatment alone may not be sufficient, acknowledging the role of psychosocial factors in overall

patient well-being. The strong support for the idea that social workers enhance medication adherence underscores their vital function in educating and motivating patients while addressing barriers to compliance.

To triangulate the information collected from medical doctors through questionnaires, additional interviews were conducted with medical social workers, patients, and hospital administrators. These interviews aimed to verify, enrich and gather diverse perspectives on the contributions of medical social work interventions to healthcare outcomes. Respondents from all groups generally provided positive feedback regarding the impact of social work interventions, affirming the significant role social workers play in enhancing patient care, addressing psychosocial issues, and improving overall healthcare outcomes. Their insights reflect a shared understanding of the valuable contributions of social work in the healthcare setting. Medical social workers identified three primary areas of intervention in healthcare settings; psychosocial support and counselling, cost assistance, and family reunification. A significant focus was on providing emotional and psychological support to patients, caregivers, and occasionally hospital staff, encompassing general counselling and guidance. Additionally, social workers reported to play a crucial role in facilitating medical cost exemptions and waivers by helping patients facing financial difficulties secure financial aid or reductions in costs. Furthermore, many social workers highlighted their involvement in family reunification efforts, assisting in locating and reconnecting patients with their families in cases of abandonment or neglect.

This information was further emphasized by two medical social workers during interviews, who stated that:

As a medical social worker, I provide a range of social welfare services, including health education for patients, drug adherence counselling, and assistance with treatment plans. I offer counselling and guidance to both patients and their caregivers, particularly for those with chronic illnesses, and provide psychosocial support. My work also involves educating about epidemic diseases, supporting victims of gender-based violence and child abuse, and facilitating exemptions and waivers for patients in need (MSW-01-F-BN).

As a hospital social worker, I provide a range of services including guidance and counselling, health education, family reunification support, addressing cases of gender-based violence (GBV), mobilizing resources for both patients and staff, patients' socioeconomic assessments, psychosocial support, arranging alternative care for abandoned or neglected children as well as client referral and linkage to appropriate services (MSW-15-M-BM).

The insights from social workers above underscore their vital role in enhancing healthcare outcomes through a range of interventions. Their provision of psychosocial support and counselling addresses emotional and psychological needs, which is critical for improving patients' mental health and overall recovery. Moreover, by mobilizing resources and facilitating financial assistance, social workers help mitigate treatment costs, ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent patients from accessing essential medical services. This intervention is likely to lead to improved health outcomes and reduced hospital readmission rates, as consistent care becomes more attainable. The emphasis on health education further supports treatment adherence and disease prevention, contributing directly to better patient outcomes and overall community health. Additionally, their involvement in family reunification and addressing broader social issues highlights the importance of social determinants of health, which significantly impact patient well-being.

The researcher also was interested to determine the contributions of medical social workers from the perspectives of hospital administrators. All administrators interviewed recognized the essential role medical social workers play in patient care, acknowledging their significant contributions to both clinical and emotional aspects of healthcare. They emphasized the medical social workers' roles in counselling, financial assistance, and ongoing management of chronic conditions.

These insights were further supported by two hospital administrators during interviews, who noted that:

Yes, medical social workers play a crucial role in healthcare delivery. Their involvement is essential in services like kidney transplants, where they provide necessary counseling for both donors and recipients as part of the authorization committee. They also offer support for patients undergoing dialysis, assist

with HIV testing services, and help patients navigate treatment costs by evaluating and requesting waivers. Additionally, social workers identify and assist patients who are unknown or in emergencies. Their contributions are vital to the overall functioning of the hospital and the well-being of patients (01-AD-M-BN).

Yes, medical social workers are vital to the healthcare delivery system. They play a key role throughout the patient care process, from diagnosis to treatment and ongoing management of chronic conditions like diabetes and heart disease. Social workers help patients adapt to new lifestyles and routines, build resilience, and provide essential social support. They also address social issues in patients who show signs of needing hospital care but have no identifiable medical condition. These individuals are treated through specialized protocols designed by social workers. Additionally, doctors often make internal referrals for cases where social work intervention is needed. Their contributions are crucial for comprehensive patient care and recovery (03-AD-M-BM).

Hospital administrators emphasize the critical role of medical social workers in healthcare delivery, viewing them as vital members of multidisciplinary teams, especially in specialized areas like kidney transplants and dialysis. Their contributions include facilitating patient counselling and navigating complex processes such as treatment costs and emergency care, ultimately improving patient access to necessary services by addressing financial barriers. This implies that social workers are recognized for their comprehensive involvement throughout the patient care continuum. They tackle not only immediate medical needs but also the broader social and psychological challenges patients encounter, such as adjusting to chronic conditions. Their proactive strategies demonstrate a commitment to addressing social determinants of health and preventing potential issues from escalating. Overall, these insights imply that medical social work interventions are fundamental for achieving holistic patient care. By addressing both clinical and psychosocial needs, they enhance care quality, improve health outcomes, and boost patient satisfaction, highlighting the necessity of their roles within the healthcare system.

The findings of this study on the contributions of social work interventions to healthcare outcomes closely align with and are supported by the work of Eba et al. (2021), Ashcroft et al. (2018), and Light (2022), all of which emphasize the significant contributions of medical social workers in healthcare settings. Eba et al. (2021) highlighted that medical social worker in Ethiopia provided essential psychosocial support and collaborated effectively within multidisciplinary healthcare teams. This shared focus on psychosocial support underscores the vital role that medical social workers play in addressing the emotional and social needs of patients, ultimately enhancing the overall patient experience. Similarly, Ashcroft et al. (2018) identified various responsibilities of medical social workers, including addressing financial stressors and managing a broad range of psychosocial issues. This congruence reinforces the essential nature of social work interventions in alleviating barriers to care, thereby improving healthcare delivery and patient well-being. In Cambodia, Light (2022) outlined core responsibilities of medical social workers, including providing emotional support, discharge planning, and coordinating resources. The alignment of these responsibilities across different contexts further illustrates the universal importance of medical social work interventions in promoting holistic patient care. Overall, these studies collectively support the findings of this research by reinforcing the notion that medical social workers are integral to the healthcare system, providing crucial support and enhancing patient outcomes across diverse settings.

5.3 Patients' Satisfaction with Social Work Services

In healthcare, patient satisfaction serves as a crucial indicator of service quality and efficacy. It reflects patients' perceptions of the care they receive, which can significantly impact their overall health outcomes and experience within the healthcare system. In the context of this study, determining the level of satisfaction among patients regarding the services provided by medical social workers was paramount. It aimed to assess how these interventions influenced patient experiences, particularly concerning emotional and financial support, which are critical components of comprehensive care. Data from patients indicated a strong sense of satisfaction with the social work services they received, highlighting the importance of these interventions in enhancing their healthcare experiences. Most patients expressed overall satisfaction with the services provided by social workers. They highlighted their contentment with the support they received, including help with payments and valuable guidance. For instance, they noted that the social workers had been crucial in providing support, from medical costs

exemptions to food, which was deemed extremely important, indicating that the services were not only satisfactory but also significantly impactful in their lives.

Two interview respondents elaborated on their experiences, stating that:

I am satisfied with the services provided by hospital social workers and appreciate their overall care. They have been crucial in supporting me, especially when I had no other support, helping with everything from medical costs to food. Their assistance is extremely important (PT-09-F-BN).

Yes, we are satisfied with the services. They provide significant help, especially with payments, offering some relief even if it's modest. Their advice is also very valuable, helping us make informed decisions about our ill-health and providing much-needed support (PT-07-F-BM).

The patient quotes reflect a high level of satisfaction with hospital social workers, emphasizing their critical role in enhancing healthcare experiences. This indicates that patients value comprehensive services that address their emotional and psychological needs alongside practical help. The emphasis on financial support and guidance suggests that social workers significantly alleviate patients' burdens, reinforcing the importance of informed decision-making and emotional empowerment in improving healthcare experiences. Overall, these insights imply that the satisfaction derived from social work interventions is closely tied to the ability of social workers to enhance patient well-being through multifaceted support, highlighting their vital impact on overall patient satisfaction and quality of care. While many patients acknowledged that the services were satisfactory, they emphasized that the ongoing high cost of medical care remained a significant barrier. Additionally, some participants expressed frustration with the exemption process, describing it as cumbersome due to the stringent criteria involved. This dissatisfaction with the process underscored the need for improvements to ensure that financial assistance effectively addresses patients' needs.

Two interview participants reinforced these claims of service dissatisfaction during the interviews, expressing that:

I was satisfied with the service I received. However, despite the reduced costs, medical expenses are still very high for ordinary people, and there are times when I struggle to afford even the discounted amount (PT-03-M-BN).

People who receive exemption services often express dissatisfaction, as the process can involve a lot of complaints. Exemptions are only granted when specific criteria are met, which can be a source of frustration for many (PT-02-M-BM).

The quotes reveal that while patients value the support from medical social workers, there are notable concerns regarding service delivery, particularly in financial assistance. These insights imply a pressing need for more accessible financial support and streamlined processes. Improving these aspects could enhance patient satisfaction and overall service delivery, ultimately leading to a more effective integration of social work in healthcare settings. Addressing these concerns would not only alleviate patient burdens but also reinforce the critical role of medical social workers in facilitating better health outcomes.

The researcher also examined patients' service satisfaction from the perspective of medical social workers. Despite challenges related to financial assistance, many social workers indicated that patients were generally satisfied with the services provided. While there were some complaints, the overall feedback was positive. A recurring issue reported by social workers was dissatisfaction with financial assistance, particularly when patients were denied cost waivers or exemptions. Patients also expressed frustration when the level of financial support was insufficient to fully cover their medical expenses.

This sentiment was reinforced by interview participants who affirmed:

Yes, there have been instances where clients have expressed complaints, primarily when they do not meet the criteria for medical cost waivers. Often, dissatisfaction arises when a waiver request is denied, leading to frustration. We strive to explain the criteria clearly and provide alternative support options to ensure

clients feel heard and supported despite these limitations. But, generally the majority of patients express appreciation for our services and frequently call to thank us (MSW-01-F-BN).

Their main complaints arise when we inform them that they are not eligible for medical charge exemptions; they often feel that we are denying them this service. However, overall, they are generally satisfied with the services we provide (MSW-09-M-BM).

These quotes from medical social workers again highlight the balance between patient appreciation and frustration regarding service delivery. The main issue identified is the dissatisfaction that arises when patients are denied medical cost waivers due to ineligibility. This suggests that the criteria for financial assistance can be a source of misunderstanding, leading to feelings of being unfairly treated. Despite these challenges, social workers emphasized that most patients remain grateful for the services provided, indicating that the overall quality of care and support is recognized and valued. The findings from this study on patients' service satisfactions are consistent with those of Orlu (2021) who reported that at Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital in Bayelsa, patients were generally satisfied with the services provided by medical social workers, particularly in the context of interdisciplinary teamwork, which helped improve patient outcomes. Similarly, these findings are further supported by the research findings by Nguyen et al. (2024), who examined the utilization patterns of social work consulting services at Trung Vuong Hospital in Vietnam and reported a high level of patient satisfaction with hospital social work services, with a mean score of 4.50. This suggests the significant value of social work in effectively addressing patients' healthcare needs, reinforcing the importance of social work interventions as highlighted in this study.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

6.1 Conclusion

The study found that social work interventions have a positive impact on addressing psychosocial issues and improving patient outcomes in Tanzanian Zonal Hospitals. These interventions were shown to enhance medication adherence, reduce hospital readmission rates, and provide essential emotional and practical support to patients. Although many medical doctors seem to have a limited understanding of the full scope and potentials of social workers' contributions, they do recognize the essential role of social workers in delivering holistic care. This presents a valuable opportunity for further integration of social work into healthcare delivery.

6.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that, to enhance the contributions of social work interventions in healthcare and improve patient outcomes, it is essential to formalize and standardize medical social work practice in Tanzania. This includes developing structured education programs, implementing licensure requirements, and establishing clear policies and guidelines to ensure that social workers are well-equipped and recognized as integral members of the healthcare system. Additionally, integrating medical social work into national health policies is crucial for securing institutional support, adequate resource allocation, and professional recognition. Strengthening interprofessional collaboration within hospitals is also necessary to improve teamwork and coordinated care, fostering a holistic approach to patient well-being. Moreover, raising public awareness about the role of social workers in healthcare through educational campaigns and professional engagement initiatives can enhance their visibility among healthcare professionals and the general public.

7.0 Acknowledgement

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