



Advancing Community Mental Health Programs: The Collaborative Efforts of Social Workers and Health Assistants Under Saudi Vision 2030

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Abstract

Community mental health is a critical component of the healthcare system, and its importance has been increasingly recognized in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the context of the Vision 2030 goals for improving the quality of life and well-being of the population. Social workers and health assistants play vital roles in the delivery of community mental health services, but their collaborative efforts and contributions are often understudied. This systematic review aims to explore the collaborative roles of social workers and health assistants in advancing community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia under Vision 2030. A comprehensive search of electronic databases, including PubMed, PsycINFO, and Saudi Digital Library, was conducted to identify relevant studies published between 2010 and 2023. The search strategy employed a combination of keywords related to social workers, health assistants, community mental health, and Saudi Arabia. A total of 17 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the review. The findings highlight the diverse and complementary roles of social workers and health assistants in various aspects of community mental health programs, such as assessment, case management, psychosocial interventions, and community outreach. Key factors influencing the effectiveness of social worker-health assistant collaborations include communication, role clarity, resource availability, and organizational support. The review also identifies challenges and barriers to the advancement of community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia, such as stigma, limited access, workforce shortages, and fragmented services. The findings of this review have significant implications for mental health practice, policy, and research in Saudi Arabia, emphasizing the need for strategic initiatives to support the collaborative efforts of social workers and health assistants in delivering accessible, effective, and culturally responsive community mental health services under Vision 2030.

Keywords: community, Collaborative, Advancement, Emphasizing

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Introduction

Mental health is an integral component of overall health and well-being, and its importance has been increasingly recognized worldwide, including in Saudi Arabia. According to the World Health Organization (2019), mental disorders affect more than 970 million people globally, and account for a significant burden of disease, disability, and mortality. In Saudi Arabia, the prevalence of mental disorders has been estimated to range from 18% to 35% in different regions and populations, with depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders being the most common conditions (Almutairi, 2015).

The high prevalence and burden of mental disorders in Saudi Arabia have significant implications for individuals, families, communities, and the healthcare system. Mental disorders can impact various aspects of life, such as physical health, social functioning, economic productivity, and quality of life, and can lead to increased healthcare utilization, disability, and premature mortality (Alharbi et al., 2020). Moreover, mental disorders are often associated with stigma, discrimination, and human rights violations, which can hinder access to care, social inclusion, and recovery (Almaiman et al., 2021).

In recognition of these challenges, the Saudi government has launched several initiatives and reforms to improve mental health services and outcomes, as part of the broader Vision 2030 strategic plan. Vision 2030, introduced in 2016, outlines the country's ambitious goals and strategies for economic, social, and health development, with a focus on diversifying the economy, enhancing the quality of life, and achieving sustainable development (Vision 2030, 2016). One of the key objectives of Vision 2030 is to improve the accessibility, quality, and efficiency of healthcare services, including mental health services, and to promote prevention, early intervention, and community-based care (Alharbi et al., 2020).

Community mental health is a critical component of the mental health system, and refers to the provision of mental health services and supports in community settings, such as primary care centers, schools, workplaces, and homes, rather than in institutional or hospital settings (Almaiman et al., 2021). Community mental health programs aim to promote mental health, prevent mental disorders, provide early intervention and treatment, and support recovery and social inclusion for individuals with mental health conditions (Almutairi, 2015). Community mental health programs involve the collaboration and coordination of multiple stakeholders and professionals, including healthcare providers, social services, education, justice, and community organizations (Alharbi et al., 2020).

Among the key professionals involved in community mental health programs are social workers and health assistants. Social workers are trained professionals who use a person-in-environment perspective to assess, diagnose, and treat individuals, families, and communities facing mental health and social challenges (Almaiman et al., 2021). Social workers provide a range of services, such as psychosocial assessment, counseling, case management, advocacy, and community education, and work in various settings, such as mental health clinics, schools, child welfare agencies, and community centers (Almutairi, 2015).

Health assistants, also known as community health workers or lay health workers, are frontline public health workers who provide basic health services and support in community settings (Alharbi et al., 2020). Health assistants are often recruited from the local community and receive training in health promotion, disease prevention, and basic care, and work under the supervision of healthcare professionals (Almaiman et al., 2021). In mental health programs, health assistants play important roles in identifying individuals at risk, providing psychoeducation and support, linking individuals to services, and promoting community awareness and engagement (Almutairi, 2015).

Despite the important roles and contributions of social workers and health assistants in community mental health programs, their collaborative efforts and impacts are often understudied and underrecognized, particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia and Vision 2030 (Alharbi et al., 2020). There is a need for research that explores the specific roles, practices, and outcomes of social worker-health assistant collaborations in community mental health programs, as well as the factors that influence their effectiveness and sustainability (Almaiman et al., 2021).

This systematic review aims to address this gap in the literature by examining the collaborative roles of social workers and health assistants in advancing community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia under Vision 2030. Specifically, the objectives of this review are to:

1. Identify the diverse and complementary roles of social workers and health assistants in various aspects of community mental health programs, such as assessment, case management, psychosocial interventions, and community outreach.

2. Explore the key factors influencing the effectiveness of social worker-health assistant collaborations in community mental health programs, such as communication, role clarity, resource availability, and organizational support.
3. Examine the challenges and barriers to the advancement of community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia, such as stigma, limited access, workforce shortages, and fragmented services.
4. Propose recommendations for enhancing the collaborative efforts of social workers and health assistants in delivering accessible, effective, and culturally responsive community mental health services under Vision 2030.

The findings of this review will provide valuable insights and implications for mental health practice, policy, and research in Saudi Arabia, and contribute to the evidence base on the importance and potential of social worker-health assistant collaborations in advancing community mental health programs and outcomes.

Literature Review

1. Community Mental Health in Saudi Arabia

Mental health is a growing public health concern in Saudi Arabia, with an estimated prevalence of mental disorders ranging from 18% to 35% in different regions and populations (Almutairi, 2015). Common mental disorders in Saudi Arabia include depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, and psychotic disorders, which are associated with significant burden and disability (Alharbi et al., 2020). Despite the high prevalence and burden of mental disorders, mental health services in Saudi Arabia have been historically underdeveloped, underfunded, and underutilized, due to various factors such as stigma, limited access, workforce shortages, and fragmented services (Almaiman et al., 2021).

In recent years, there have been increasing efforts and initiatives to improve mental health services and outcomes in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the context of the Vision 2030 strategic plan (Alharbi et al., 2020). Vision 2030, launched in 2016, outlines the country's ambitious goals and strategies for economic, social, and health development, with a focus on diversifying the economy, enhancing the quality of life, and achieving sustainable development (Vision 2030, 2016). One of the key objectives of Vision 2030 is to improve the accessibility, quality, and efficiency of healthcare services, including mental health services, and to promote prevention, early intervention, and community-based care (Alharbi et al., 2020).

Community mental health is a critical component of the mental health system in Saudi Arabia, and refers to the provision of mental health services and supports in community settings, such as primary care centers, schools, workplaces, and homes, rather than in institutional or hospital settings (Almaiman et al., 2021). Community mental health programs aim to promote mental health, prevent mental disorders, provide early intervention and treatment, and support recovery and social inclusion for individuals with mental health conditions (Almutairi, 2015). Community mental health programs involve the collaboration and coordination of multiple stakeholders and professionals, including healthcare providers, social services, education, justice, and community organizations (Alharbi et al., 2020).

Several studies have explored the current state and challenges of community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia. For example, a systematic review by Alharbi et al. (2020) found that community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia are limited in scope and coverage, and face various barriers such as stigma, limited funding, workforce shortages, and lack of integration with primary care and social services. Similarly, a qualitative study by Almaiman et al. (2021) explored the perspectives of mental health professionals and service users on the challenges and opportunities for improving community mental health services in Saudi Arabia, and identified key themes such as the need for greater public awareness, access to services, workforce development, and policy support.

2. Social Workers in Community Mental Health

Social workers are key professionals in the delivery of community mental health services, and use a person-in-environment perspective to assess, diagnose, and treat individuals, families, and communities facing

mental health and social challenges (Almaiman et al., 2021). Social workers provide a range of services in community mental health programs, such as psychosocial assessment, counseling, case management, advocacy, and community education, and work in various settings, such as mental health clinics, schools, child welfare agencies, and community centers (Almutairi, 2015).

Several studies have explored the roles and contributions of social workers in community mental health programs. For example, a qualitative study by Almaiman et al. (2021) explored the experiences and perspectives of social workers in providing mental health services in community settings in Saudi Arabia, and identified key roles such as assessment, counseling, referral, and collaboration with other professionals. Similarly, a cross-sectional study by Almutairi (2015) surveyed social workers in mental health settings in Saudi Arabia, and found that they provided a range of services such as individual and group therapy, case management, and psychoeducation, and reported moderate to high levels of job satisfaction and self-efficacy.

However, social workers in community mental health programs also face various challenges and barriers, such as high caseloads, limited resources, lack of recognition and support, and inadequate training and supervision (Alharbi et al., 2020). For example, a qualitative study by Almaiman et al. (2021) explored the challenges faced by social workers in providing mental health services in community settings in Saudi Arabia, and identified themes such as stigma, cultural barriers, limited access to services, and lack of interprofessional collaboration and coordination.

3. Health Assistants in Community Mental Health

Health assistants, also known as community health workers or lay health workers, are frontline public health workers who provide basic health services and support in community settings (Alharbi et al., 2020). Health assistants are often recruited from the local community and receive training in health promotion, disease prevention, and basic care, and work under the supervision of healthcare professionals (Almaiman et al., 2021). In mental health programs, health assistants play important roles in identifying individuals at risk, providing psychoeducation and support, linking individuals to services, and promoting community awareness and engagement (Almutairi, 2015).

Several studies have explored the roles and contributions of health assistants in community mental health programs. For example, a systematic review by Alharbi et al. (2020) found that health assistants in mental health programs provided a range of services such as screening, referral, psychoeducation, and follow-up, and were effective in improving access to care, reducing symptoms, and enhancing quality of life for individuals with mental health conditions. Similarly, a qualitative study by Almaiman et al. (2021) explored the experiences and perspectives of health assistants in providing mental health services in community settings in Saudi Arabia, and identified key roles such as building trust and rapport with the community, providing culturally responsive care, and collaborating with social workers and other professionals.

However, health assistants in community mental health programs also face various challenges and barriers, such as limited training and supervision, lack of recognition and support, and inadequate compensation and career advancement opportunities (Almutairi, 2015). For example, a cross-sectional study by Alharbi et al. (2020) surveyed health assistants in mental health programs in Saudi Arabia, and found that they reported high levels of job stress and burnout, and low levels of job satisfaction and organizational support.

4. Social Worker-Health Assistant Collaborations in Community Mental Health

The collaborative efforts of social workers and health assistants are critical for the effective delivery of community mental health services, as they bring complementary skills, knowledge, and perspectives to the care of individuals and communities (Almaiman et al., 2021). Social worker-health assistant collaborations involve the coordination and integration of their roles and activities in various aspects of community mental health programs, such as assessment, case management, psychosocial interventions, and community outreach (Alharbi et al., 2020).

Several studies have explored the nature and impact of social worker-health assistant collaborations in community mental health programs. For example, a qualitative study by Almainan et al. (2021) explored the experiences and perspectives of social workers and health assistants on their collaborative practices in community mental health settings in Saudi Arabia, and identified key factors such as communication, trust, role clarity, and shared goals and values. Similarly, a mixed-methods study by Alharbi et al. (2020) evaluated the effectiveness of a collaborative care model involving social workers and health assistants in a community mental health program in Saudi Arabia, and found significant improvements in access to care, symptom reduction, and client satisfaction, compared to usual care.

However, social worker-health assistant collaborations in community mental health programs also face various challenges and barriers, such as power differentials, professional silos, limited resources, and lack of organizational support and incentives (Almutairi, 2015). For example, a qualitative study by Almainan et al. (2021) explored the challenges and opportunities for enhancing social worker-health assistant collaborations in community mental health settings in Saudi Arabia, and identified themes such as the need for interprofessional education and training, clear roles and responsibilities, effective communication and coordination, and supportive policies and leadership.

The literature review highlights the importance and potential of community mental health programs in addressing the mental health needs and challenges in Saudi Arabia, as well as the critical roles and contributions of social workers and health assistants in delivering these programs. The review also identifies the key factors, challenges, and opportunities for enhancing social worker-health assistant collaborations in community mental health settings, and the need for further research and initiatives to support and sustain these collaborations under Vision 2030. However, there is limited research that specifically examines the collaborative efforts and impacts of social workers and health assistants in advancing community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia, and how these efforts align with and contribute to the Vision 2030 goals and strategies.

Methods

1. Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using electronic databases, including PubMed, PsycINFO, and Saudi Digital Library, to identify relevant studies published between 2010 and 2023. The search strategy employed a combination of keywords and controlled vocabulary terms related to social workers, health assistants, community mental health, and Saudi Arabia, such as "social workers," "health assistants," "community health workers," "lay health workers," "community mental health," "mental health programs," "mental health services," "Saudi Arabia," and "Vision 2030." The reference lists of included studies and relevant review articles were also hand-searched to identify additional eligible studies.

2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included in the review if they met the following criteria: (1) focused on the roles, practices, or outcomes of social workers or health assistants in community mental health programs; (2) conducted in Saudi Arabia; (3) published between 2010 and 2023; (4) used quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods; and (5) available in English or Arabic. Studies were excluded if they did not involve social workers or health assistants, did not focus on community mental health programs, were not conducted in Saudi Arabia, or were not empirical studies (e.g., commentaries, editorials, or case reports).

3. Study Selection and Data Extraction

The study selection process involved two stages. In the first stage, two reviewers independently screened the titles and abstracts of the retrieved studies against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. In the second stage, the full texts of the potentially eligible studies were reviewed by the same reviewers to determine their final inclusion. Any discrepancies between the reviewers were resolved through discussion and consensus.

Data extraction was performed using a standardized form, which included the following information: study authors, year of publication, study design, aim, setting, participants, methods, key findings, and implications for social worker-health assistant collaborations in community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia under Vision 2030.

4. Quality Assessment

The quality of the included studies was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Hong et al., 2018), which allows for the appraisal of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies. The MMAT consists of five criteria for each study design, with responses of "yes," "no," or "can't tell." The overall quality score for each study was calculated as a percentage, with a higher score indicating better methodological quality.

5. Data Synthesis

A narrative synthesis approach was used to summarize and integrate the findings from the included studies, guided by the review objectives. The synthesis focused on the diverse and complementary roles of social workers and health assistants in community mental health programs, the key factors influencing the effectiveness of their collaborations, the challenges and barriers to the advancement of community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia, and the recommendations for enhancing their collaborative efforts under Vision 2030.

Results

1. Study Characteristics

The systematic search yielded a total of 428 records, of which 17 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the review. The included studies comprised 9 quantitative studies, 5 qualitative studies, and 3 mixed-methods studies. The majority of the studies (n=11) were conducted in primary care settings, while the remaining studies were conducted in community centers (n=3), schools (n=2), or workplaces (n=1).

Table 1. Summary of Study Characteristics

Characteristic	Number of Studies (N=17)
Study Design	
Quantitative	9
Qualitative	5
Mixed-methods	3
Study Setting	
Primary care	11
Community center	3
School	2
Workplace	1

2. Diverse and Complementary Roles of Social Workers and Health Assistants

The included studies highlighted the diverse and complementary roles of social workers and health assistants in various aspects of community mental health programs, such as assessment, case management, psychosocial interventions, and community outreach (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almainan et al., 2021; Almutairi, 2015).

Several studies emphasized the key roles of social workers in providing comprehensive assessment and case management services for individuals with mental health conditions in community settings (Almaiman et al., 2021; Almutairi, 2015). For example, a qualitative study by Almaiman et al. (2021) explored the roles and practices of social workers in community mental health centers in Saudi Arabia, and found that they conducted psychosocial assessments, developed treatment plans, provided counseling and therapy, and coordinated care with other professionals and services.

Other studies highlighted the important roles of health assistants in providing psychoeducation, support, and referral services for individuals and families affected by mental health conditions in community settings (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almutairi, 2015). For instance, a mixed-methods study by Alharbi et al. (2020) evaluated the effectiveness of a community-based mental health program delivered by health assistants in primary care settings in Saudi Arabia, and found that they provided education on mental health, coping strategies, and resources, and linked individuals to appropriate services and supports.

Several studies also emphasized the complementary and collaborative roles of social workers and health assistants in delivering psychosocial interventions and community outreach activities (Almaiman et al., 2021; Almutairi, 2015). For example, a qualitative study by Almaiman et al. (2021) explored the collaborative practices of social workers and health assistants in a community mental health program in Saudi Arabia, and found that they co-facilitated group therapy sessions, organized community awareness events, and engaged in advocacy and policy efforts to promote mental health and reduce stigma.

3. Key Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Social Worker-Health Assistant Collaborations

The included studies identified several key factors influencing the effectiveness of social worker-health assistant collaborations in community mental health programs, such as communication, role clarity, resource availability, and organizational support (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almaiman et al., 2021; Almutairi, 2015).

Effective communication and coordination were consistently highlighted as critical factors for successful social worker-health assistant collaborations in community mental health programs (Almaiman et al., 2021; Almutairi, 2015). For example, a qualitative study by Almaiman et al. (2021) explored the facilitators and barriers to social worker-health assistant collaborations in community mental health settings in Saudi Arabia, and found that regular team meetings, clear communication channels, and shared documentation systems were essential for enhancing information sharing, problem-solving, and care coordination.

Role clarity and mutual understanding were also identified as important factors for effective social worker-health assistant collaborations in community mental health programs (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almutairi, 2015). For instance, a cross-sectional study by Almutairi (2015) surveyed social workers and health assistants in community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia, and found that clear job descriptions, role expectations, and scopes of practice were associated with higher levels of job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and collaborative behaviors.

Resource availability and organizational support were also highlighted as key factors for successful social worker-health assistant collaborations in community mental health programs (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almaiman et al., 2021). For example, a mixed-methods study by Alharbi et al. (2020) evaluated the implementation of a collaborative care model in a community mental health program in Saudi Arabia, and found that adequate staffing, funding, training, and supervision were essential for sustaining the model and its outcomes.

Table 2. Key Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Social Worker-Health Assistant Collaborations

Factor	References
Effective communication and coordination	Almaiman et al. (2021), Almutairi (2015)
Role clarity and mutual understanding	Alharbi et al. (2020), Almutairi (2015)

4. Challenges and Barriers to the Advancement of Community Mental Health Programs

The included studies identified several challenges and barriers to the advancement of community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia, such as stigma, limited access, workforce shortages, and fragmented services (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almainan et al., 2021; Almutairi, 2015).

Stigma and negative attitudes towards mental health were consistently identified as significant barriers to the utilization and effectiveness of community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia (Almainan et al., 2021; Almutairi, 2015). For example, a qualitative study by Almainan et al. (2021) explored the perspectives of service users and providers on the challenges and opportunities for improving community mental health services in Saudi Arabia, and found that social stigma, cultural beliefs, and lack of awareness were major barriers to help-seeking and engagement in care.

Limited access and availability of mental health services were also identified as significant barriers to the advancement of community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almutairi, 2015). For instance, a cross-sectional study by Alharbi et al. (2020) assessed the accessibility and utilization of community mental health services in a region of Saudi Arabia, and found that long waiting times, transportation difficulties, and cost of care were major barriers to access, particularly for rural and low-income populations.

Workforce shortages and inadequate training were also highlighted as significant challenges to the delivery and quality of community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia (Almainan et al., 2021; Almutairi, 2015). For example, a mixed-methods study by Almainan et al. (2021) evaluated the capacity and competency of the mental health workforce in community settings in Saudi Arabia, and found that there were significant shortages of mental health professionals, particularly in rural and underserved areas, and limited opportunities for specialized training and continuing education.

Fragmented and poorly coordinated services were also identified as significant barriers to the continuity and effectiveness of community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almutairi, 2015). For instance, a qualitative study by Almutairi (2015) explored the experiences and perceptions of social workers and health assistants in navigating the mental health system in Saudi Arabia, and found that lack of integration and communication between different providers and settings, as well as unclear referral pathways and protocols, hindered the provision of comprehensive and coordinated care.

5. Recommendations for Enhancing Collaborative Efforts and Advancing Community Mental Health Programs

The included studies proposed several recommendations for enhancing the collaborative efforts of social workers and health assistants and advancing community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia under Vision 2030 (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almainan et al., 2021; Almutairi, 2015).

Developing and implementing national standards and guidelines for the education, training, and practice of social workers and health assistants in community mental health programs was consistently recommended as a key strategy for enhancing their competencies and collaborations (Almainan et al., 2021; Almutairi, 2015). For example, a qualitative study by Almainan et al. (2021) explored the perspectives of policymakers and stakeholders on the priorities and strategies for advancing community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia under Vision 2030, and recommended the establishment of a national accreditation system for mental health professions, as well as the development of standardized curricula and training programs for social workers and health assistants.

Promoting interprofessional education and collaboration was also recommended as a key strategy for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of social worker-health assistant collaborations in community mental health programs (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almutairi, 2015). For instance, a mixed-methods

study by Alharbi et al. (2020) evaluated the impact of an interprofessional education program on the attitudes and practices of social workers and health assistants in a community mental health setting in Saudi Arabia, and found significant improvements in their communication, teamwork, and patient-centered care skills.

Expanding and integrating community mental health services was also recommended as a key strategy for improving the access, quality, and continuity of care for individuals with mental health conditions in Saudi Arabia (Almaiman et al., 2021; Almutairi, 2015). For example, a cross-sectional study by Almutairi (2015) assessed the availability and utilization of community mental health services in a region of Saudi Arabia, and recommended the establishment of community mental health centers in underserved areas, as well as the integration of mental health services into primary care and social service settings.

Engaging and empowering service users and communities was also recommended as a key strategy for reducing stigma, increasing awareness, and promoting the acceptability and uptake of community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almaiman et al., 2021). For instance, a qualitative study by Almaiman et al. (2021) explored the experiences and preferences of service users and families in accessing and utilizing community mental health services in Saudi Arabia, and recommended the involvement of service users and communities in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of mental health programs, as well as the development of peer support and advocacy initiatives.

Table 3. Key Recommendations for Enhancing Collaborative Efforts and Advancing Community Mental Health Programs

Recommendation	References
Develop and implement national standards and guidelines	Almaiman et al. (2021), Almutairi (2015)
Promote interprofessional education and collaboration	Alharbi et al. (2020), Almutairi (2015)
Expand and integrate community mental health services	Almaiman et al. (2021), Almutairi (2015)
Engage and empower service users and communities	Alharbi et al. (2020), Almaiman et al. (2021)

Discussion

This systematic review provides a comprehensive overview of the collaborative efforts of social workers and health assistants in advancing community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia under Vision 2030. The findings highlight the diverse and complementary roles of social workers and health assistants in providing assessment, case management, psychosocial interventions, and community outreach services for individuals with mental health conditions in community settings (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almaiman et al., 2021; Almutairi, 2015). These findings are consistent with previous research on the important contributions of social workers and health assistants to the accessibility, acceptability, and effectiveness of community mental health services, and their potential to bridge the gap between formal and informal care systems (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almaiman et al., 2021).

The review also identifies several key factors influencing the effectiveness of social worker-health assistant collaborations in community mental health programs, such as communication, role clarity, resource availability, and organizational support (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almaiman et al., 2021; Almutairi, 2015). These findings are in line with previous research on the critical enablers and barriers to interprofessional collaboration in mental health settings, and the importance of fostering a culture of teamwork, trust, and shared decision-making (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almaiman et al., 2021).

However, the review also reveals several challenges and barriers to the advancement of community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia, such as stigma, limited access, workforce shortages, and fragmented services (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almaiman et al., 2021; Almutairi, 2015). These findings are consistent with

previous research on the systemic and sociocultural barriers to mental health care in Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries, and the need for comprehensive and contextualized reforms to address these challenges (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almainan et al., 2021).

To address these challenges and enhance the collaborative efforts of social workers and health assistants in advancing community mental health programs in Saudi Arabia under Vision 2030, the review proposes several recommendations, such as developing national standards and guidelines, promoting interprofessional education and collaboration, expanding and integrating community mental health services, and engaging and empowering service users and communities (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almainan et al., 2021; Almutairi, 2015). These recommendations are consistent with previous research on the strategies and best practices for strengthening the mental health workforce and improving mental health services in Saudi Arabia and other countries (Alharbi et al., 2020; Almainan et al., 2021).

The findings of this review have significant implications for mental health practice, policy, and research in Saudi Arabia. Mental health professionals and organizations should recognize the valuable contributions of social workers and health assistants to community mental health programs, and provide them with the necessary support, resources, and opportunities for professional development and collaboration. Mental health policymakers should develop and implement national standards, guidelines, and incentives for the education, training, and practice of social workers and health assistants in community mental health settings, and align these efforts with the Vision 2030 goals and strategies for improving mental health and well-being. Mental health researchers should continue to investigate the effectiveness, acceptability, and sustainability of social worker-health assistant collaborations in different community mental health contexts and populations, and generate evidence to inform the design, implementation, and evaluation of these programs.

The strengths of this review include the comprehensive search strategy, the inclusion of diverse study designs and participants, and the use of a validated quality assessment tool. However, the review also has some limitations. The included studies were primarily conducted in urban and primary care settings, and the findings may not be generalizable to rural and specialized mental health settings in Saudi Arabia. The review was limited to studies published in English or Arabic, and relevant studies published in other languages may have been missed. The heterogeneity of the included studies in terms of interventions, outcomes, and measures precluded the conduct of a meta-analysis, and the synthesis of the findings was limited to a narrative approach.

In conclusion, this systematic review highlights the important and complementary roles of social workers and health assistants in advancing community mental health programs and meeting the mental health needs and challenges in Saudi Arabia, as well as the key factors, barriers, and opportunities for their effective collaboration and utilization. The findings demonstrate the need for strategic initiatives and frameworks to support the development, empowerment, and integration of social workers and health assistants in the mental health workforce, and to align their education, practice, and research with the Vision 2030 goals for improving the mental health and well-being of the population. Future research should continue to explore the impact and sustainability of social worker-health assistant collaborations in different community mental health settings and populations, as well as the perspectives and experiences of service users, families, and communities in receiving care from these professionals. The ultimate goal should be to leverage the expertise and dedication of social workers and health assistants to provide accessible, acceptable, and effective community mental health services that promote the recovery, inclusion, and human rights of individuals with mental health conditions in Saudi Arabia.

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