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Exploring the Impact of Digital Communication Technology on the Relationship between Social Workers and Young Adults in Social Work Practice

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Student: Montasir Fahad

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Supervisor: Lars Uggerhøj

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of digital communication technology on the relationship between social workers and young adults in social work practice. A qualitative research method has been used to gather in-depth information from the participants. A semi-structured interview guide has been developed to explore participants' ideas, feelings, and perspectives. Three social workers from three different Nationalities have participated in this study. The findings of this study shows the use of digital communication technology has impacted the relationship between social workers and the young adults both positively and negatively. Social workers emphasized the advantages of using digital communication technology in social work practice is as easier, faster, and more accessible to young adults to build relationships, specifically with those young adults with whom the social workers had difficulties reaching out and providing services in person and young adults with disabilities. However, working with young adults requires a high degree of trust and interaction, and it was difficult for the social workers to develop that trust and interaction without physical presence. Social workers expressed to have both options alternatively in social work practice, the use of digital communication technology and in-person meetings, considering the benefits and drawbacks of both in-person meetings and the use of digital communication technology, to maintain and build relationships with young adults.

Chapter One

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

Digital technologies have grown significantly in the previous decade, people increasingly relying on the internet and mobile devices for communication, entertainment, knowledge, and practical chores (Pascoe,2023). Technology has entered social work as well, frequently without conscious decisions or critical evaluation (Pascoe,2023), and is being used in the social work practice over the past few decades (Bullock and Colvin, 2015). Also, digital communication technology is playing a part in giving practitioners access to colleagues and their clients through emails, cell phones, chat rooms, and online messaging (Bullock and Colvin, 2015). Moreover, using technologies to meet the requirements of donors, organizations, and clients has become essential (Newcomb & Venning, 2022). Technology that enables the use of real-time data in social work can be advantageous. From the perspective of service users, human connections in the twenty-first century are increasingly mediated by internet-based communication devices (Simpson, 2017). With the emergence of digital communication technology, modern social workers deliver services to service users via phone calls, video counseling, email, social media networks, text messages, email, and so forth (Reamer 2013). Also, social workers employ a variety of communication techniques, to establish good working relationships with the service users (Simpson, 2017).

The Covid-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented changes in the provision of social work and home services, that need to be given greater thought before becoming implicit practice (Newcomb & Venning, 2022). Due to Covid-19, changes to the digital delivery of social services started rapidly, and social workers were compelled to adopt digital communication technologies to replace face-to-face services. (Mishna et al., 2021). However, many questions remained unanswered, such as how social service providers could effectively use technology to bridge the gap caused by Covid-19, but social service providers have demonstrated a high level of inventiveness in the use of digital communication technology to provide services and maintain relationships with service users. (Mishna et al., 2021). By looking at the benefits of using digital communication technology in terms of the relationship between social workers

and service users, the use of digital communication technology technologies can enhance interaction through multiple forms of exchange (Randolph et al., 2023), Additionally, for social workers to stay in touch with service user during the pandemic, the use of digital communication technology options was expanded and new communication tools such as the use of personal cell phones for phone calls or texting, video-conferencing, and formal usage of the email was quickly adopted by social workers (Mishna et al., 2020). Some social workers claimed that interacting digitally (via text message or email, or phone call) was easier, more effective, and time efficient (Byrne & Kirwan, 2019). Also, some service users who previously had anxiety about going out to meet the social worker are discovering that staying at home and talking about what is going on digitally actually helped the service users to reduce their anxiety (Mishna et al., 2021). Furthermore, the use of digital communication technology helped more effectively to access service users from remote locations, as well as service who faced hurdles to get services, such as transportation (Mishna et al., 2021). The shift to digital services was greater access for service users, particularly young people, who rely on others to attend therapy, such as their parents or guardians (Mishna et al., 2021).

On the contrary, most social workers experienced difficulties with contacting service users due to asymmetry of service users' resources, such as a lack of internet or smartphone access. (Mishna et al.,2021), The introduction of e-counseling was also a barrier in social work practice for instance conducting therapy over video conferencing, via e-mail, or through chat rooms has created both ethical and legal concerns (Bullock and Colvin, 2015). Moreover. some social workers faced difficulties interacting with service users because of s service users lack of computer literacy abilities or comfort level with digital communication technology (Mishna et al., 2021). Also, there were difficulties in reaching service users due to their lack of privacy, particularly those living with abusers or family members who do not support service users' therapy (Mishna et al., 2021).

After discussing the overall involvement of digital communication technology in social work practice, the objective of the study has been designed which has been presented below.

1.2.   Objective of the study

The objective of this study is to analyse how the use of digital communication has impacted the social workers and young adults' relationship in social work practice and to explore whether the social workers faced any challenges and the possibilities of the use of digital communication technology in social work practice with young adults from social workers perspectives.

1.3.   Significance of the study

As the purpose of this research is to investigate how the use of digital communication technologies has impacted the relationship between social workers and young adults from the perspective of social workers. Besides, to comprehend the possibilities and challenges of using digital communication technology in social work practice experienced by social workers and young adults from the view of social workers. Therefore, this study will be useful to explore the importance of relationships in social work practice from the social workers' standpoint using digital communication technology. The findings of the previous literature have shown that to fulfill practical needs, social workers find digital communication tools like WhatsApp and text messaging more satisfying than face-to-face (Mishna et al., 2021). For instance, after the face-to-face session with the service users to follow up, social workers had to arrange a phone call (Mishna et al., 2021). But during Covid-19, when they did a phone call session, after that, they often did the follow-up through texts (Mishna et al., 2021). However, it has been noticed that there was more closeness has been observed between the service users and the social workers because some service users were more open to the social workers digitally than face to face sessions as they were more confident and could see each other at home (Mishna et al., 2021) and they were more engaging, which lowered youths feelings of stigma or judgment (Newcomb & Venning, 2022). According to one social worker, before covid, they could not provide cultural programming to the youth in foster care but during covid when they had to do it virtually the participation of youths got increased (Mishna et al., 2021). Although, there were some obstacles and challenges that have been observed during Covid-19 while providing virtual counseling (Mishna et al., 2021). For instance, lack of competence in using digital communication technology, the cost of the internet, and lack of privacy as some clients do not

have that much private space because some young adults' roommates could hear the conversation (Mishna et al., 2021).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate how the use of digital communication technology has influenced the relationship between young adults and social workers, as well as social workers' perceptions on the use of digital communication technology in social work practice. That led to the following research question.

1.4. Research question

- How does the use of digital communication technology have impacted the relationship between young adults and social workers from the perspective of social workers?

Chapter two

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Data collection method

To conduct the study, a qualitative research method has been used. As the research question of this project is based on getting the perspective of social workers experience of using digital communication technology and how the relationship has affected social work practice between social workers and young adults while using digital communication technology. Therefore, The qualitative research method is more logical to apply in this study since it produces extensive descriptions of the participants' thoughts, ideas, and experiences and interprets the implications of their behavior. (Rahman, 2017). Also, qualitative methods show precisely and deeply how information processes and performance are related (Rahman, 2017). In addition, in this research social workers experience has been investigated using digital communication technology with

young adults. So, the qualitative research method is more realistic to apply since the researcher can get to know more about participants' inner experiences through qualitative research and it gives the flexibility to construct or reconstruct based on the research design (Rahman, 2017). Furthermore, a researcher can gain insight into the participants true emotions and experiences through qualitative research. Also, narratives from respondents help to convey the scope of the study challenge (Mwita, 2022).

On the contrary, the limitation of choosing qualitative research can be subjectivity because when the researcher has interpreted the gestures or posture during the data collection what the researcher perceived as right or wrong may not always be seen in the same perspective by others (Mwita, 2022). Also, data collection and analysis sometimes could be difficult because in qualitative research the researcher uses different kinds of methods such as focus group discussion, in-depth interviews, and so forth, and keep only the data that are only relevant to the study (Mwita, 2022). Furthermore, the biases of the researcher may consciously or subconsciously occured during the data collection process as the researcher directly has involved the participants (Mwita, 2022). A researcher may be driven to record information that is inaccurate in comparison to the actual circumstance by the respondents' deliberate use of gestures and posture (Mwita, 2022). Also, respondents' nationality, accent, and other factors could cause a researcher to bias during data collection and analysis (Mwita, 2022). The reason for not to choosing the quantitative research method in this study is that it is not possible to get in-depth information from the participants because, in quantitative research, data is analyzed with software like SPSS which does not provide a deeper explanation from the participant involved in the research project (Rahman, 2017). Therefore, for this study quantitative research method has not been deployed as this study aims to get in-depth information from the social workers about the use of digital communication technology in social work practice.

2.2.   Research method

A semi-structured interview guide was developed for this study which has helped the researcher to collect data based on the research question and objectives of this study. Semi-structured interview method offers the best of both worlds: comparable, trustworthy data and the freedom to ask follow-up questions (George,2022). Furthermore, it was helpful to avoid interruptions

while promoting two-way communication and will give more open-ended character and it has additional depth and rich data (George,2022). Also, when it was necessary, participants were quested to clarify, elaborate, or rephrase their responses during the interview (George,2022). Implementing a semi-structured interview investigates participants' ideas, feelings, and views about a topic and goes deeply into personal and often sensitive matters (Dejonckheere and Vaughn, 2019).

Also, there are some limitations to apply the semi-structured interview method in this study, such as poor or limited responses from the research participants because of the language barrier (Kakilla, 2021). Also, there could be biases while deploying semi-structured interviews, because the participants could give the responses that the researcher wants to hear, which causes social desirability bias, or they behave differently when being observed, which causes selection bias (George, 2022). Furthermore, data loss may occur when conducting semi-structured interviews because of poor or limited responses (Kakilla, 2021). Furthermore, the language barrier may cause data loss during translation and frequently raises issues about the reliability and authenticity of interview data or when utilizing technology that simulates the surroundings of face-to-face conversations (Kakilla, 2021).

2.3. Study area

In this research, there are three study areas, Vienna, Austria, Sao Paolo, Brazil and Tehran, Iran. The justification for having three different study areas is that, in this research, the study area is selected based on the accessibility of the research participants. As a result, considering the accessibility of the research participants in this study, social workers from different nations have been recruited. Also, as an international student, it was easier for the researcher to collaborate with other foreign students studying social work in different areas as they worked as social workers Also, with a limited time to finish the research. during the process of the data collection, it was trouble-free to reach out to the participants back and forth as the researcher was in touch with the participants through a social media platform and email as well.

2.4.   Data collection procedure and tools

There are a total of eighteen questions in the interview questionnaire. The interview questionnaire was divided into two sections: the relationship between social workers and young adults and the use of digital communication technologies, each section has nine questions. The interview questionnaire was created with the goal of achieving the study's purpose and answering the research question of this study.

To collect data from social workers, both face-to-face and online interview was conducted by the researcher. First, the interview questionnaire was sent to the social workers email addresses. Following that, the social workers availability for the video call interview and face-to-face interview was discussed via Whatsapp.

As the social worker from Iran currently residing in Aalborg, that interview was conducted face-to-face in Aalborg. Then, with the other two social workers who are from Austria and Brazil were asked through Whatsapp, if they have any preference to do the interview such as via video call or audio call, or sending voice messages to answer the interview questionnaire and their preferable interview date.

 The social workers from Austria and Brazil did not have any preference for any digital communication tools for the interview. Therefore, as a researcher, the suitable option is to conduct the interview through videoconferencing platform because both the participants and researcher could see each other faces and emotions during the conversation (Khalil & Cowie, 2020). However, the shortcoming of video conferencing was the inability to detect body language and other nonverbal cues (Khalil & Cowie, 2020).

In addition, the two social workers from Austria and Brazil were asked if they preferred a particular video conferencing program for the interview. Because it is important that participants agree to participate with the video conferencing tool and have access to the required software (Khalil & Cowie, 2020).

Therefore, the researcher decided to use Zoom software to conduct the online interviews and the two social workers from Austria and Brazil have been asked if they have the accessibility to use Zoom software. After, getting the participant's responses as they have the access to the

Zoom software then a Zoom meeting was scheduled by the researcher with the social workers from Austria and Brazil to conduct the interview. After scheduling the Zoom meetings, the invitation links was sent to the two social workers through Whatsapp. The reason for choosing the Zoom platform is because Zoom software has improved its usability by adding capabilities such as simultaneous recording, accessibility (e.g., mobile phone, tablet, computer), affordability, and user-friendliness (Khalil & Cowie, 2020). The social workers asked for permission to record the conversation to transcribe it for the research analysis and findings. After the researcher got consent from the social workers to record the interview session, the interview started with the participants. The first face-to-face interview lasted 1 hour and 11 minutes with the social worker from Iran, The second and third interviews which conducted digitally through Zoom, with the social worker from Austria the interview length was 31 minutes 10 seconds and the interview with the social worker from Brazil was 53 minutes 50 seconds.

At the end of the interview, the participants were asked if they had any questions to me or about the project or any comments that they would like to make about the study. As the participants did not have any further questions or comments therefore the interview session ended.

2.5.   Participants recruitment

Selecting an appropriate sample size is essential, to ensure the validity and reliability of the study findings, (Kumar et al., 2020). Access to the population is a further external factor that influences the researcher's selection of sample size by restricting it (Mocănașu, 2020). The population in research is the entire group of people, occasions, or events that display the behaviors and/or have attributes of interest to the researcher (Berndt, 2020). The population that takes part in the study is the sample (McCombes, 2023). Sampling is a method or procedure used by researchers to methodically choose a smaller number of representative people from a pre-defined population focusing on the objectives of the study (Sharma, 2017). In this study, to recruit participants purposeful sampling method has been deployed because purposeful sampling is a technique commonly used in qualitative research to identify and choose information in order to make the most use of limited resources (Palinkas et al., 2013). This involves finding and selecting individuals or groups who have special knowledge or experience

with a phenomenon of interest and willingness to participate, as well as the ability to share experiences (Palinkas et al., 2013).

In this study, three social workers from three different Nationalities were approached who specifically have experience working with young adults. After contacting them and presenting the research design, the social workers were interested to participate in this study and share their experiences of using digital communication technology with the young adults. The justification for choosing the purposeful sampling method in this study is that rather than making statistical assumptions, it is vital to have thorough knowledge about a particular phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2013). This study is to get the perspective of social workers on the use of digital communication technology in social work practice with young adults and how the use of digital communication technology has impacted the relationship between social workers and young adults. (Nikolopoulou, 2022). The reason for only interviewing three social workers is that the lack of accessibility to participants because as an international student in Denmark, it was difficult to recruit a substantial number of social workers who worked with young adults using digital communication technology. However, it could have been possible to recruit more social workers in this study but not having work experience as a social worker, it has limited to recruit more social workers. As, from the workplace, the colleagues and the service users could have been approached to participate in this study. However, recruiting a smaller number of participants for qualitative research is based on interview-method, when the accessibility of the researcher to the research population is limited (Mocănașu, 2020). The issue could arise biases about selecting a small sample size. Though it has been argued that qualitative samples should be larger and there could be biases in deploying purposeful sampling in this study because the sample units are chosen based on the researcher's subjective evaluation, and the results may likely to be affected particularly observer bias. However, other scholars argue that selecting a larger sample in qualitative research is unnecessary because a small sample size allows a more in-depth perspective of the phenomenon that is studied (Mpofu, 2021). In qualitative research, the major goal of sampling is to achieve a balance between the necessity to collect rich data from participants without losing the fair representation of experiences across the population of possible participants (Mpofu, 2021).

2.6.   Scientific position

For this study, practice research on the social work approach has been implemented. Before discussing the justification for choosing practice research on social work approach for this study first, an introduction to practice research has been presented, and the four approaches of practice research have been discussed as the motivation to use one of the practice research approaches in this study. Afterward, the justification of implementing practice research on the social work approach has been argued, and how it has been implemented in this research, as well as the limitation of using the practice research on the social work approach in this study. Furthermore, the reasoning for not applying one of the other three approaches of practice research in this study has been discussed. Additionally, there is a presentation about the possible biases that may have occurred unconsciously by the researcher in choosing practice research on the social work approach even though it has occurred due to the challenges of not having the scope to use other practice research approaches in this study.

Practice research

Before getting deep into practice research on social work, it is important to get an idea of what practice research is, to get a better understanding. Practice research is being curious about practice, identifying effective and promising ways to help people, and addressing troubling practice by critically studying it in order to develop new ideas in light of experience. (Julkunen, 2016). According to Austin (2020, p. 15), Practice research is crucial in the ongoing search for ways to improve social services and raise the well-being of service users. It involves collaboration among many different stakeholders, including service providers, researchers, service users, and educators, as well as funders, policymakers, and agency directors. (Austin, 2020). Also, it seeks to account for the power dynamics between service users and service providers in terms of inclusiveness, transparency, ethical reflexivity, and critical reflection (Austin, 2020). As asserted by Austin (2020, p. 15), the complexity of issues affecting service users expands, and practice becomes more specialized as research and technology development, there is a growing interest in understanding what works best to handle complex social problems.

In this study practice research approach has been adopted rather than using the traditional research approach because as in this study, the curiosity is to explore how the relationship impacted between young adults and social workers using digital communication technology from the perspective of social workers. Thus, it is necessary to involve the social workers and young adults because the theme of this study has been grasped from practice, however, it was not possible to involve young adults as informants as well as consultants due to difficulties in accessing young adults who received services from social workers using digital communication technology. Practice research cannot be primarily planned, carried out, and delivered by the researcher to practice without collaboration with the other stakeholders (Uggerhøj,2011). It also implies that the collaboration may take numerous forms and evolve over time (Uggerhøj,2008) which has been discussed later as one specific approach of practice research has been deployed for this study.

There are four approaches of practice research. These are practice research on social work, practitioner research approach, participatory practice research, and service user-focused practice research

Firstly, in practice research on the social work approach, external researchers/university-based researcher lead, direct, and carry out research processes and research questions, research designs, data collection, analysis, and findings (Andersen et al., 2020). In the process, social work practice is involved for collection purposes and the service users, social workers, and other stakeholders are involved in the process as informants or consultants (Andersen et al., 2020). However, the research process is not based on a close collaboration between practice and research, and practice has no vital influence in the process because every aspect of the process will be discussed and determined by the researcher alone or in collaboration with other research colleagues (Andersen et al., 2020). However, it is vital for the researcher to have a direct connection to practice qualifying the knowledge about the phenomenon that is being investigated (Andersen et al., 2020).

Secondly, in the practitioner research approach, the assessments, and investigations are conducted by practitioners (Andersen et al., 2020). Practitioner research is the implementation of research-inspired ideas, designs, and research methodologies to daily practice, allowing participants to respond to inquiries that arise from practice and providing responses that will guide practice (Anderson et al., 2020). Additionally, to function concurrently with social work activities, the practitioner research approach is more than a research process because it is assigned to the main task which is social work practice (Andersen et al., 2020). Furthermore, in the practitioner research approach, the research should originate from the practice, the research question generates from individual experience from work and the findings can be implemented into practice to make a difference (Andersen et al., 2020). In this study, practitioner research has not been implemented because this research project has been conducted by a researcher who is based in an educational institution, and practitioner research is not directly related to traditional concepts of research components (Andersen et al., 2020).

Thirdly, in the participatory practice research approach, research is conducted in close collaboration with practice (Uggerhøj et al., 2018). Moreover, the learning process will be managed mostly through practice, whereas the research process will be managed mainly by researchers (Uggerhøj et al., 2018). Also, every step of the research has been done through a close, binding, and dedicated partnership with a focus on cooperative planning, execution, and dissemination throughout the research process with the service users, the practitioners, and other stakeholders (Andersen et al., 2020). However , in this research project, not every step of this research process has not been done through close collaboration with the practitioner, and service users and other stakeholders. As, in the participatory practice research approach every single collaborative effort is developed by both practice and research (Andersen et al., 2020). With a limited time to finish the project, it was not possible for the researcher to deploy participatory practice research approach in this study. Moreover, in this research, young adults have not been recruited as a participant because it was not possible to include them due to the challenges to reach out to the young adults who services from the social workers using digital communication technology.

Lastly, the service users-focused practice research approach primarily aimed at service user involvement in research procedures (Andersen et al., 2020). Participation of service users in

practice research is required and important, but it is not the only purpose of it as it is related to several research-related activities (Andersen et al., 2020). The service users did not participate in the processes in this research, as previously discussed, it was not possible to recruit young adults for this study.

Justification of choosing practice research on social work approach and the limitations

The reason for choosing practice research on the social work approach for this study is, the researcher was in charge of this study and took the initiative to plan the research methodology, collect the data, and conduct the analysis, while the practitioners involved as consultants and informants. The researcher and the practitioners collaborated on the research question, objective of the study, and interview guide during the research process.

Nevertheless, the limitation in terms of choosing practice research on social work approach is that, despite having a close collaboration during the research process between the practitioners and the researcher, the research methods has been decided by the researcher's interests, personal requirements, and institution administration standards for academic qualification (Uggerhøj, 2008). For instance, in this study even though there was a collaboration between the researcher and the social workers on the research objective, research question, and interview guide but the idea of the research design was based on the personal interest of the researcher to fulfill the academic requirement. Also, research fields and qualification requirements will not always coincide with the needs and desires of social workers in practice (Uggerhøj,2008).

Positioning practice research on the social work approach

To implement the practice research on the social work approach in this study, three social workers were involved in this study not only as informants but also as consultants. First, a face-to-face meeting was held with the social worker from Iran who is doing Master's in Denmark. In the first meeting, there was a discussion about the project theme, the objective of the study, and the possibility of recruiting two more social workers in this study. Following a discussion of the project summary, the social worker from Iran expressed interest in participating in this study and to ask other course mates of her Master program. Then, the researcher made a short presentation of the study/project in a Microsoft word file which contained the title of the study,

the research question, and the objective of the study. Then, the project outline was sent to the social worker from Iran through Whatspp. Afterwards, the social worker from Iran shared the project outline with her other colleagues who are also in the same Master's program but at different universities in Europe, as their Master's program requires the students to study in different countries in Europe for different semesters.

Two social workers expressed interest to take part in the study and requested a thorough outline from the researcher so they could better understand what their involvement would be. An overview of the project was sent out explaining that in the scientific approach of this study is based on practice research on social work approach that social workers are included not only as informants but also as consultants to qualify the research process.

Following that, the research question, objective of the study, and interview guide were sent in Microsoft Word format to all the social workers via email to get their suggestions/feedbacks. Then, after getting the feedbacks from the social workers, the objective of the study, the interview questionnaire was redesigned. The communication with the social workers was done through e-mail because it was not possible to meet up with them face to face especially with the two social workers who are residing and studying in France and Portugal. Afterwards, the social workers provided their last remarks regarding the interview guide. The researcher then revised the interview guide considering the social workers' suggestions.

2.7. Ethical consideration

Ethics are norms for professional research that lead them to conduct to integrate toward the study participants and a code of ethics with rules of behavior should be included in the fieldwork (Guthrie, 2010). To respect the rights and privacy of the participants, any identifying information such as of the participant's names, and the educational institution, has not been collected and used in this research. Before start of the interview, the participants have been informed about the research, the aim of the research, and the reasons for doing this research study. Also, they have been informed that, if they were not comfortable with any question, they could skip the question without any explanation, and they can withdraw themselves at any point during the interview. In this study, the interviews with the participants were both online and

face-to-face. The in person interview was recorded on the Android phone of the researcher with an audio recorder application and the video call interviews on Zoom were recorded on the computer. The in-person interview conversation was recorded on the phone that was transferred to the researcher personal computer. Also, the Zoom video recording was converted an audio file with an installed software on tresearcher'sher computer. Then all the audio files was renamed with pseudo names and has been put into a folder with a password that is only accessible to the researcher. Afterward, the audio file on the phone and the video recording of the interviews through Zoom was deleted from the researcher's computer. Then, the transcription files of the interview were also saved into a different folder with a password and the file was renamed with pseudo names.

<div align="center">Chapter three</div>

<div align="center">3. Literature Review</div>

In the literature review chapter, first, the definition of digital communication technology and young adulthood has been discussed. Then, the use of digital communication technology in social work practice has been presented. Following that, there is an elaboration of how Covid-19 has shifted the pattern of social work practice. Moreover, the aspects of looking at the relationships between service users and social workers have been shown. Specifically, how the use of digital communication technology has influenced young people and social workers' relationship in social work practice. Last but not least, it has been discussed how this study can help to fill a research gap.

What is Digital communication technology?

Digital technology is the use of electronic equipment to store and process data and to communicate with one another, as communication is built in a digital format (Emma, 2016). Digital communication technology includes email, texting, phone calls, use of different social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp and so forth), and videoconferencing tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and so forth (Emma, 2016).

Defining Young Adult

There are various definitions and age range for young adulthood, which leads to confusion. Young adulthood should be distinguished from adolescence and adulthood (Higley, 2019). Young adulthood is a distinct developmental stage that occurs between the ages of 18 and 25 years, between adolescence and adulthood (Higley,2019).

Covid 19 and digital social work practice

Long before Covid-19, information, and communication technologies (e.g., smartphones, tablets), computer hardware/software and other communication media (e.g., social media, text messaging) permeated direct social work practice (Mishna et al., 2021). As a supplement to face-to-face practice, social workers were increasingly using digital communication tools informally with clients to interact between the sessions (Mishna et al., 2021). Technology is used by social workers in a variety of ways in their daily job, from telephones to email to video conferencing tools and instant messaging (Newcomb & Venning, 2022). However, because of Covid-19, there was a sudden shift in the pattern of work in social work practice which required the social workers to work from home using digital communication technology (Newcomb & Venning, 2022). The pandemic has forced both service users and practitioners to quickly build skills and resources (Newcomb & Venning, 2022). As the world grapples with a 'new normal' in the post-Covid -19 era, social workers must consider the paradigm shift in practice and its implications (Mishna et al., 2021). In online interactions, social presence can help to increase the sense of social connection (Randolph et al., 2023). There is evidence to support the idea that social presence, or the feeling of connection, through electronic communication, can improve relationships, such as the one between a social worker and their service users (Randolph et al., 2023). Some service users could favour or demand electronic communication over traditional methods (Mishna et al., 2012). Therefore, social workers have to respond effectively, for instance, a lot of young people prefer electronic communication (Mishna et al., 2012). In this process, the selection of digital communication technology plays an important role (Mishna et al., 2012). Young adults of today rely increasingly on digital communication technologies for

personal assistance and guidance as well as for entertainment, information, and social connections (Mishna et al., 2012). According to several respondents especially youth, it has become the preferred method of communication and has integrated itself into their work (Mishna et al., 2012).

Though online or phone-based technologies may be beneficial for some service user groups, particularly young people, as they are more engaging, which lowers feelings of stigma or judgment (Newcomb & Venning, 2022). But in terms of confidentiality, while having e-counseling between service users , and social workers, they can look into each other's private residences when professionals use technology while working from home, there may be a breach of privacy for both parties (Newcomb & Venning, 2022). Moreover, using digital communication technology, social workers and service users should be aware that personal information may be retained by a third-party carrier or simply overheard by neighbors or family members (Newcomb & Venning, 2022). Furthermore, depending on the geographic location, not every service user may not have the literacy, aptitude, information, or financial means to employ a variety of technologies (Newcomb & Venning, 2022).

Relationship in digital social work practice and young adults

Digital communication and media infrastructures are increasingly manifesting as digital tools that support, or replace social work practice in areas such as case management (e.g. automation), outcome measurement (e.g. standardized assessment), interventions (e.g. online counselling), and communication (e.g. video meetings) (Nordesjö et al., 2022). The relationship between social workers and service users can be seen not just as a fundamental component of social workers' professional identity and purpose (Rollins, 2020, p. 395), but also as the very foundation of an intervention or as a service in and of itself (Nordesjö et al., 2022). Transparency, mutual trust, respect, and an interest of the service users are all values that can

help the social worker-service user relationship (Nordesjö et al., 2022). Nonetheless, the relationship is not 'neutral,' but can be filled with power based on context and asymmetrical positions (Nordesjö et al., 2022). Looking at the benefits of using digital communication technology in terms of relationship between the social workers and young adults, in Denmark an app called "MySocialworker" assisted the young users in gaining perspective on their life and in seeing themselves realistically (Mackrill & Ørnbøll, 2019), For instance, the young adults mentioned that the app is used to define and remember personal, goals and the young adults used the app to evaluate their overall performance throughout the week prior (Mackrill & Ørnbøll, 2019). However, there are concerns that the social workers and service users might get too close and some of their goals and information will be considered too personal to share with their social worker (Mackrill & Ørnbøll, 2019). The usage of digital communication and social media increases young people's appearance of the accessibility to social workers as there are no geographical/physical/time constraints, like there are in offline settings, which helps young people more likely to see social workers as being more accessible (Nordesjö et al., 2022).

The use of digital tools has raised various ethical concerns about the social work notions of service users-informed consent; service users privacy and confidentiality; and boundaries (Nordesjö et al., 2022). Digital communication tools can help social workers and service users to establish, maintain, and modify interpersonal connections in ideal ways (Nordesjö et al., 2022). Digital tools can make welfare services more accessible and engage hard-to-reach groups like young people on their terms (Nordesjö et al., 2022). While face-to-face meetings may decline and ethical challenges may develop, these issues could be manageable through education and ethical reflection in a reflexive practice (Nordesjö et al., 2022). The demand for social service providers to generate outcomes is increasing (Bullock and Colvin, 2015). For example, social workers may believe that behavioural goals are a complicated way of doing things since they might harm the service user and social worker relationship (Bullock and Colvin, 2015). From some social workers perspectives, developing a relationship with a service user through digital communication technology is not feasible, as it is with face-to-face interaction (Bullock and Colvin, 2015).

The aspects of relationship in social work

Relationships are fundamental to the practice of social work, and social workers work carefully to establish and maintain relationships while providing services to service users. (Randolph et al., 2023). Social worker-service user relationship serves as a means for empathy to be communicated, care to be delivered, experiences to be shared, a feeling of belonging to be formed and meaning to be created (Rollins,2019). Relationship-based approaches in social work tend to rise and fall with the fortunes of the profession's subsequent knowledge creators such as researchers, theoreticians, policymakers, administrators, and managers (Howe, 2008). Trust, empathy, dependability, sincerity, and transparency have been identified as crucial attributes in social worker-service user relationships for effecting change (Rollins,2019). Although how social workers conduct relationships is less clear but the social worker role has been described as the practitioner's ability to hold together the cognitive, emotional, and practical aspects of a client's life (to) provide(s) a sense of security and thus reduce(s) anxiety (Rollins,2019).

The significance of human relationships is a fundamental principle of the relationship-based profession of social work (Randolph et al., 2023). The relationship between the social worker and the service users serves as the foundation for effective outcomes and, in many situations, in the transformation process (Randolph et al., 2023). The core foundation of all service users -based interaction/relationships throughout the change process, and communication is key to establishing and maintaining the relationship at the generalist practice level (Randolph et al., 2023). During, Covid-19 the medium of communication between the social workers and the service users changed completely (Randolph et al., 2023). According to Davidson (2005), most social worker- service user relationships at the generalist practice level are based on some fundamental characteristics. For instance, the relationship is built around the requirements of the service users, not the social workers and the goal is to encourage the service users to make a positive change (Davidson, 2005). Moreover, the relationship is time-limited, the emphasis is on attaining client outcomes (Davidson, 2005). In addition, the social worker is responsible for setting and preserving professional boundaries, regardless of any restrictions put forth by the service user. (Davidson, 2005).

From the perspective of service users, human connections in the twenty-first century are increasingly mediated by Internet-enabled communication devices (Simpson, 2017). Social workers should employ a variety of communication techniques, including mobile devices and social media, to establish good working relationships (Simpson, 2017). The relationship between a social worker and a service user occurs in a particular structural, positional, and relational setting (Hansen & Natland, 2017). As social work is carried out at many levels and from different perspectives the relational work that develops between a social worker and a service user is reflexive-individualist or reforming (Hansen & Natland, 2017). According to Murphy et al., (2012), professionalism and policy contexts demand practitioners operate instrumentally on behalf of the state. As a result, person-centred relationships should be categorized as pragmatic partnerships since they are incompatible with modern social work practice. (Hansen & Natland, 2017). However, the relationship between a social worker and a service user can be developed through task-oriented work, which can be characterized as a purposeful relationship (Hansen & Natland, 2017).

The study conducted by Beresford et al., (2008), focuses on the relationship between Palliative care social workers and service users. Friendship with the social worker was viewed as a crucial component of the connection and the word "friend" was frequently used by users to describe the expert palliative care social worker (Beresford et al., 2008). Moreover, the social worker was frequently referred to as a "friend" by service users, and the service users valued this (Beresford et al., 2008). Service users tended to link two qualities with this concept of friendship in the social work relationship first one is —reciprocity because some service users think it is important as the service users preferred a two-way conversation with the social workers (Beresford et al., 2008). And adaptable working relationships— as the social workers made extra efforts for the service users and appeared to be flexible in how they interpreted their professional boundaries in response to meet the service users needs which was greatly valued by them. Additionally, the social worker listened without passing judgment as the service users expressed their feelings in a transparent way (Beresford et al., 2008). Additionally, service users appreciated the social worker's accessibility and availability, and they also found respect to be a good quality in their connections with knowledgeable palliative care social workers. (Beresford et al., 2008). According to the perspective of the service users, who defined

friendship as acts of generosity and compassion from their social workers, the social worker "went above and beyond the call of duty" (Beresford et al., 2008).

The findings of the study will reveal the gap in from international viewpoint, how digital communication technology has impacted the relationship between young adults and social workers and how social workers from three different countries with different specializations working with   young adults and the importance of relationships in social work practice from the perspective of social workers.

3.1.   Theoretical framework

For this study, the interactional theory has been used to analyse the data findings. In this study, the interactional theory has been implemented because Interactionists study how people see the environment around them in relation to the meaning that it carries for them (Lehn et al., 2021). The term "interactionism" refers to a system in which interpersonal communication is essential (Hutchinson and Oltedal, 2014). Interactionism is a term used to refer to a group of people who place significant importance on interpersonal interaction (Hutchinson and Oltedal, 2014). Moreover, the interpersonal effort to comprehend the other's point of view also involves trying to understand the other's sense of self and sense of social identity (Lehn et al., 2021).

The philosophy of social work practice around the world is built on a concept of helping process in which the worker influences the practice's outcomes and their competence helps to establish a productive working relationship (Hutchinson and Oltedal, 2014). According to Shulman, social work is a dynamic interaction that requires development in interaction (Hutchinson and Oltedal, 2014). To establish a successful working relationship, the service user and social worker need to agree on what the interactional setting will be as the initial stage in the process (Hutchinson and Oltedal, 2014). The interactional practice theory focuses on what happens when we meet face to face, for instance when a social worker meets with a client or user in an office, an institution, or the service users home (Hutchinson and Oltedal, 2014). To fulfil the aims of social work practice, the social worker must work on having successful interactions with both service users and co-workers (Hutchinson and Oltedal, 2014).

Interactional social work is a casual model of change which asserts the social workers skills help to create positive relationships, which are the medium through which social workers influence practice outcomes (Hutchinson and Oltedal, 2014). Interaction social work is a practice theory that describes what we know about human behaviour and social organization (Hutchinson and Oltedal, 2014). Social workers may assume a professional relationship when meeting with a service user, but in other circumstances, it may be required to focus on developing trust so that, over time, the service user will come to believe that the social worker can be trusted. (Hutchinson and Oltedal, 2014). If the service user and social worker are to establish a successful working relationship, the first stage in the process is to agree on what the interactional scenario should be (Hutchinson and Oltedal, 2014).

The aim of the study is to explore the impact of the use of digital communication technology on the relationship between the social workers and young adults from the view of social workers. Therefore, the justification for using the interactional theory is that social workers interacted with young adults in person as well as through digital communication technology. The use of interactional theory in this study is justified by the fact that social workers used interpersonal skills and emphasized the value of doing so in order build relationships with young adults to achieve the goals of the practice. The interactional theory has been used to analyse the study.

Chapter four

4. Results

Data analysis approach

To analyze the qualitative data of this study, a thematic analysis approach has been deployed because, in this study, the researcher aim is to explore the social worker's views, their experiences using digital commutation technology with young adults, and how the use of digital communication technology has impacted the relationship between the social workers and the young adults. Thematic analysis is a technique for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting

meaningful patterns (or "themes") within qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2016). The usefulness of the thematic analysis is, there is flexibility in terms of the study topic, sample size, data gathering methodology, and methods for generating meaning (Clarke & Braun, 2016). Thematic analysis can be useful to find patterns in data that relate to participants ideas and lived experiences, perspectives, behavior, and practices (Clarke & Braun, 2016). Furthermore, the thematic analysis offers simple, organized methods for extracting codes and themes from qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2016). The smallest analytical units are called codes, and they are used to record interesting elements of data that can be relevant to the study (Clarke & Braun, 2016). To identify the themes in this study deductive approach has been used because the deductive approach is helpful for focusing on a particular feature of the data or a particular finding that might be better clarified or understood in the context of an already established theory or frame (Clarke & Braun, 2016). The inductive approach has not been considered to apply in this study because the inductive approach typically offers a more thorough review of all the available data and is not always indicative of the researcher's personal viewpoints or interests (Clarke & Braun, 2016). Also, along with the advantages of applying thematic analysis, there are some limitations as well. Sometimes it is difficult to decide which parts of the data to focus on or which theoretical or epistemological frameworks to employ in the analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2016).

To use the thematic analysis, Clarke & Braun (2016), six steps have been followed.

Table. 1 Phases of Thematic Analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2016)		
Phases	**Activity**	**Description**
1	Familiarization with data	• Transcribing the interviews collected from the participants • Reading through the data after transcription
2	Initial code generation	Arranging data in efficient categories
3	Searching for Themes	Sorting of codes into initial themes, and links between initial codes

4	Theme review	Examining the complete data set to make sure the data set can support the themes
5	Theme defining and naming	Finalizing the themes to answer the research question
6	Report production	Presenting the findings with a compelling argument that answers the research questions both within and between themes

First, before the start of coding of the data ,the audio recording of the interviews of social workers was transcribed by the researcher and transferred into Microsoft word file. Then to do the coding of the interview data Nvivo 12 software was downloaded from Aalborg University online library website as Nvivo12 software is accessible for the students. Then the transcription documents of the data were exported to the NVivo 12 software. Afterwards, the data from the interviews have been read by the researcher back and forth to become familiar with the data. Because in thematic analysis the first step is to get to know the data as it is important to get a thorough overview of all the data that has been collected before start analyzing (Caulfield, 2022). Then, to create themes for the study, the researcher generated 21 initial codes from the data of the interview transcription. From 21 initial codes, the researcher came up with the 4 main themes with the sub-themes to analyze the data from collected from the participants. Then, to answer the research question the researcher finalized the 4 themes to present the results.

The Nvivo12 application was used to create the codebook after the codes had been generated (See Table 2). Developing a codebook helped to arrange the data while writing the results and improve transparency.

Table 2. Codebook of the interview transcripts

Name	Description	Files	References
Accessibility to digital technology	The lack of accessibility to digital technology of young adults led social workers to take the initiatives to provide for young adults.	2	5
Advantages	The social workers mentioned the numerous benefits of using digital communication technology in social work practice with young adults	2	11
Attributes of social worker	Social workers mentioned about the characteristics that they need to have to build up a relationship with young adults	2	3
Awareness about data protection	Social workers expressed the concern, the lack of awareness they noticed among the young people using digital tools	1	1
Challenges	The challenges the social workers faced while using digital communication technology with young people	3	26
Confidentiality	Social workers talk through about the confidentiality of young adults because of private space and on online platforms	2	8
Safe environment	Importance of a safe environment for young adults to express themselves to the social workers	2	4
Cultural barriers	In Iran due to different family structure, the gender of young adults influence to access to digital tools.	1	4
Data protection	Concern expressed by the social workers about data protection of young adults on using digital communication technology	2	9

Digital tools and devices	The digital communication tools and devices that has been used by the social workers in social workers with young adults	3	6
Lack of accessibility to digital devices	The lack of accessibility of digital devices of the young adults	1	3
Preference of Social Workers	Preference of social workers between in-person meetings and digital communication tools	3	10
Preference of young adults	Preference of young adults in between in-person meetings and digital communication technology mentioned by the social workers	1	3
Relationships in social work practice	Social workers define the Importance of Relationships in social work practice and impact of using digital communication technology	3	22
Boundaries	Borderline between the social workers and young adults in friendly and professional relationships	1	6
Building trust	The importance of trust social work practice with the young people	2	4
Structural barriers	Structural barriers/racism defined by the social worker from Austria	1	2
The pandemic	First time using digital communication tools with young adults during the Covid-19	2	4
Training	Training or guideline to use digital communication technology	3	8
The transition of work setting	The similarities and distinctions between personal meetings and digital communication technology	2	2
Work-life balance	Distinction and similarity of work-life between working from the office and home	3	11

Themes

Impact of digital communication technology on the Relationship between Social Workers and young adults

The advantages of the use of digital communication technologies building relationships with young adults in social work practice from social workers perspective

Challenges Faced by social workers and young adults using digital communication technology

Social Workers' views on using Digital communication technology in Social Work Practice

Demographic information of the social workers

In this study, the pseudo names have been used for the social workers to keep the anonymity while writing the results and discussion of this study. The researcher asked the social workers what pseudo name they preferred to use in this study. Social from Austria suggested a pseudo name for her to use in this study and social workers from Brazil and Iran they did not have any preference of using any of pseudo names. Therefore, the researcher tried to come up with pseudo names for the social worker from Brazil and Iran which can be culturally relevant.

Furthermore, on the demographic information of the participants, in the table social workers specific age has not been mentioned rather the social workers were asked by the researcher which specific age group they belong. In this study, the age range of the social workers is 20-35 years old.

Table. 3 Demographic Information of the social workers					
Name (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Years of work experience	Specialization	Educational background	Nationality
Magda	Female	5 years	Young minors- specifically young refugees without family members	o Bachelor's in social work o Master's in social work (Ongoing)	Austria
Jasmine	Female	8 years	Young people at risk of child labor in Iran.	o Bachelor's in social work o Master's in social work (Ongoing)	Iran
Gabriela	Non-Binary	3 years	Public health and international social work (Ongoing) health facility for LGBT people in Porto, Alegre/ RS-Brazil	o Bachelor's and Masters in Public Health o Masters in Public health/ Social Work (Ongoing)	Brazil

The notion of relationship in social work practice and the significance of establishing a relationship with young adults from a social worker's perspective have been covered before discussing the impact of digital communication technologies on the relationship between social workers and young people.The reason for talking through the relationship in work practice before discussing the impact of digital communication technology on the relationship between the social workers and the service user is to get the perspective of social workers on how they perceive relationships social work practice with young people.

Defining relationships in social work practice from social worker's view

The social workers in this study, defines the role of relationships in social work practice is crucial. When discussing the concept of relationship, social workers define the relationship as trust, interaction, and connection that exists between young people and social workers. The social workers mentioned, relationships between the young people and the social workers, can be both friendly and professional. To fulfill the aims of social work practice, the social worker must work on having successful interactions with both clients and co-workers (Hutchinson and Oltedal, 2014).

As stated by Magda, there is no need to set limits in a professional relationship. According to Magda, it is a two-way communication in which the social worker and the young adults can discuss and share honestly without feeling like an interview setting. Magda believes that it should be more like getting to know the individual the social worker is working with, figuring out a shared goal, and collaborating to achieve it.

"I think that sometimes happens when you work with young people, they do not really know why they are here, what they are doing, why they here to get service, and it can be easy to ask them to what they should do and if you have a good relationship with them, then you can talk about and find out together what the person across from you what actually wants" – Magda

Jasmine worked with vulnerable young people who had been traumatized at workplace and family violence, and it was critical for her to build trust with the young people to engage with

them. Jasmine was desired to establish a friendly relationship to provide them with a sense of security, as well as a professional relationship to avoid crossing the line.

"We are social workers; we are not caregivers. I got through a situation where young people think we are caregivers, not social workers. At the same time, it is also important to have friendly relationships when you work with young vulnerable people to build trust, but you should also try to balance between them and try to build up more effective and more friendly relationships with the young people who can continue and communicate"- Jasmine

Gabriela sees the relationship in social work practice, as every connection that she has with service users, colleagues, and other professionals. She also mentions the social movement as a key component of their connection and practice. Because the relationship empowers the young people, and to do so, the social worker and the young people must be very trusting and respectful of one another.

"Like, I am a social worker, this is what I do, this is the service that I can provide. We are here, we are in a safe environment, making sure that they feel they can express themselves. Also in my case, I always make sure that you do not judge the young adults because sometimes they can feel very judged"- Gabriela

Furthermore, while working with young adults, Gabriela only preferred and had professional relationships, but she also believes that it is also not about placing limits on the young people with having a professional relationship. But that does not imply it is not pleasant or sociable. Magda also had both professional and friendly contacts with the young adults. Since, Magda believes that in the process, a social workers relationship with a young adults get more profound and friendlier as some young adults are open more and spend more time together in a social work context.

When meeting with a service users, social workers might presume a working relationship, but in other situations, it may be necessary to try to build trust with each other so that the client can

develop a belief that the social worker can be trusted after a while (Hutchinson and Oltedal, 2014). In this study, all social workers believe that relationship building is very important for good social work practice. Once strong relationships are developed, it helps young adults establish trust, it makes young adults feel safe, and they can share their concerns with the social workers without fear of being judged. In addition, developing a solid connections with young people and adults is the key to resolving any situation, and there will be no solution if there is no trust.

Attribute of social workers to build relationships with the young adults from social workers point of view

The essence of the service users -social worker interaction is based on problem-solving empathy and listening abilities (Hutchinson and Oltedal, 2014). Magda described, the authenticity of the social workers is crucial to have to build the relationship with young people because according to her, the social worker should have a real interest in the person, especially with the young people while working with them. Magda also mentioned that social workers should identify the problem if they believe they are not doing a good job and that something is wrong rather than causing the person to suffer. According to Gabriela, a social worker needs to possess several skills, but it also depends on the individual. However, Gabriela believes that empathy and active listening are the most important abilities for social workers to possess.

"*I believe in my case because I was working with LGBT young adults, it is nearly impossible for me to not to have a friendly relationship because we see the world similarly". - Gabriela*

The interactional social work model pointed out that communication is the defined relationship, it is a basic component of a relationship (Hutchinson and Oltedal, 2014). Jasmine also believes that the crucial attributes for a social worker to build up a relationship with young adults is the importance of effective communication, active listening, and especially developing a rapport trust with young people as vital.

Impact of digital communication technology on the relationship between social workers and young adults

The influence of digital communication technology on the relationship between social workers and young adults has both positive and negative consequences as described by the social workers. As Magda pointed out, texting was an effective alternative option for some young adults who felt insecure to talk with the social worker face to face. On the other hand, Magda found it difficult to grasp the entire scenario of young adults, attempting to figure out what was going on in their lives of young adults.

"It is okay when you have silent moments when you are meeting in person but when you are on the phone or in an online meeting it is a bit weird to have a long silent moment. You need the silent moment because there were thought processes going on, especially who is trying to build up the confidence to tell you about that matters to them. That was much more difficult digitally"- Magda

From the perspective of Jasmine, there was no difference between digital and in-person communication in terms of impacting relationships with young adults. Because Jasmine thinks, it depends on the person with whom she was working. She emphasized on the flow of communication between the her and the young adults, either digitally or in person.

According to Gabriela, the usage of digital communication technologies has had an impact both positively and negatively on young people. She highlighted that the usage of digital tools increased their usability and accessibility. Additionally, it was quicker and simpler to reach out to young adults through digital communication technology than it could have been to do so using traditional methods during the pandemic. Gabriela also mentioned, it can generate a few more personal connections, and it may be difficult to build trust and empathy without face-to-face interaction. It was also challenging for Gabriela to provide emotional support to the young adults because the   physical presence was not the same as when Gabriela and the young adults were on the other side of the screen.

The advantages of the use of digital communication technologies building relationships with young adults in social work practice from social workers perspective

Social workers had to deliver services digitally when Covid-19 struck the world as meetings with young adults took place digitally because of social distance. The benefits of using digital communication technologies with young adults were brought up by the social workers as they talked about switching from in-person meetings to digital ones. In addition, the social workers mentioned that the young people, feel comfortable at home and because did not need to travel to the office to meet with the social workers. As stated by Gabriela, *"We live in a digital era, so they are young, especially, they really like digital communications"*

Also, Gabriela observed that young adults were more engaged in digital sessions than in face-to-face meetings which increases the young adult's participation because they did not have to show their faces and did not have to visit the office with the Gabriela. Additionally, the young adults that Gabriela worked with digitally, did not want to switch to in-person meetings following the outbreak. Furthermore, the social workers described that, reaching out to young adults was manageable using digital communication technologies than it was for people who did not want to go to office to meet with the social workers or the social worker had difficulties to contact. Magda described that, it was beneficial for them as well to build a relationship to some extent and connect with the young adults through different digital communication technology because some young adults were not confident to talk over the phone or meeting face to face, as some young adults prefer the texting option. Furthermore, Jasmine described the benefits of using digital communication technology as now she lives away from her home country, Jasmine can easily connect with young people support them. And using digital communication technology, Jasmine can provide and create more awareness and provide services to young adults.

Challenges faced by social workers and young adults using digital communication technology

On the contrary with the advantages of using digital communication technology, social workers had challenges too.

It was difficult for the social workers to adapt to the shift from in-person to digital meetings. even though Magda had experience of using digital communication technology in practice before providing services to young people, she only did it occasionally and learned a little bit about it. Moreover, Gabriela and Jasmine mentioned the issue of the bad internet connection they faced the entire time while providing service to the young people with the digital tools.

"When the pandemic hits in Austria in March in 2020 and that's when we started to work remotely. Before that time to time, I had some online meetings, but it was very rare. It only when it was requested and that was, we only started to use it and when we build some knowledge about it as an organization and as a social worker. Like how to do it in the right way or considered as the best possible way. It felt a little bit locked up and it was also a feeling of not knowing what was going on with the people we are working with"- Magda

Lack of private space for young people

The social workers raise the issue of the lack of private space of young adults. When the social workers had video conferencing meetings, with the young adults, some of the young adults were unable to talk openly because they did not have their own rooms and their family members were unaware of their circumstances. Also, observing the young adult's gestures and posture throughout the video conferencing meetings was also tough for the social workers to observe them.

"I think it was one of the biggest challenges because many of the young adults we talked to did not have own rooms and they did not have space to talk in a way that they could open up and take the time and have a clam place where they can be their self's that one of the things and

being face to face there is more place for humor and there is also place for laughing and feelings with other person what they are feeling and grasp the whole the whole situation and to see how they are moving and to see what they are doing with their gesture and with their face"- Magda

Furthermore, Jasmine and Gabriela also brought up the issue of the lack of privacy problem of young adults who did not have their own rooms. That disrupted the communication and trust building process using digital communication technology between the social workers and the young adults which troubled the relationship between the social workers and the young adults. Jasmine mentioned, sometimes it was difficult for her to manage the young adults during the video conferencing meetings because some young adults had problems of focusing during the online meetings and they got carried away or got distracted by other things at home for instance with talking with their siblings or watching TV and so forth.

Furthermore, Gabriela described, during video call meetings with the young adults, she could not guarantee young adults privacy like Gabriela used did at the workplace.

"If you feel like you're not safe, at some point, you take your safety first, and then we can deal with that later. But we didn't have much trouble with that. Like, nobody complained about it. But we did have times when they would tell me, look, I cannot talk about this right now because my sister is in the room, and she doesn't know about this. So, this part was quite hard because that would never happen in the office"- Gabriela

Furthermore, Gabriela described, it was difficult for her just to rely on digital communication tools because it felt bit more impersonal to her and she thinks it was not the same to build trust and the empathy like when she meets the young adults face to face.

Confidentiality

Among the social workers there was growing concern about the confidentiality of young adults on using digital communication technology. When young adults shared their issues through different digital platforms with the social workers and when their parents are around in the home while their parents did not have any idea about it.

"In terms of confidentiality. In my case, some of the young people are forced to have an interview, or have an online meeting, for example, with me in the small group that I know that their parents also are around". - Gabriela

Also, some of the young adults that Gabriela was working with had health issues which make her worried because she could not check on them properly as she was meeting with them digitally.

"Most of our service users, they had mental health issues. So, we as a team, we didn't feel safe to deal with these people when they are online because we couldn't access them if we noticed that something Was wrong because of the health issues". I was dealing with people with HIV, people who use drugs for example, or people who are suffering from depression and their family didn't know. So, talk to them about meds, about drugs, about safe sex"- Gabriela

Magda brought up the issues of differences in the interaction process using digital communication technology and in-person meetings. that they observed the situation digitally with the young adults.

Accessibility to digital tools

In terms of access to digital resources, the young people experienced a lack of availability to access the digital tools because, in the family, they only had one laptop, which was normally utilized by a working member of the family. The challenges with the availability of computers, smartphones, internet connections, and so forth are linked to the social status and geographic location of young adult families in Austria, Iran, and Brazil. However, Magda and her colleagues came up with an initiative, to contact people who had old laptops and then they collected those laptops and repaired them. However, Magda mentioned, it was quite stressful for them because they had to do first come first serve policy because they did not have enough laptop for everyone. Also, some of the laptops did not work very well., But she expressed that, it was great initiative.

"I mostly found the biggest difference in the socio-economic background of the family. I was working with one young adult who had one phone in the family so I could reach her for weeks. So, it was mostly structural and economic differences in the society which is very visible". - Magda

Furthermore, the internet connection was a serious issue in Brazil and Iran, causing disruptions multiple times during online meetings with young people as mentioned by Jasmine and Gabriela. Gabriela stated, sometimes during online meeting, when the young people opening up or they are telling her something important or Gabriea and the young adults finishing or making some agreements , suddenly they got disconnected or froze in front of her.

" It was really terrible. Yeah! When you work digitally. even if someone is disconnected you cannot tell if it was on purpose or like if it was the internet connection. You cannot guess," – Gabriela

"So somehow most of the social resources are city-centred and you know the metropolitan city or capital city. So, some of the people who live in the poor situation, or in some village they do not have a lot of social development. If I compare two-three years ago, now it is better. But yeah of course that there is a poor internet connection. Yeah, it is true, the big cities and metropolitan cities are more developed. Of course, they have more access to social resources, compared to the people who live in remote places"- Jasmine.

Data protection

The use of digital communication technologies made social workers to be concerned about the data privacy of young adults. The concern indicated by the social workers about sharing sensitive information about young adults on various online platforms was not considered safe by the social workers. Because frequently young adults write about personal matters that should be discussed in private. Furthermore, unlike in-person meetings, digital technologies contain terms and conditions that must be followed before use.

"I think the difference is I felt less control over doing so because, with digital communication technology like Zoom or Whatsapp and you always have to say Yes to their terms and conditions, and in my workspace, there is more freedom in what I should write down and not and I felt like I am in more power to protecting the data that. I was working with"- Magda

"Every time before we start a meeting, we tell them, look! we cannot guarantee the privacy here as we did in the office". – Gabriela

Social workers have also noted a lack of understanding among young adults, as the young people do not care about the privacy policy if they have to sign something, and they sign and hand it over without reading it.

"One young adult said, I don't care because I have nothing to hide, that's they often said" - Magda

About data protection, the young adults were unaware of or not concerned about it, and social workers had to discuss with them about the data protection issues. Furthermore, the social workers, described when they started to use the digital communication technology in the beginning, they had no insight into how the data was being processed or what tools were being used for digital meetings with the young adults. As sometimes on digital platforms young adults overshare a lot about their private life. Additionally, because the phone provided by the organization was outdated and the new features the social workers wanted to use did not function, they frequently had to use their own phones. Furthermore, social workers prefered texting rather than using audio or video call because it was considered an easier and safer option in terms of privacy during Covid-19 because everyone was at home and texting was considered a more secure option for the young adults.

"But when it is online, there is two things that worn me a lot. One is that we had no idea how these digital tools work in the matters of if they have access to what we are listening, doing, or reading, we just trust that it wasn't and of course, the place that the service users are."-Gabriela

Social workers' views on using digital communication technology in social work practice

Choices for digital tools

There was a conversation between the social workers and the young people about which digital platform was much safer to use. Magda mentioned, if a young person already had one app installed on their phone, they did not want to get another, and it was difficult for social workers to convince them to install a specific app entirely to communicate with the social worker. The organization that Magda worked in Austria, wanted to use the Signal app, but the challenging aspect was ensuring the young people's data protection and that the software was accessible to young adutls. Furthermore, different social media platforms were popular among young adults in Iran, and they chose to utilize them with social workers. Also, in social work practice using different kinds of digital communication tools was a new experience for the social worker as they had to keep updated and both social workers and the young people learn from each other. Gabriela indicated, while working digitally they usually used WhatsApp for scheduling, updating prescriptions, and making WhatsApp video calls with the young adults.

Preference of social workers between in-person meetings and using digital communication technology in social work practice

Magda prefers personal meetings with young adults at the office, where both the young people and she may be in a similar environment. Because spatial aspects are highly important in social work practice, and in a nice environment, young adults can feel safe and communicate openly it was easier for Magda to build a relationship because There is also more room for young adults to take their time and have a peaceful place where they can be themselves; there is more room

for humor, laughing and picking up on the other person's emotions; and there is more opportunity for understanding the full issue by watching the young people's gestures and posture.

Gabriela prefers both digital and in-person approach to work with young people. However, she prefers the first meeting with young adults in person because the presence of face-to-face meetings for the first time helps to create trust and relationships in order to convey the service that they can offer to the young people. Because, upon first meeting with the young adults, they greet them and show them around the workplace, which was not possible online and was difficult to deal with through digital communication technology. However, Gabriela stated that, having a digital option is beneficial for young adults with disabilities or those with financial difficulties.

Jasmine shared her thoughts on the use of digital communication in the practice of social work with young adults. Because she is now living and studying overseas, she likes both in-person and digital options to work with young people. She wants to assist the youth while offering service through digital communication technologies. Moreover, the use of digital communication technology is beneficial because it gives the accessibility to reach out the young adults from abroad and to support, and create awareness among young people through digital platforms and without physical presence, as majority of the young adults now have smartphones and internet in Iran.

While talking about their preferences of the social workers between the use of digital communication technology and in person meetings with the young adults, the researcher also asked the social workers, if they have heard from young adults preference about the use of digital communication technologies or face-to-face meetings . Gabriela stated that when the Covid-19 restriction was lifted. the young adults she dealt with still preferred meeting digitally when she offered both online and in-person appointments. The difference Gabriela mentioned was then all her co-workers were present at the office. Because of the confidentiality and the fact that the majority of the young adults they dealt with had mental health difficulties, were depressed, or had suicidal ideas, they eventually switched everything to in-person meetings.

*"So, it was quite heavy for the team and for the young adults. as well, but they would prefer online, and they kept asking for online appointments"- **Garbriela***

However, Jasmine and Magda did not directly ask the young adults about their preferences, nor did the young adults mentioned about the online or personal meetings with the social workers. However, following Covid-19, Jasmine, and Magda, added the option for the young adults to meet in person, via Zoom, or talk via phone. However, Magda stated that she enjoyed face-to-face meetings with young adults rather than digitally.

Workloads of social workers

The social workers had slightly different experiences with their workloads using digital communication technology. Magda's workload was initially less because when Covid-19 struck, everything was put on hold. However, Magda described, the online meetings she had with young adults were less demanding since the duration of the meetings were shorter, and not as effective as in-person meetings.

For Jasmine, the workload while working digitally was difficult to handle since she had many cases to manage and services to deliver to young adults, which were difficult to manage in comparison to person meetings.

Gabriela's workload was heavy because she worked at night throughout the pandemic. But the major reason was Gabriela normally took more time during in-person meetings, but she experienced the digital meetings with the young adults more like an interview. As a result, the manager requested Gabriela to take more young adults. However, the paperwork was the same as working from the office for Gabriela, but the mental workload was more working digitally as stated by Gabriela. Because she needed to work with more individuals but had less time. Also, Gabriela mentioned, not being able to speak and meet with her co-worker's face to face and not able to share some difficult experiences which they had all encountered during the Covid-19 and providing services digitally to young people was difficult to deal with for Gabriela. As a result, the support system vanished while working digitally, Gabriela added.

"What happened is that we had our meetings every week and it was more like a support group because everyone was exhausted because we did not have the support of anyone in person. and that made us even more attached to technology because we could only talk through technology. so, at the end of the day, everyone was exhausted from the computer and phones"- Gabriela

Work-life balance

All the social workers experienced numerous adjustments when working from home. Gabriela stated that she did not enjoy working from home because her family members assumed she was available most of the time. However, Gabriela enjoyed the flexibility of combining digital and in-person alternatives because if she is unable to attend the office, she was able to communicate and get in touch with the young people.

"Your family member will knock at your door sometimes; some crazy people will shout on the streets and there is nothing you can do. So that was kind of annoying for me." – Gabriela

Magda said, when she prepared to turn off her phone in the evening closing hour of work, sometimes she received calls from young adults. Magda also mentioned the benefits of working from home because her employer provided all of the necessary technology. She received a laptop from the organization for which she worked, and she also had working internet at her apartment and her own workspace.

"One day I was about to turn off my phone, it was in the evening, and I was about to stop work. I was a young adult I was working with; she was calling and I picked up the phone, we started to talk and talk. And I was looking at my window and I thought it was a really nice talk and I was sitting and thinking at looking at my window I thought the boundaries were blurred and at end of the talk she said, you know I do not even talk that much with my boyfriend".- Magda

Jasmine expressed, the difficulties, to balance work and life while working from home because young people assumed she was always available. There were certain sensitive instances she handled, so they had to set up a 24-hour hotline for them. *"One day there was one girl, she was physically abused by her parents and so she called me because at that time, we needed to*

provide a safe place for her. But, during the pandemic it was difficult. So, I talked with her on the phone for an hour and tried to make her feel safe. Then I talked with one of her sisters, to provide a safe place for her and somehow, we managed it".

Chapter five

5. Discussion

This chapter will give an overview of the major findings of this study, then in the interpretation section the researcher has described how the findings of this study has answered the research question. After, in the implication part the researcher discussed whether or not the existing literature support or challenges the results of this study and the possible practical implication from the perspective of the researcher. Lastly, the limitation of the research which was not possible to explore and the recommendation for further study.
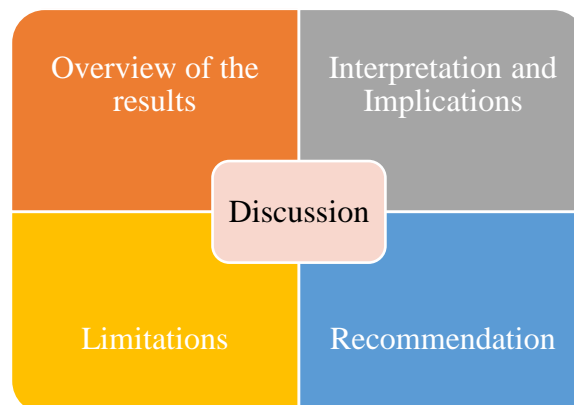
5.1. Overview of the results

The researcher's interest is inspired by how social work practice thrived in the advent of Covid 19 and how digitalization has come in handy to help the situation. To be more precise, the interest grew in how a phenomenon like Covid-19 has impacted the social work practice

especially how or whether the relationship between social workers and young adults has been impacted by not having in-person meetings during the pandemic. Connecting to that, the researcher was interested to investigate social workers' perspectives from different countries experienced the use of digital communication technology with young adults.

Along with the impact of digital communication technology on the relationship between social workers and young adults, other facts such as confidentiality, data protection, and a lack of private space at home for young adults, as well as similarities and differences of caseloads of social worker in-person meetings and digitally with young adults and so forth, were investigated, because it was necessary to point out those issues to explore if or whether those aspects has an impacted the relationship between social workers and young adults using digital communication technology and the results has shown that, these aspects has an influence and impacted the relationship between the social workers and young people.

Use of digital communication tools in social work were a new experience for all social workers when the pandemic hit globally. The social workers had to come up with different strategies to get in touch with young people as the data shows that there was a lack of accessibility to digital devices for young adults due to a lack of financial ability.. Furthermore, social workers place significant importance on relationships with young people since it was impossible for social workers to fulfil the goal of the young adults who came to the social worker unless they have a friendly and professional relationship. Social workers placed a greater focus on interaction with young people since it was more beneficial for the social workers to create trust and a deep link between social workers and young adults. All the social workers described working with young people also required a high level of trust, interaction, and kindness. On the issue of the impact of the use of digital communication on the relationship between the social workers and young adults, the social workers expressed having both options alternatively usage of digital communication technology and in-person meetings, considering the benefits and drawbacks of both in-person meetings and the usage of digital communication tools to the maintain and build relationship with the young adults. Also, the social workers described the benefits of utilizing digital communication technology, which was easier, faster, and more accessible to young people and build up relationships especially with young with disabilities.

On the other hand, social workers experienced difficulties ensuring young adults' privacy due to a lack of private space in their homes since the young people could not freely talk and share their problems with the social workers during digital meetings. Nonetheless, social workers were concerned about data protection because they were unsure about the security of the information that young people were sharing through various digital platforms and video conferencing tools, and how the information could be proceeded by a third party and that affected the relationship between the social workers and young people. Furthermore, the social worker expressed different experiences of the workloads in their countries while working digitally. For, Magda there was not that much difference between working from home and at the office with the caseloads. However, Magda stated that the effectiveness of digital meetings with young people was not the same as in-person meetings. However, rather than caseloads, Gabriela experienced a mental workload when working digitally from home and somehow it affected to build up the relationship between Gabriela and young adults.

Additionally, the social worker wanted to maintain a friendly relationship along with a professional relationship with the young people when offering services to young people. Jasmine and Gabriela kept a narrow line between the young people to achieve the common goal that the young people required. Furthermore, this study showed because of the socioeconomic structure in Austria, Brazil, and Iran the young adults faced barriers to get to access to digital devices. As a result, social workers in their home countries took initiatives to provide digital devices to young people. Besides, this research showed the importance of relationships in social work practice is crucial between social workers and young adults which has been expressed by the social workers.

5.2. Interpretation and Implications

The results of the study have answered the research question, how does the use of digital communication technology have impacted the relationship between young adults and social workers from the view of social workers? Social workers interpreted the benefits and challenges they faced using digital commutation technology with young people which impacted the

relationship positively and negatively. The benefits of using digital communication technology with young adults it was easier for social workers to get in touch with them as the young people prefer digital meetings or texting. However, the challenges the social worker faced using digital communication technology impacted the relationship significantly between the social workers and young people because during the usage of digital communication technology with young adults as it was difficult for the social workers to build trust which is one of the crucial notions for the social workers to build a relationship with the young adult as mentioned by the social workers because the social workers felt that without physical presence it is difficult for them to provide emotional support and empathy to the young adults.

Even though in the research question the Covid-19 issue has not been included, but in the introduction, literature review, and in the results section, the issue of Covid-19 has been discussed. The reason for mentioning Covid-19 in those sections of this study is that the outbreak of the pandemic forced people to stay physically distance and the usage of digital communication technology increased exceptionally to work from home for the social workers (Pink et al., 2022). The reason for not including Covid-19 in the research question is that all the social workers have used digital communication technology in social work practice before the pandemic. But the usage of digital communication technology was very limited. In the case of Magda, she had online meetings with young adults, but those were few. It was only when it was asked by the organization that they began to use it, as well as they wanted to build some knowledge. Also, Gabriela mentioned that they have used WhatsApp to make an appointment with young adults before Covid-19. Although, for the researcher the interest to work on this theme grew from how global phenomena like Covid-19 impacted the social work practice as social workers had to utilize digital communication technology to work with young adults. But the focus of this research was to explore how the use of digital communication technology has impacted the relationship between social workers and young adults from the social worker's perspective.

The data of this study contributes to a better understanding of the impact of digital communication technology on the relationship   between social workers and young adults and the importance of relationships in social work practice between the young adults and social workers from the perspective of social workers from three different countries. As the finding

of the study shows young adults preferred to use digital communication technology with social workers because some young adults were not confident to talk over the phone or meeting face to face, as some young adults prefer the texting option, and to some extent, it helps the social workers to build a relationship digitally with the young adults because it was difficult for the social workers to reach out to the young adults to meet in person. But due to several challenges, social workers would like to have both the option of digital communication technology and an in-person meeting in social work practice. However, to build a relationship with young people social workers prefer a face-to-face meeting with young adults because it is more effective for them to build trust with young adults. Moreover, the social workers faced challanged using digital communication technology impaired the relationship due to data protection, confidentiality, young people could not openly, and social worker did not have the power to protect the information that the young adults shared with the social workers through digital communication technology whereas in face to face meeting the social workers had the capability what to write and what not to.

The existing literature used in this study also discusses that young people, benefit from digital communication technology because they feel reduced of stigma or feel less judgmental. Furthermore, young people were more engaging in online settings with the social workers rather than in person meetings. Moreover, as stated by Mishna et al. (2012), social work practice was mostly conducted in more private surroundings, with the social worker deciding what information to reveal, how to express it, and with whom. As in social work practice in person meetings might decrease and ethical concerns may arise; these issues may not appear to turn social work activity useful, but they are manageable via education and ethical reflection in a reflexive practice (Nordesjö et al., 2022).

Considering that, the study of Mackrill & Ørnbøll, (2019), shows, in Denmark an app called "MySocialworker" assisted young users in gaining perspective on their life and in seeing themselves realistically. For instance, the young adults mentioned that the app is used to define and remember personal goals (Mackrill & Ørnbøll, 2019). Also, the young adults also used the app to evaluate their overall performance throughout the week prior (Mackrill & Ørnbøll, 2019). It improved their perception of how their lives are progressing as well as evaluating their own effectiveness and their potential (Mackrill & Ørnbøll, 2019). The app served as a lens

through which the service users and caseworker could investigate various parts of the service users life (Mackrill & Ørnbøll, 2019). The app itself became a collaboration, and shared interests and the app improved the young people's relationship with their caseworkers (Mackrill & Ørnbøll, 2019).

The findings of this study are more international because it explored the perspective of social workers who are from three different Nationalities (Austria, Brazil and Iran) and three different continents (Europe, Asia and South America) on the impact of using digital communication technology on the relationship with young adults.   Following that, these findings should be considered while deciding how to move ahead with the use of digital communication tools in social work practice considering a more secure way to protect the confidentiality, data protection, of young adults with the use of digital communication technology, which will help the social worker to build a strong and effective relationship with the young adults.

5.3.   Limitations of the study

This study has prospective limitations.

The first limitation of the study is, in this research the data has been collected only from the social workers. Therefore, on the use of digital communication technology in social work practices, the results of this study only demonstrated from the social worker perspective. However, it was not possible to recruit young adults in this study due to a lack of accessibility. After, discussing with the social workers who participated in this study if there is any possibility to involve the young adults that they worked with using digital commutation technology. But due to the code of ethics, it was not possible for the social workers to recommend the researcher to reach out to the young adults. Which led to the second limitation of the study.

Secondly, of the study is the scientific approach used in this study. As, in this study practice research on the social work approach has been deployed. However, in the process, only social workers have been involved as a consultant as well as informants. But young adults have not been involved as a consultant or as an informant because it was not possible for the researcher to reach out to them due to a lack of accessibility. So, the suggestion and the feedback have only came from social workers on the research question, the objective of the study, and the

interview guide. Therefore, involving the young adults as a consultant along with informants in the research process might have provided a new point of view to the researcher.

Thirdly, the time limitation to finish the study. Due to limited time, it was not possible for the researcher to have a few pre-meetings with the two social workers to spend more time with them before the interviews. However, the communication was going through Email and Whatsapp with the social workers during the research process as they were involved as a consultant as well. Also, the interview for data collection from two social workers was conducted online. Nonetheless, a face-to-face pre-meeting before the interview and the interview with the social workers from Austria and Brazil might have been more efficient for in-depth information.

In spite of some limitations in this study, the result of the research is well-founded as the study findings gives satisfactory overview of the impact of using digital communication technology on the relationship between social workers and young adults including the possibilities and challenges of using digital communication technology in social work practice with young adults. With the limited time to finish this study, implementing practice research on the social work approach and only involving the social workers as consultants as well as information was more logical.

Furthermore, this study represents an international perspective, Therefore, the study findings can be helpful for the development of social work practice by generating innovative digital methods or tools for social work practice which will make sure data protection, confidentiality, and ease of access for young adults and social workers while using digital communication technology in social work practice and can ensure the reliability and possibility for the social worker to build a relationship with young people

5.4.   Recommendations

Considering the limitation of the study, in further research can be done on, how new technologies can be more inclusive for people with disabilities or people who live in rural areas. Furthermore, more research could be done on how digital communication technology has impacted the relationship between social workers with other age groups in social work practice.

Chapter six

6.   Conclusion

This study has answered the research question, "How does the use of digital communication technology have impacted the relationship between young adults and social workers from the view of social workers"?   The findings showed that the use of digital communication technology has impacted both positively and negatively between social workers and young adults. The social workers experienced some benefits of using digital communication technology that helped the social workers to build relationships with the young adults which was difficult face to face to get access to young adults those who had confidence issues to talk face to face or on video conferencing tools, young adults with disabilities or who had financial issues. Moreover, there were challenges as well that faced by the social workers using digital communication tools with young adults to build relationships such as data protection, observing young adults' gestures and postures, providing emotional support without physical presence, build trust. As these findings can be useful for social workers and other stakeholders to come up with a standalone digital platform to implement in social work practice globally.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

First, I want to thank you for taking your time for this interview.

Introduction: I am an international student at Aalborg University, I am doing my Masters in Nordic Social Work and Welfare and this research project is part of my Master's thesis titled, **"Exploring the Impact of Digital Communication Technology on the Relationship between Social Workers and Young Adults in Social Work Practice"**

Confidentiality: All information of the participants will be collected anonymously, and all answers will be treated confidentially. Any identifying data such as, participants' names, or educational institution/organization name and email address will not be disclosed.

Participation: In the study, your participation of yours is completely voluntary, and the participant can withdraw from the interview at any time, can refuse to answer any question if it make discomfort to them without any explanation.

Interview duration: Approximately 1 hour 30 min.

Nationality:
Gender:
Age range:
Years of work experience:
Specialization:
Educational background:

Relationship between Social Worker & Young Adults

1. As a social worker, how do you define a relationship and the importance of relationship with young adults in social work practice?

2. Do you only have a professional relationship with the service users? If Yes/No, then, from your point of view how crucial it is to build a friendly or social relationship with young adults?

3. Do you think building up relationship is a key to good social work practice? If Yes/No, why?

4. How does the use of digital communication technology has impacted the relationship between you and the young adults?

5. Do you think building up a relationship with young adults is difficult or easier on a digital platform compared to an in-person meeting? If Yes/No, why?

7. Do you have any experience facing any dilemmas using digital communication technology with young adults? If yes, could you share the incident?

8. From your perspective what characteristics or attributes does a social worker need to have to build a relationship with a young adult?

9. Do you think a friendly relationship plays an important factor to connect with young adults? If, yes/no, why?

Use Of Digital Communication Technology

1. When was the first time you used digital communication technology such as telephones, email, messaging, and videoconferencing (Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, and so forth) with young adults? How was your experience with the transition from in-person meetings to remote work?

2. Did you receive any training from the organization to use of digital communication technology (telephones, email, messaging, Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, or any other digital platform) to provide services to young adults? If yes/No, why?

3. Did you have any guidelines or protocols at the beginning or later about using digital communication technology when engaging with young adults (such as how to use it to ensure security)?

4. Do you prefer to use digital communication technology or in-person meeting with young adults? If Yes/No, why? Can you identify any advantages and disadvantages in the use of digital communication technology or in-person meetings with young adults?

5. How was your experience with workloads while using digital communication technology with young adults compared to in-person meetings?

6. What is your thought about protecting young adults' privacy while using digital communication technology (Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, etc) compared to in-person meetings?

7. Do you think the participation of young adults got increased while using digital communication technology compared to in-person meetings? If Yes/No, why?

8. Did you face any difficulties at any time to contact any young adults due to their lack of accessibility to (the internet, or smartphone)? Or lack of competency to use digital communication technology? If Yes/No, why?

9. As a social worker when you provide services to young adults using digital communication technology did you face any challenges to balance your private and professional life? If yes/no-why?

> ➢ If there is any more information about this subject that you would like to add or comment on, or if you have any questions for me, please feel free to ask.

Appendix.B

Participant Consent Form

Title of the project: Exploring the Impact of Digital Communication Technology on the Relationship between Social Workers and Young Adults in Social Work Practice

I... openly accept to engage in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without consequence.

- I was given written explanations of the study's objective and nature, and I was given the opportunity to ask questions about it.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in researcher personal computer in a secure folder with a password which contains by the researcher.

Signature   and   date   of   research   participant

Signature and date of researcher