The Relationship between Structural Empowerment, Attitudes and Competencies Practice in Malaysia Welfare Department

Noorhaizah Ahmad Shuhaimi[1]*, Amna Md Noor[2], Wan Munira Wan Jaafar[2]

[1]Department of Social Welfare, Government of Malaysia Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, Malaysia
[2]Department of Human Ecology, Putra Malaysia University, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: Noorhaizah Ahmad Shuhaimi (noorhaizah77@yahoo.com)

ABSTRACT

This study meticulously examines the intricate relationship between structural empowerment, attitudes (specifically job satisfaction, commitment, and trust), and behaviors, on their impact on practical competencies in the realm of social work. The participants, drawn from the Department of Social Welfare's Social Scheme, underwent analysis using the SPSS survey and revealed a statistically significant and positive correlation between structural empowerment, attitudes and behaviors with practical competencies as indicated in the motion. Crucially, the study also identifies resources and support as key variables which exert a pivotal influence on competencies at workplace. The findings underscore the critical imperative of enhancing structural empowerment, attitudes, and behaviors to elevate competencies within the social work domain. The study also strongly advocates for organizational prioritization of structural empowerment improvements and the provision of substantial support, fortifying social workers' competencies and thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of social services.

Keywords: structural empowerment, competencies practice, behaviors, job satisfaction, social worker

1. Introduction

The Department of Social Welfare (JKM) serves as a cornerstone public agency under the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development, with a long history dating back to 1946. With the mission to safeguard societal well-being, JKM addresses a spectrum of social issues, including child abuse, infant abandonment, elderly neglect, domestic violence, and poverty-related challenges. As a vital player in the social services sector, JKM provides comprehensive assistance to diverse target groups and is also most notable for its commitment to social work.

This crucial function is carried out by a dedicated team of professionals, including Social Welfare Officers (Grades 41 to 54), Community Development Officers (Grades 29 to 38), and Assistant Community Development Officers (Grades 19 to 26). These individuals actively engage with and provide support to individuals, families, groups, and communities, addressing a wide spectrum of needs within JKM's diverse clientele. As of June 2022, JKM is comprised of a workforce of approximately 3500 personnel strategically placed at the JKM Headquarters, State offices and all Branch Offices (PKMD/C). The JKM's workforce includes 531 registered Social Workers and

2137 registered Associate Social Workers, all meeting the educational criteria stipulated in the proposed Worker Registration Regulations draft. This commitment reflects the agency's dedication to maintaining a qualified and skilled workforce to effectively address the complex social challenges faced by the community.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Kanter's Structural Empowerment Theory

This study adopts Kanter's Structural Empowerment Theory (Kanter, 1993, 1977), building on the work of Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook, and Irvine (2007) and Samad (2007). The theory emphasizes the transformative potential of organizational structures over individual qualities (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook and Irvine, 2007) which theorizes that by decentralizing decision-making and amplifying subordinates' access to information and resources, organizations aim to cultivate empowerment among their workforce (Samad, 2007). According to Kanter, power within an organization is characterized by the ability to mobilize resources for goal attainment, contingent upon access to information, support, resources, and learning opportunities (Kanter, 1993, 1977). Lack of access to these critical resources impedes empowerment and poses challenges to conducting an effective job performance.

Thus, as a step forward to this theory as well as considering the fact that decentralization of decision-making and provision of broader access to resources is believed to create an environment conducive to structural empowerment and thereby enhances overall job performance, the study aims to underscore the effects of centrality of organizational structures in the shaping of an individual's structural empowerment. The study will then challenge Kanter's assertion regarding the flourishing of structural empowerment when individuals are given unfettered access to the essential components that drive organizational success.

2.2. Principles and Practices in Social Work

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) collectively define social work as a dynamic profession and academic discipline that champions social change and community empowerment. This definition is rooted in principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversity, as highlighted by Siti Hajar et al. (2020). Social work integrates theories from the social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge which aligns perfectly with the mission and vision of the Department of Social Welfare of Malaysia (JKM).

Connecting this foundation of social work to competencies practice in social works, we are able to set a benchmark which enables the measurement of one's professional adherence to specific knowledge and skills related to various professional assistance activities. Social work practice which involves the application of mentioned framework of values, principles, and professional techniques is as such in order to provide social or human services to, offer counseling and psychotherapy for, and empower the community members through various social recovery processes, advocacy, and social legislation. Thus, in line with this definition, social work practitioners are to master foundational knowledge encompassing human development, human behavior, social and economic sciences, cultural institutions, and their interplay in influencing human behavior as emphasized by the National Assembly of Social Workers, NASW, (2017).

2.3. Competency

Competencies, as Palan R (2007) notes, represent characteristics related to effective or superior job performance in specific work situations. Competencies reflect underlying characteristics that describe motives, personal attributes, self-concept, values, knowledge, or skills that enable someone to excel in the workplace. There are five factors that influence ones competency:

i.   Human Factors (knowledge of technical issues, administration and human processes)
ii. Skills (a person's ability to perform an activity)
iii. Self-concept and values (attitudes, values, self-image and beliefs)
iv. Personal attributes (physical characteristics and resilience)
v.   Motives (emotions, desires, and psychological needs)

In this study, competency refers to the competence attribute of social workers based on the indicators as outlined in the Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice by NASW (2015). Assessment of social worker competencies can be done through measuring the expansivity of knowledge, skills, values and ethics possessed by the person. These measurements are essential as social work, as a profession, brings about social change to society at large as well as on the individual level. It involves interactions at various levels of human interaction and environmental life which in return causes its quality to easily be influenced by both personal factors and the social environment. Thus, a competent social worker is required to be resilient to influencing personal factors and environmental factors while being aware of the dynamic social processes within their social groups and organizations (Siti Hajar et al., 2020). Through these characteristics, a social worker will be able to formulate a realistic, holistic and comprehensive assessment of clients' situations and propose an intervention model personalized to fit the client's needs (Agllias, 2010; Bogo, 2010).

2.4. Social Structures, Legislation and Professional Adaptability in Social Work

The interplay between social structures, legislation and professional adaptability is paramount for effective social work practice. This involves not only a keen focus on the active dynamics within groups and social organizations but also an in depth awareness of the broader socio-political structures and cultural contexts influencing social work interventions. As underscored by Siti Hajar et al., (2020), Strier & Bershtling, (2016), Jessen, (2015), the quality of social work practice is intricately linked to key factors within the social structure, specifically social legislation which safeguards social workers and other policies that shape the framework for social welfare service implementation. The dynamic nature of social structures, particularly the state's social administration system, plays an important role in supporting and encouraging the growth and development of social work practices. The collaborative environment fostered by these structures and socio-political cultures is recognized as a core need in social work services, as highlighted by Delavega et al. (2018).

Explicit social legislation is indispensable for safeguarding social workers who often navigate physically and socially hazardous environments, particularly when serving clients facing potential risks (NASW, 2017). In conclusion, the competence and ethical practice of social workers, informed by a comprehensive understanding of social structures and legislation, serve as the linchpin for delivering impactful services and contributing to the well-being and empowerment of diverse communities.

3. Methodology

This research employs a quantitative approach, utilizing a modified version of a pre-existing questionnaire from prior studies for online distribution. The data collection was executed through

internet-based communication tools, including email, online survey platforms, and mobile phones. The adoption of online surveys has gained popularity among researchers due to its convenience, as observed in several studies (Andrade et al., 2020; Sagar et al., 2020; Akintunde et al., 2021). This method is favored for its ease of use compared to traditional face-to-face interviews or physical questionnaire distribution. Moreover, it facilitates reaching respondents across diverse geographic locations, offering a cost-effective and efficient alternative to manual data entry, minimizing the risk of errors during input (Hlatshwako et al., 2021).

The survey participants involved 407 social workers from JKM, encompassing grades S19 to S44, stationed across 19 District/Branch Offices (PKMD/C) and JKM Kuala Lumpur. Stratified random sampling based on geographic zones was applied for the selection of PKMD/C in states, namely Kedah and Perak (Northern Zone), Terengganu and Pahang (Eastern Zone), Selangor and Kuala Lumpur (Central Zone), and Johor (Southern Zone). A comprehensive structured questionnaire was developed, amalgamating components from seven instruments employed in prior studies, namely:

i.   Conditions for Job Effectiveness,
ii.   Minnesota Job Satisfaction Questionnaire,
iii.   Organizational Commitment Questionnaire,
iv.   Workplace Trust Survey,
v.   Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI),
vi.   Professional Opinion Scale (POS), and
vii.   Social Work Practice Skills.

The research instrument underwent a rigorous pilot test, confirming its reliability with a high Cronbach's alpha value of 0.90. The raw data collected via the questionnaire underwent processing using SPSS version 29. The subsequent analysis involved obtaining information on frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation to ensure a comprehensive examination of the dataset.

4. Results

As the social work profession operates within a dynamic and evolving landscape, it is bound to be highly intertwined with the demographic composition of its workforce. A profound understanding of these demographic intricacies serves as a step to discover the challenges and opportunities inherent in the social work profession. Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of gender distribution, professional rank, educational backgrounds, age distribution, income patterns, and the duration of service among social work practitioners. Through a nuanced analysis, the possible implications of these demographic trends can be drawn to provide valuable inferences for enhancing both professional development and organizational effectiveness the social work sector.

The survey discloses a noteworthy equilibrium in gender distribution, with 49.6% male and 50.4% female respondents. This close representation can be seen as an active effort and a deliberate commitment to inclusivity within the Malaysian welfare system. This parity in gender representation shows the conscientious effort to embrace diverse perspectives from people of different societal category, laying the groundwork to foster an inclusive and egalitarian professional environment. Such a balanced representation not only reflects societal ideals but also enhances the profession's capacity to address a plethora of issues with sufficient sensitivity and a holistic understanding.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Overview of Respondents (N = 407)

Background	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	202	49.6
Female	205	50.4
Professional Rank		
S19 – S26 (PPM)	231	56.8
S29 – S38 (PPPM)	154	39.8
S41 – S44 (PKM)	22	5.4
Education Background		
SPM	112	27.3
Diploma/ STPM	147	35.9
Undergraduate	122	29.7
Postgraduate	26	6.3
Age (year)		
20 – 30	58	14.3
31 – 40	174	42.8
41 – 50	145	35.6
51 – 60	30	7.4
Avg = 38.5, S.D = 7.95, Min = 23, Max = 58		
Income (RM)		
2000 – 3000	88	21.6
3001 – 4000	157	38.6
4001 – 5000	95	23.3
5001 – 6000	55	13.5
6001 – 7000	11	2.7
> 7000	1	0.2
Avg = 3812.7, S.D = 1062.64, Min = 2000, Max = 7300		
Duration of Service (year)		
1 – 3	29	7.1
4 – 10	82	20.1
11 – 20	230	56.5
21 – 30	53	13.0
> 30	13	3.2
Avg = 14.87, S.D = 7.23, Min = 1, Max = 33		

Note. Respondents are grouped into 3 categories, namely Community Development Officers (PPM), Assistant Community Development Officers (PPPM) and Social Welfare Officers (PKM) due to similarities in job scope and responsibilities.

The educational panorama among the surveyed respondents in the social work profession reveals a tapestry of diverse talents and qualifications. Significantly, 27.3% of practitioners have attained high school qualifications, while 35.9% hold diplomas or STPM certification. This underscores a foundational commitment to knowledge acquisition, with at least 60% of the workforce possessing proper academic qualifications that provide a strong foundation for social work practices. The 29.7% who have completed undergraduate education signify a cohort with a more extensive academic background, indicating both opportunities and potential areas for growth in the postgraduate field. Lastly, The 6.3% of respondents holding postgraduate degrees add another

layer of expertise to the educational landscape of social workers in the Malaysian welfare system. This divergence in educational backgrounds highlights the necessity for tailored initiatives aimed at promoting continuous professional development among social work officers as well strategic efforts to enhance qualifications, specifically through postgraduate education as it is indispensable to elevate the overall professional standards within the social work field. By fostering a culture of ongoing learning and advanced education, the profession can ensure that practitioners are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to address the evolving challenges within the social work landscape.

The next important socio-demographic background is the age of the respondents as the pattern of age distribution among social workers is essential in providing insights regarding the career trajectories within the social work profession. A notable concentration in the 31–40 age range, constituting 42.8% of respondents, implies a predominant mid-career stage for a significant portion of social workers. This age cohort suggests individuals who have accumulated substantial experience while maintaining a dynamic and active professional presence. The 41–50 age range closely follows, representing 35.6% of the respondents. Together, these two age brackets create a substantial base of seasoned and experienced professionals, contributing to the stability and maturity of the social work workforce. The average age of 38.5 further corroborates the presence of a stable and experienced community. However, these observations necessitate considerations for the recruitment, attraction, and retention of younger professionals to maintain a balanced and dynamic age demographic. Exploring strategies to engage and empower early-career social workers becomes crucial for ensuring the continued vibrancy and innovation of the profession. Establishing mentorship programs, offering professional development opportunities, and creating a supportive environment for career growth are potential avenues to address the evolving needs of a diverse age group within the social work community.

The subsequent category is the pattern of income distribution of social workers. Table 1 shows that the income distribution within the social work profession has a prevalent trend with the majority falling within the RM 3001–4000 range. This observation suggests that the average social worker is being compensated at par with other skilled professions as per the statistics released by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2023). Income distribution is highly crucial due to its huge economic impact on the quality of the welfare system if any potential challenge in providing robust financial incentives is found within the profession. The financial constraints implied by this distribution also have profound implications for job satisfaction and retention, and ultimately competency of social workers as the financial aspect is intricately linked to the overall well-being of professionals in any field. A closer examination of the existing remuneration structures is warranted to address potential disparities and align compensation packages with the level of commitment and dedication demonstrated by social workers. This examination is crucial for ensuring that the financial rewards commensurate with the demanding nature of social work. By addressing the financial aspects, stakeholders in the field can contribute to the well-being and professional contentment of individuals dedicated to the crucial and challenging field of social work. This, in turn, fosters a more sustainable and fulfilling work environment for those committed to making a positive impact on individuals and communities in need.

Finally, the service duration among the surveyed social workers is a useful index to provide oversight on the general level of commitment and experience of social workers. 56.5% of respondents proudly showcase a service record spanning 11 to 20 years, signifying not just longevity but a profound dedication to the social work profession. The average service period of 14.87 years also serves as an indication to the wealth of experience of the heroes within the welfare system. Leveraging this extensive reservoir of knowledge and dedication from long-serving social

workers can be extremely useful for organizational effectiveness. These professionals are able to bring forth a nuanced understanding of the intricacies and challenges within the system and the field and serve as invaluable mentors for their peers. However, as implied in the discussion regarding the age of social workers, the narrative of social work should transcend the scope of experience and also put a focus on the efforts to support early-career professionals. Striking a delicate balance that acknowledges the significant contributions of experienced professionals while fostering an environment that nurtures the growth of newcomers is vital for sustaining a comprehensive and harmonious workforce. Recognizing the distinct needs and aspirations of those new to the field ensures a smooth transition into the dynamic realm of social work and fosters a culture of continuous learning and growth within the individual level. In essence, the narrative of service duration not only speaks to the history of commitment but also presents an opportunity for strategic organizational planning. Harnessing the collective experience of long-serving social workers and cultivating an environment that supports the professional evolution of early-career practitioners is a nuanced yet imperative approach to fortifying the foundations of the social work profession.

Table 2: Score Distribution for Performance of Social Work Practices among Participants After Undergoing Courses/Workshops/Programmes Related to Social Work

Category	Item	Scale	N	%	Avg	S.D	Min	Max
Courses/Workshops/ Programmes								
Performance	30	5			111.34	16.10	66	150
Low: ≤ 95			53	13.0				
Medium: 96 – 126			282	69.3				
High: ≥127			72	17.7				

The courses/workshops/programmes studied are as follow:
1. Programme: Social Work Practice Executive Certification (SPEC)
2. Programme: Diploma on Social Work for Postgraduates (DPSKS)
3. Course: Social Service Workshops in Court
4. Course: Skills on Provision of Supervision by Officers of the Community Service Order
5. Course: Case Management System (CMS) in Social Work Context
6. Course: Indexing of Competency in Social Work Practices (Generic)
7. Course: Indexing of Competency in Social Work Practices (Specific)
8. Course: Handling and Managing Cases in Institutions for Disabled People
9. Course: Custody and Adoption of Children
10. Course: Provision of Reports on Residence of Institutions for Children
11. Workshop: Preparation of Ethics Report and Provision of Caretakers
12. Course: Management of Juvenile Cases
13. Course: Management of Welfare Volunteer Organization
14. Course: Management of Rescue Efforts and Provision of Home (HOME HELP)
15. Course: Social Work Within Community
16. Course: Disability in the Context of Social Model (DET & IL)
17. Course: Disability Equality Training (DET) & Disability-Related Services Training (DRST)
18. Course: Basics on Managing Provision of Monetary Assistance in JKM
19. Course: Managing Provision of Support in JKM (Pre-approval)
20. Course: Managing Provision of Support in JKM (Post-approval)
21. Course: Empowering PPN & PDBK
22. Course: Enforcing Provision of Inspection Report by PDBK

23. Course: Executive Enforcement of Law
24. Workshop: Social Services in Court
25. Course: Supervision of Professionals Within Organizations
26. Course: Understanding Social Theories
27. Course: Competency Index of Social Work Practices
28. Course: Social Work Competency Practices
29. Course: Professional Accountable Practice (PAP) Model
30. Course: Introduction to Social Work

Table 2 shows the recorded performance of participants who underwent various courses, workshops, and programs in the field of social work. The data highlights the distribution of participants across different performance categories and emphasizes the positive outcomes, particularly the significant improvement seen in the majority. A thorough analysis will be able to provide ideas on the implications of these findings, explore the effectiveness of the listed courses and the commitment of social workers in enhancing their competency within the Malaysian welfare system.

The central focus of the data lies in the distribution of participants' performance levels after engaging in professional development initiatives. Notably, 69.3% of participants achieved a medium level of improvement, with an additional 17.7% reaching the high-performance category. The apparent success in achieving significant improvement, as evidenced by more than 80% of participants, is a positive indicator of the impact of the listed courses on the competency of social workers in the Malaysian welfare system. Furthermore, the data suggests a high level of commitment from social workers in implementing and exercising their knowledge and capabilities for better competency.

In conclusion, the data in Table 2 suggests a positive trend in the performance of social workers following professional development initiatives. A critical analysis reveals an impressive increment in work performance and participants' commitment to social work. By addressing these nuances, stakeholders can enhance the design and implementation of future courses, ensuring a more comprehensive and impactful approach to professional development in the field of social work.

Table 3: Evaluation of Personal Attributes in 3 Main Categories (Structural Empowerment, Attitudes and Behaviour and Competency) as Observed by Respondents

Aspect	Scale	N	%	Average	S.D	Min	Max
Structural Empowerment							
Opportunity	5			26.88	3.90	14	35
Low		4	1.0				
Medium		172	42.3				
High		231	56.8				
Information	5			26.35	4.17	14	35
Low		13	3.2				
Medium		161	39.6				
High		233	57.2				
Support	5			20.90	3.55	12	30
Low		66	16.2				
Medium		326	80.1				

Aspect	Scale	N	%	Average	S.D	Min	Max
High		15	3.7				
Resources	5			34.10	5.74	17	45
Low		25	6.2				
Medium		95	23.3				
High		287	70.5				
Attitude and Behaviour							
Job Satisfaction	5			62.85	10.19	32	87
Low		28	6.9				
Medium		334	82.0				
High		45	11.1				
Commitment	5			34.14	6.33	16	45
Low		66	16.2				
Medium		326	80.1				
High		15	3.7				
Trust	5			78.80	13.81	42	105
Low		92	22.6				
Medium		256	62.9				
High		59	14.5				
Burnout	6			59.83	22.26	0.00	132
Low		175	43.0				
Medium		146	35.9				
High		86	21.1				
Competency							
Value and Ethics	5			133.16	16.36	92	200
Low		63	15.5				
Medium		62	15.2				
High		282	69.3				
Knowledge and Skills	5			122.26	22.0	50	165
Low		59	14.5				
Medium		94	23.1				
High		254	62.4				

Note. Respondents were required to complete a survey which measures their respective personal attributions to each of the subcategories under the three main topics, Structural Empowerment, Attitudes and Behaviour and Competency.

4.1. Structural Empowerment

Opportunity:
The data highlights a positive trend, with 56.8% of respondents reporting high opportunity scores. This suggests that a substantial portion of social workers perceives favorable prospects for advancement and growth within their profession. However, the presence of 1.0% with low scores suggests a potential area for improvement. The effort to address this discrepancy is crucial to ensure equal opportunities, preventing any form of professional marginalization among social workers.

Information:

A majority, comprising 57.2% of respondents, demonstrated high information scores. This implies a generally well-informed social work community. However, the 3.2% with low scores warrant immediate attention. Considering adequate disposition of information is the backbone of an empowered professional community, it is critical to address this minority and ensure a standardized level of professionalism throughout the workforce. Consultations should be implemented to enhance communication channels, ensuring that all social workers have access to the information necessary for informed decision-making and effective practice.

Support:

Data from table 3 also unveils a concerning statistic with 16.2% of respondents reporting low support scores. This necessitates a thorough examination of the support structures within the social work profession and an immediate procedure to identify and rectify the factors contributing to this disparity. This is crucial to ensure the well-being of social workers are well taken care off. A lack of support can detrimentally impact job satisfaction and overall professional fulfillment. Implementing targeted support programs and fostering a culture of mutual aid and mentorship will be beneficial in cultivating a supportive and resilient social work community.

Resources:

Finally, table 3 shows that the majority of respondents (70.5%) perceive access to resources as favorable, signified by high resource scores. This suggests that a significant portion of social workers feels well-equipped in their professional endeavors. However, attention should also be directed towards the 6.2% with low scores, as it is highly likely that their needs might differ significantly than the 70.5% hence the recorded difference in perception and opinion. Enforcing a more inclusive resource environment involves understanding the specific requirements of this minority would be a step that could be considered by the managing team. Regardless of numbers, initiatives should be developed to ensure that all social workers, regardless of their resource scores, have the necessary tools to excel in their roles.

4.2. Attitudes and Behaviour

Job Satisfaction:

The majority of respondents, comprising 82.0%, reported medium levels of job satisfaction. This indicates a that a significant portion of social workers falls into the middle range of satisfaction and while this suggests a baseline contentment, it also implies that there is room for improvement in elevating satisfaction levels for a considerable portion of the workforce. The 11.1% with high scores suggest a positive trend, indicating a subset of professionals who find high levels of fulfillment in their roles and the presence of 6.9% with low scores signals potential challenges that need attention. Identifying the sources of dissatisfaction and implementing targeted interventions can enhance overall job satisfaction, contributing to a more positive work environment.

Commitment:

The commitment data reveals that the majority of respondents, totaling 80.1%, reported medium commitment levels. This suggests a substantial portion of social workers are moderately engaged in their roles as social workers and indicates that an improvement is to be made to improve levels of commitment. The 16.2% with low commitment levels signal an area of concern, as lower commitment may impact overall performance and organizational effectiveness. Strategies to en=levate commitment levels, such as mentorship programs, professional development opportunities and recognition initiatives, could be explored to enhance overall commitment and engagement.

Trust:
Moderate trust levels, reported by 62.9% of respondents suggests an area for improvement in cultivating a trusting professional environment. Trust is foundational in fostering effective collaboration and communication within the social work sector. Enhancing interpersonal relationships, promoting transparent communication channels, and establishing mechanisms for conflict resolution are essential strategies to elevate trust levels and may cultivate an environment where professionals feel secure, supported, and confident in their interactions, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of their work.

Burnout:
Finally Table 3 also provides the distribution of burnout scores experienced by the respondents. This necessitates a direct but personal approach in providing assistance to the workers. While 43.0% of social workers report low burnout, the substantial 21.1% experiencing high burnout levels is a serious indication of emergence in taking corrective actions to solve the issue. Burnout can significantly impact the well-being and effectiveness of social work professionals and applicable strategies should be redirected to focus on identifying stressors unique to individuals, implement stress management programs and create a supportive organizational culture. Prioritizing mental health and well-being is not only beneficial for individual professionals but is integral to sustaining a resilient and effective social work sector.

4.3. Competency

Value and Ethics:
In the competency attribute, a measured 69.3% of respondents exhibit high scores in values and ethics, reflecting a positive trend in the social work sector. This has a positive implication of the sentiments and personalities of the social workers as the dedication to ethical standards is crucial for maintaining the integrity of the profession. However, the presence of 15.5% reporting low scores necessitates a focused examination. Addressing this group may include implementing strategies to identify the specific areas of concern, providing targeted interventions and continuous education to fortify the ethical foundation of social work practitioners.

Knowledge and Skills:
Finally for the knowledge and skills section, the majority of the respondents accounting for 62.4% demonstrate high knowledge and skills scores, indicating a promising foundation in social service practices and theories. This competency is essential for navigating the dynamic landscape of social work. Continuous professional development initiatives can be implemented to address knowledge gaps and enhance skills of the workers to ensure that social work professionals remain well-equipped to meet the evolving demands of their roles.

5. Discussion

The intricate interplay between structural empowerment, attitudes, behaviors, and competency practice within the study's context reveals a nuanced relationship crucial for understanding the dynamics of effective social work. The positive correlation between structural empowerment and competency practice suggests that organizational structures supporting autonomy and professional growth contribute significantly to the development and application of competencies among practitioners. Moreover, attitudes and behaviors emerge as pivotal elements, shaping the professional conduct of social work. A workplace culture fostering positive attitudes and constructive behaviors likely enhances competency levels. Integrating these findings, it becomes evident that a harmonious alignment of structural empowerment, attitudes, and behaviors can synergistically elevate competency practice. These insights carry practical implications for both

social work practice and organizational policies, urging a closer examination of how these factors interact. Future research, focusing on causal relationships and longitudinal perspectives, holds the potential to uncover actionable strategies for promoting competency development and application in the ever-evolving landscape of social work.

6. Conclusion

All findings from this study tend to indicate that the level of practical social work competence among JKM social workers involved in this research is high. Indirectly, this high level of practical social work implies that welfare officers are competent in carrying out their responsibilities and performing well. In other words, welfare officers possess competence in all four aspects of competency: analytical competence, emotional competence, creative competence, and behavioural competence. Analytical competence enables them to transform cognitive resources into a form of understanding and effective interaction strategies through the social work services they provide. Emotional competence contributes to the effective aspect that builds an open-mindedness toward socio-cultural diversity and multicultural identities among service clients. This aspect then contributes to the development of high self-confidence among welfare officers who interact across cultures with departmental target groups. Furthermore, the creative competence within social workers allows them to synthesize diverse perspectives in problem-solving, presenting alternatives that are acceptable and making diversity a source of inspiration in the helping process. Finally, the behavioural competence and skills they possess encourage and facilitate the interaction process as well as competence in delivering social work services to clients.

Moreover, the positive findings in this section also indirectly indicate that JKM has competent human capital at various job levels, including Welfare Officers, Assistant Community Development Officers, and Community Development Assistants who are recognized for their knowledge and skills in delivering social work services. JKM social workers understand and are clear about the procedures involved in delivering social work services, consistently is motivated and positive incentives to deliver effective services, and fulfil their duties and responsibilities within the framework of ethical values and the principles of social work services. These personal qualities contribute to the practical competence of social work among welfare officers who are the respondents in this research.

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