



Social Work in the Face of Crises and Disasters

Part One - A case study

Lebanon in the years between 1975 - 1990 and after the Beirut Explosion, 4th of August 2020

Researcher

Hiam Samaha Kahi

Research Assistant

Aimée Ghanem

October 2021

FH·W-S

University of Applied Sciences
Würzburg-Schweinfurt



Higher Education Dialogue
with the Muslim World



DAAD

We would like to give special thanks to the contributors to this study:

Historical overview: Mr. Charles El Hayek

Participation in design and implementation of data collection of Beirut Blast explosion: Mrs. Myrna dagher from “ Berad El Hay”, and her team, Miss Joelle Chaaya, Miss Helena Rizkallah, Miss Gaelle karam, Miss Renee El- Khoury
Adminitrative work: Miss Jinane Abou Jaoudeh

Design: Mr. Talal Zeidan

Data entry: Mr. Charles Chemaly

Photography: Mr. Saleh Al Rifaii and Mrs. Nadine El Achkar

Proofreading and translation: Miss Bushra Abyad

Editing: Mrs. Mona Al Chaar

The research in this report was conducted as part of the Higher Education Dialogue project “Refugees, Host Communities and the Sustainable Development Goals 2019-2020” and the publication was finalized as part of the German Arab Transformation Partnership project “International Social Work Acting in Crises – Attitude Matters (AttiMa) 2021-2022”.

The projects aim at fostering the resilience of International Social Workers and adequately preparing them for their future work. This is done by on the one hand, researching collaboratively about the realities on the ground Social Workers are facing and learning from their experience. On the other hand, intercultural exchange and collaborative learning formats are implemented in this field with trainings in conflict transformation, mindfulness based intercultural communication, resilience and community building; and thus transforming higher education in Germany, Jordan and Lebanon.

Both projects were funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) with funds from the Federal Foreign Office of Germany and headed by Prof. Hannah Reich and assisted by the research assistant, Lisa Mends, University of Applied Science Würzburg- Schweinfurt (FHWS).

Social Work in the face of crises and disasters

Part One: A case study of Lebanon between the years 1975-1990 and after the Beirut Explosion, 4th of August 2020

Introduction	3
1. General Research Objectives	4
2. The Applied Methodology	4
3. Social Work in the Face of Crises and Disasters	6
3.1. The First Part of the Research (1975-1990)	6
The stage of the Lebanese war and developing adequate work methods	
3.1.1. The Lebanese Reality	6
3.1.2. Problems and Difficulties	9
3.1.3. Social Work	10
3.2. The Second Part of the Research (after the August 4th explosion)	14
Documenting field experiences in social intervention	
3.2.1. The Lebanese Reality	14
3.2.2. Problems and Difficulties	15
3.2.3. Social Work	16
4. Conclusions and Suggestions	18
Afterword	19

Introduction

The role of social work in international contexts was investigated by the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences of the University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt (FHWS), with different universities in Lebanon since 2018.

The explosion of August 4th, 2020, destroyed the Port of Beirut and great parts of the capital and caused damages stretching dozens of kilometers, and it led to human losses exceeding the thousands: The deaths of more than 212 persons and 6500 injured with wounds or permanent disabilities. Approximately 7700 homes were destroyed, leaving more than 300 thousand of Beirut's population homeless. It is worth pointing out that most of the people who were made homeless because of the explosion have still not returned to their homes.

In the process the project team were confronted with the harsh impact of the Beirut explosion, the suffering and the repercussions for the Lebanese society. Furthermore, the team also wanted to acknowledge the tremendous capacities of the Lebanese civil society actors to constructively respond. The research was requested and led by Hyam Samaha Kahi and Aimée Ghanem, long-standing partners of FHWS. And it happened that the idea of the research was in lines with FHWS project. This will make sure that this practical, experience based knowledge would be collected to be inserted into future Social Work education, resources were made available to conduct a research on Lebanese social work in crisis situations. The study looks on the aftermath of the explosion as well as scrutinizing it from a historical perspective. It was done on the one hand in cooperation with social workers from the organization "Berrad El Hay", who had been active in the emergency work being done in one of the most affected neighbourhoods of Beirut. On the other hand it aimed to look at the previous

experience of Social Workers in crisis, particular the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), which was very much evoked by this tremendous explosion, and the stages that followed. Thus experiences and initiatives of social workers in this time period were scrutinized by interviews with Lebanese social work pioneers. These findings were then compared with the experiences from the social interventions after the August 4th explosion in Beirut.

This research began in September 2020 and was divided into two parts. The first part attempted to extract field experiences by way of semi-structured qualitative research interviews with 35 "social workers" about their experiences in periods of war and security incidents and about their experiences during their practicing of their tasks. In particular, the period extending from 1975 to 1990 was prolonged. The stages that followed between the years 1990-2020, which were permeated with many security incidents, as well as economic, social and life crises, will be addressed at a later point.

The second part concentrated on documenting field experiences from the four months that followed the August 4th explosion, and on observing the opinions of social workers working in a number of the social institutions which were active in the aforementioned area at the time.

In the following, we will address the general research objectives and the applied methodology. Then, we will deal with the first part of the research which covers the period between 1975 to 1990. Thereupon, we will present the second part which deals with the period after the explosion of August 4th, 2020, and we will end with general conclusions and suggestions.

1. General Research Objectives:

This paper aims to identify the most prominent events that Lebanon has gone through during the years 1975-1990 and after the explosion of August 4th, 2020, events which have had an effect on social work. It also aims to infer the means of work that the social workers resorted to, as well as to identify the field experiences that they obtained in the face of security incidents, social and economic crises, and the life tragedies that followed. Furthermore, the study aims to shed light on the interaction of the social workers with the lived reality and the challenges that they faced, in order to preserve the methodologies, principles and professional foundations from their field practicing.

2. The Applied Methodology:

In the first part of the study, the methodology was based upon:

- The reading of documents, references and studies on the raised subject
- Initial meetings with a large number of concerned people with the aim of determining those key informants with whom interviews would be conducted later, dependent on the changes that would happen with them.
- Semi-structured interviews with 35 “social workers” who were chosen based on the year of obtaining the social work certificate (before 1990), the type of work done by the institutions within which they practiced social work, and their involvement in relief work depending on the geographical area in which they worked. The purpose of this was to target the largest possible number of geograph-

ical areas. It is to be noted that for 5 interviewees, the data was collected indirectly through other persons that know these pioneers. And this is due to two reasons, either because of death or because of them living abroad and being unavailable. The researcher’s 44 consecutive years of field experience (between the years 1970-2014) contributed to shedding further light on the lived reality. It is worth mentioning that we paused at some of the most prominent achievements of those with whom we conducted interviews. We tried to collect and document these accomplishments with honesty and faithfulness in accordance with what they conveyed to us.

The interviews were conducted with “specialized social workers”. These are the people who practice the profession of social work on the basis of a certificate recognized by one of the existing colleges and institutes in Lebanon that are licensed by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Lebanon. The term “social workers”, or “social worker”, is used in this study.

We would like to stress here that it is definitely not our intention to give preference to one group over another. Rather, our choice came out of us being more familiar with the reality of “social work” on the one hand and, on the other, due to us not being able to fully grasp all the different specialities, practices and qualifications of the rest of the social workers. And all of us know that social work is a message first and foremost, and the first test of it is the degree of commitment shown to human dignity and rights and the ability to offer the human being the appropriate services with complete respect for professional and humanitarian ethics.

It is necessary to mention some of the difficulties and obstacles which we faced:

- The difficulty in reaching the concerned persons due to the changes that occurred with the key informants and due to some of them leaving the country.

- The difficulty in getting in contact with people and the difficulty in narrowing down the institutions and organizations which had initiatives during the specific period of time. We apologize in advance to all those with whom we were not able to get in contact.
- The difficulty of reaching resources and documents due to security measures related to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The lack of available time for research.

With regard to both parts of the study, the interviews were initially conducted face to face. However, due to the spread of Covid-19, interviews were continued by way of electronic means of communication. Each interview was sound recorded (with the consent of the persons concerned), and the interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes from which information was extracted and analysed afterwards.

In the second part of the research, the methodology focused on:

- The reading of documents, resources and studies on the topic.
- The conducting of semi-structured interviews with a number of social workers who accompanied the relief work after the August 4th explosion. 12 interviews were conducted.

3. Social work in the face of crises and disasters

3.1. The first part of the research (1975-1990)

The stage of the Lebanese war

In the following, we will treat the stage of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990). Through that, we will attempt to infer field experiences within the field of social work in order to confront the despairs of war, displacement and indiscriminate bombing. In later studies, we will treat what came after the end of the war up until the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri (1990-2005), which is the phase of the Lebanese civil society and governmental institutions attempting to rise from the repercussions of the war. We will also later treat the stage from the Syrian withdrawal up until the August 4th explosion (2005-2020) which is a phase that was permeated with many events.

3.1.1. The Lebanese reality during this period

The Lebanese war began on April 13th, 1975, and lasted 15 years. The war witnessed rounds of internal armed conflicts, foreign military interventions, invasions which led to the killing of more than 150.000 people, displacement of a million Lebanese citizens within Lebanon, the disappearance of 17.000 Lebanese people, and losses estimated at 25 billion dollars. This led to the internal displacement of 21% of the Lebanese population and to the emigration of around a million Lebanese people. In addition to that, other tragedies resulted from the war, such as identity killings, forced migration, families being made homeless and dispersed, mothers being widowed, children

being orphaned, rise of unemployment rates, causing of physical disabilities, mental illnesses, and the emigration of young people (Samir Kassir, 2018).

The Lebanese civil war is divided into four stages between 1975-1990. In the following are some of the prominent events from the period before the civil war and during it:

Before the civil war (Kamal Salibi, 1976):

The Lebanese state came into being in 1920 following the repercussions of the period after the First World War (1914-1918). The state of Greater Lebanon was declared on September 1st, 1920, and was placed under French mandate.

Lebanon gained its independence in stages within the context of the Second World War (1939-1945), and what is known as the National Pact laid the foundation for the Lebanese system. The Independent Lebanese Republic witnessed attempts of building institutions and witnessed the repercussions of regional conflicts as well, i.e., the Nakba, with the first wave of the exodus of 100.000 Palestinians in 1948 and the establishment of the first camps around the main cities.

The Lebanese system failed in managing its social, political, and economic affairs, and internal tensions along with the repercussions of regional conflicts and Cold War politics led to the outbreak of the first civil war in the 21st century in the summer of 1975.

With the ascension of Chehab to the presidency, the period of building modern institutions in Lebanon began, and the “Irfed” mission (Dennis Claire Lambert, 1968) was commissioned to study the economic and social reality in Lebanon. It is worth pointing out that most of Lebanon’s state institutions date back to this period. Lebanon witnessed a unique economic growth as well as attempts of social modernization and the expansion of the middle class. A study carried out by the Irfed mission, which was led by Father Lebret, warned against the dangers of not carrying out reforms and of not adopting policies of balanced growth and against the internal conflicts which could arise from this.

Chehabism was not capable of limiting the influence of sectarian leaderships, and the Arabic defeat in 1967, i.e., the Naksa, led to the arrival of a second wave of Palestinian refugees, along with their weapons, just as it led to a rise in the level of tension at the domestic level. Within the context of this reality, the Lebanese state entered into the Cairo Agreement in 1969 which permitted Palestinian military action to take place from within Lebanese territory.

The countdown to the outbreak of war began against the backdrop of internal divide over the identity and history of Lebanon, the nature of the political system, Palestinian asylum, and the rates of the big economic and social inequality. A period of mutual internal armament began and lasted from 1969 until the outbreak of the war on April 13th, 1975 (Fawaz Traboulsi, 2012).

On the one hand, the clashes took the form of civil war between the Lebanese themselves, while, on the other hand, the violence encompassed hostile actions between Lebanese Christians and Palestinians.

The first stage: Internal conflict (1975-1978) (Hervet Amiot, 2020)

The Lebanese civil war began in Beirut in April 1975 as an armed conflict between the Lebanese Phalanges and Palestinian factions. The spiral of violence took the form of guerilla warfare in urban areas (assassinations, ambushes, street battles) which later ignited the conflict in whole country, starting from Beirut. This first period witnessed the Battle of the Hotels, the Two-Year War, and the intervention of the Syrian Deterrence Forces in 1976.

The fighting led to the destruction of downtown Beirut which indicated the death of the city and of the Lebanese economic and political model. This also led to the division of Beirut into East Beirut and West Beirut, which were separated by what is known the Green Line.

The balance of power during this period was in favour of the National Movement and its Palestinian allies. However, the intervention of the Deterrence Forces, which numbered 300.000 Syrian soldiers, limited their progress.

The second stage: The invasions (1978-1982)

This period of the Lebanese civil war witnessed enormous military invasions, the first of those being Operation Litani or the first Israeli invasion. The operation lasted six days. The intensity of the fighting and its impact on civilians, in addition to Lebanese diplomatic efforts, led the United Nations Security Council to issue Resolutions 425 and 426, which called for the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from Lebanon and for the establishment of the UNIFIL (the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon), which is still active in its peace-keeping mission in South Lebanon.

Also, this phase witnessed sectarian massacres that aimed to create areas with specific sectarian identities and to create a new sectarian geography.

In the summer of 1982, the second Israeli invasion or Operation Peace for Galilee began which led to the siege of Beirut with the objective of expelling the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from the city. Urban neighbourhoods were heavily bombed by the Israeli army, and there were many civilian casualties. The operation ended with PLO leaving the city while the Multinational Forces entered Beirut on a peacekeeping mission.

Following the first and second invasion, Israel had occupied approximately 10% of the area of Lebanon, and this occupation continued until 2000.

The third stage: Divide and petty states (1982-1988)

The divide of Lebanon turned into small sectarian semi-states. Bachir Gemayel was elected president of the republic in August 1982 before he was assassinated ten days after taking office. This period witnessed the Mountain War which resulted in mutual massacres between Christians and the Druze in the south of Mount Lebanon in 1982 along with Christians being driven away from these parts of Mount Lebanon towards Christian controlled areas. Likewise, fights broke out east of Sidon in 1984-1985 and in Tripoli between 1983-1985. During this period, the sectarian divide reached its climax, and militias imposed themselves as an alternative to the state in semi-closed sectarian enclaves. The consecutive rounds of fighting intensified the social crises.

The fourth stage: The end of the war (1988-1990):

Within the context of the crisis of choosing a new president for the republic, the Com-

mander of the Army, Michel Aoun, was appointed head of an interim government which was semi-recognized in the Christian areas, while in West Beirut recognition of Selim Hoss' government continued.

On March 14th, 1989, General Michel Aoun and the forces of the Lebanese Army, which were under his command, began a unilaterally declared "liberation war" against all foreign forces in Lebanon directed exclusively against the Syrians. This war had dire consequences and did not manage to make any progress. With the end of the Cold War, efforts to end the Lebanese war turned into an internal peace project which was translated into action by inviting 62 Members of Parliament (those who had survived out of the 99 representatives who had been elected in 1972) to meet in the city of Taif in Saudi Arabia. On September 30th, 1989, what is known as the National Accord Document was reached, and the constitution of 1943 was amended.

The Taif Agreement formed the beginning of the Lebanese national reconciliation process with active support from Syria, the Arab states, and the international community. However, before the implementation of the Taif Agreement, another war broke out on January 30th, 1990, between the Lebanese Forces and divisions of the Lebanese Army which was under the command of General Michel Aoun. This war was militarily inconclusive and led to the worsening of the miserable social reality of life in Lebanon. With the fall of the presidential palace in Baabda on October 13th, 1990, the Lebanese Civil War ended with Syria occupying 90% of Lebanon's territory and Israel 10% (Amiot, 2020)

The consequences of the war, with all the tragedies and the destruction, both material and moral, that it left behind, were many and varied. Perhaps the moral destruction had a greater impact and was more painful because its restoration was more difficult and took longer time.

3.1.2. Problems, difficulties, and basic needs during this period

In the face of this situation, social work had to deal with and adapt to a new reality where many social institutions had stopped performing their usual roles. The notion of social work entered into the whirlpool of quick and instantaneous relief work in response to the multifaceted needs and problems which presented themselves on the ground. Perhaps the issue of the displaced people was among the problems that had multiple social, psychological, economic, and life-pertaining consequences, and it was necessary for the social workers to quickly deal with these at the time.

In its **first stage**, the relief work revolved around the following: sheltering of displaced individuals as well as whole families in schools, churches, mosques; organization and distribution of basic aid, including food, drink, and medicine; care for exposed groups such as children, the elderly, and pregnant women; and other primary relief work.

In addition, during periods of bombing of civilian neighbourhoods, many social workers, along with local volunteers, were working in neighbourhoods exposed to danger inside the shelters where residents gathered to escape the bombings which would sometimes continue for several days. They took care of the children, organized the communal life in the shelter, secured the arrival of drinking water, bread and medicine, and they handled waste and other ordinary matters of life. All that took place under difficult security conditions which prevented movement and contact between neighbourhoods and forced many to stay in their houses or in shelters for long periods. The role of social workers was prominent during this period.

After the initial relief work came the **second stage** of it which centred around the

organizing of communal life in the displaced groupings places (be that schools, churches, mosques, or public places), and the preparing of these places to be able to receive families in a suitable way that would respect the simplest means of living, including toilets, shared kitchens, and the partition of living spaces in a manner that would respect each family's privacy. Likewise, the work focused on helping them getting to know the new geographical surroundings, accompanying them in facilitating matters of life, taking care of cases of depression, desperation, and psychological symptoms, dealing with conflicts, violence, and child abuse, particularly inside groupings places, as well as on helping the rest of the displaced groups.

Based on what May Hazzaz mentions in her article "Le travailleur social et les situations d'urgence" (1985) ("The social worker and cases of emergency"), the **third stage** of the relief work can be considered the "stage of coming out of war and attempting to return to normal life". In her article, Hazzaz demonstrates the three stages which characterize "the social intervention in cases of emergency resulting from catastrophes". The first stage, which follows immediately after the catastrophe, is represented by a state of panic, alarm, and confusion, and it centres on the work of evacuation and sheltering. The second stage of relief work comprises the organizing of communal life in the short term. The third stage is represented by long-time reorganization and by the material, moral, and psychological rebuilding of the damaged families and communities along with helping them regain their normal lives.

For more information on this period, we will in the following present the study undertaken by The Center for Applied Studies in Social Sciences (IESSA) in **1987** within the framework of a collaborative program between Saint Joseph University of Beirut (the Faculty of Humanities and the Lebanese School of

Social Work) and Université Laval, Quebec, Canada (the Faculty of Humanities and Literature and the School of Social Work at Université Laval). The study dealt with the “Internal displacement in Lebanon as a result of the war” (“Les populations déplacées par la guerre au Liban”), and it considered the displaced person as someone who had been forced to leave his home after January 1st, 1975, due to the security situation, and who had not yet returned to his home at the time when the study was being conducted.

This study lasted for four years between 1987 to 1991 and dealt with approximately 62.000 families, equivalent to 3 million people, from among the Lebanese population. The study had more than one purpose. In addition to finding out the size of the problem of the displaced persons and identifying their reality, it was also necessary to find out the reality of the aid that various governmental, local, and international institutions and organizations provided. Furthermore, it was necessary to draw up clear plans of action to treat their situation.

The percentage of displaced people at the time was estimated at 18,5%, or approximately one fifth of the Lebanese population. A little less than half of them had been subjected to forced migration as a result of acts of violence, while the rest of them had fled from areas exposed to danger or due to them being unwanted. The majority of them belonged to the middle and lower social classes. All the displaced persons in the study voiced their fear for the future, as well as the need for a source of income and for permanent housing that would secure them stability. They also expressed the necessity of ensuring education for their children and of helping them confront their health problems.

On top of that comes the situation that many people went through due to losing a beloved or a relative or as a result of them being force-

fully removed from their villages and areas and their social environment, along with the difficulty of reaching out for a helping hand and asking for sympathy which, in particular, was suffered by the elderly among the displaced people.

It is evident from the mentioned study that the “extended family” formed the first pillar of support in critical cases. Likewise, friends and people coming from the same area from which they had been driven away, and who after their displacement gathered within communities in specific geographical areas, constituted another pillar of support.

It is worth mentioning that the social and economic problems reached all social classes in Lebanon at the time (even those who had not been displaced), especially the poor and middle class, and everyone came to have the same worries.

The displaced persons mentioned more than 50 social institutions that were on the scene during this period. International organizations did not exceed 15% at the time. The study showed the views of those responsible for the social institutions on the needs and real-life problems during this stage. The study had a positive impact and formed the point of departure for many projects in the public and private sector.

3.1.3. Social work during this period

The period between **1975 to 1990** was rich with individual and collective initiatives, and many social institutions – and via them the social workers working in them – were forced to coexist with reality. In what follows are some of the initiatives that we arrived at through the interviews that we conducted with a number of the social workers who did not leave the arena of social work during the years of the war despite difficulties and challenges.

What distinguished all the key informants with their different affiliations was that they rose to perform their vital role in helping unconditionally. They defied the psychological, territorial, and sectarian barriers, and most of the interviewed stated that there was much coordination and cooperation between them. The most important challenges thrown upon or faced by the social workers during this period revolved around problems of life and relief work for periods of time which many thought would be temporary, but were prolonged, and thus the suffering prolonged.

However, the reality of the sectarian and political parties war weighed heavily on some of the social initiatives and projects which did not yield the desired results. At times, rulers with political and partisan backgrounds would be behind the establishment and financing of these initiatives so as to exercise control over the weaker groups of society during the war.

Despite the safety situation, there were many meetings and much communication between the social workers for the purpose of cooperation, sharing and adjusting work. We do not deny that some social workers occasionally slipped, even if only for a short time, into the pitfalls of insularity and intolerance where they rejected the other and held him responsible for the violence. This could either be due to direct reasons from which these social workers had suffered personally, such as the loss of a beloved or a relative or due to being exposed to direct acts of violence, or it could be because of political reasons and partisan or sectarian affiliations which, at times, could be oppressing. However, those reasons would quickly evaporate when these social workers found themselves in front of tragedies and sufferings that did not differentiate between one person and the other, regardless of their affiliations and beliefs.

As we have mentioned earlier, there were many positive initiatives that had been

confronted with these pitfalls and that attempted to keep control over political parties and sectarian affiliations. They worked on the frontlines in silence and with devotion, while adhering to their principles and professional ethics. Most of them, however, stayed behind the scenes, and they must be highlighted out of respect for the sacrifices that they made.

Here we pause at a letter sent by the late Archbishop Grégoire Haddad (1988) who founded the NGO in Lebanon, and who inspired many social projects of a developmental character. Likewise, he had many initiatives and projects within the field of social work, both during and after the civil war. His letter, which he wrote by hand and sent to many social workers in the midst of the war, had a great and influential impact in rectifying social work.

The interviews which we conducted with 35 social workers and the field experiences that they shared with us – and for which we are grateful – allow us to extract some thoughts, opinions, and data. Regarding the period between 1975 to 1990, the efforts of most of the social institutions focused on programs of relief work in its three phases. From one point of view, they did so to secure the basic needs of the many families that had been forced to flee. From another, they did so to help the families and individuals who had been afflicted by the woes of the wars and catastrophes that hit Lebanon one after the other, and which had produced various social and economic problems. These problems included both those problems that had already been present in the country, and which, along with their impact on society, were made worse by the war, as well as the problems that were a direct result of the wars and security events and the conditions they left behind. They touched different aspects of life and living and were, in particular, embodied by the large numbers of widowers and orphans, the loss of the provider of the family, loss of housing, possessions and sources of

income, and permanent disabilities, along with many psychological problems such as fear, desperation, worry, feelings of instability, the turning to painkillers and often also alcohol and drugs.

In addition to all that are the problems that arose due to the suspension of studies and school dropouts and the subsequent loss that this caused for children and parents alike. The events left behind a void within groups of youth who were exposed to all kinds of delinquency, and many minors were forced to work from an early age. Additionally, there were problems with the disruption, shortcomings, or even absence of official departments and governmental institutions.

Naturally, these problems had a more severe impact on low-income families and on the poor and below-average social classes, and even on middle class.

Faced with this reality, the workers in the field of social work had to take a side and had to work starting out from the professionalism which they must abide by. One of the most important methodologies of social work in this period was the activation of natural support networks (the extended family, neighbours, and friends. This network is strongly present in Lebanese society and had a main role in overcoming many difficulties), as well as the activation of institutional support networks (institutions and organizations) and community-based support networks (the local committees which were formed in neighbourhoods and in the groupings places.

Here we must mention some of the questions that were thrown upon all those who accompanied the displaced families:

- Should we help the displaced people to adapt to the environment to which they have fled, with our prior knowledge of the potentially negative psychological effects that this decision might have, regardless of the economic and social effects?

- Or should we help them to stay temporarily while waiting to return home, even though returning home is related to matters that might be long-term, and work to improve their temporary situation with all the anxiety and instability related to such a situation?

Most of the key informants agreed on the importance of the relief work that accompanied this period. As one of the social worker said: "They had to secure the basic needs quickly and directly, but it is work that must remain circumstantial and exceptional, even though it is repeated in several stages and with different social groups, depending on the security events and the cycles of violence that followed one after the other.."

There is no doubt that the social institutions during this period gained solid experience in the field of "social intervention in emergency cases" and in "cases of disasters and shock", either through direct field work or through the many training courses that accompanied this work from several directions.

After a short period, however, many of these institutions and the workers within them wanted to move away from this work method, as one of the social workers said: "It is necessary to look for more effective development programs that can bring social work out the cycle of situational relief work and contribute to forging a vision of a "life project" for individuals and families, at least in the short and medium-long run, if not in the long run. ... As well as social, educational, and developmental programs that aspire to enable people to confront the future. ... and activating the resources of the social environment to suit the needs.."

For many of them, as stated in one of the interviews: "Relief work creates situations of dependency and obligation if it is not tied to work in the middle-long and long term with

an educational vision that aims to restore the ability of individuals and families to be in control and manage their affairs..."

The majority of them think that: "It is very important to join forces in order to ensure requirements of life in a way that respects the rights of all those with whom we work, and we look forward to the return of life to state institutions and the state apparatus." Some of them mentioned that: "Without this cohesion, social work remains ineffective. Even though it responds to some of the immediate needs, the results of the work are much less than the goals set for it and the expenses allocated for it."

Everyone unanimously agreed on the necessity of: "An integrated and comprehensive vision that takes into consideration all the facts, whereby matters are anticipated and their causes dealt with and [whereby] they do not drown in the collection of results " - "and the necessity of the return of the state and its institutions".

Everyone emphasized "the need for clear social policies based on principles of social justice and on the rights of individuals, communities, and the public interest...", and many of the interviewed focused on "laws that protect marginalized groups..." - "and practical measures that ensure that these rights are translated into reality..." - "and clear and simple working mechanisms that each individual can resort to and make use of with its available possibilities...", and "that there be within in civil society the role of instigator, observer and partner, and that the common interest prevails...".

There was almost consensus on the importance of endowing oneself with professional foundations and principles, including "the importance of respect for the privacy of individuals and communities and their right to self-determination, and [the importance of] strengthening their abilities with the goal

of identifying their problems and taking the proper decisions and helping them carry them out, and the importance of partnership between the service provider and the beneficiary...".

In any case: "Complete respect for human dignity, whereby the human being is not only looked at from the perspective of the problems that he suffers from, but is also looked at from the perspective of the possibilities within him that already exist or that can be developed, highlighted and strengthened...".

During this period, many workers, and especially those who were the first, fought diligently to defend social issues and to defend the struggle for these matters. They fought to build community institutions and, despite the difficulty of it, to support governmental institutions which alone can ensure work's continuity and inclusivity.

Perhaps the clearest summary of field work in emergency situations was that which was expressed by one of the social workers at the end of field work stage in one of the neighbourhoods affected by bombings and acts of violence during the war. She mentions: "The necessity of social work being independent from partisan, political and military work; a dynamic identification of needs and the distribution of tasks and responsibilities in advance; respect for privacy and for not putting people in situations where they have to ask for sympathy; respect for the right to self-determination and involving them in the relief work process; the activation of all the existing expertise and possibilities in the immediate environment.

It is important to deal with the conflicts that may arise between the beneficiaries, as well as between the volunteers, and to listen positively to these conflicts, which become more intense as the violence and destruction become more intense, to always seek common ground, and to accept the other".

Here we must pause at the phenomenon of the fatigue of the social organizations and institutions from war and relief work. Many of them stopped their work which, in turn, caused many of the “social workers” and those who, at the time, were called “social workers” to stop working and leave the battlefield of social work without them passing on their knowledge. Some of them left the country, some retired, and some died. Along with them disappeared years of accumulated experience and years of hard work of trying to defend humanitarian matters and of fighting for turning charitable social work into institutional social work based on social rights and humanitarian principles.

This caused a big gap in the history of the profession of social work which the newer generations may not have felt, but which however did leave a great void for the many who had lived through the pre-war period and the beginnings of social work, and it is very important to document this period through the people who lived with it.

3.2. The second part of the research (after the August 4th 2020 explosion)

Documenting field experiences in social intervention

3.2.1. The Lebanese reality

Before the explosion of the Port of Beirut, Lebanon was going through an unparalleled severe economic crisis, as political, geo-regional, and social crises followed one after the other. Living conditions had worsened, and the purchasing power of citizens had fallen to its lowest level.

On September 10th, 2021, the Lebanese leadership formed a new government after a period of 13 months of vacancy of executive power and of unfitting political responses in

face of complicated crises. It is the biggest economic and financial crisis in the country during peace time. In all probability, the economic and financial crisis in Lebanon ranks in the global top ten, or perhaps the top three, of the most severe economic crises since the nineteenth century.

The monetary and financial unrest has continued to fuel the conditions of the crisis. The exchange rate has deteriorated quicker during the past six months where the rate of the Lebanese Pound to the US dollar has fallen by an enormous percentage.

Different areas of Lebanon witnessed popular protests during 2019 that demanded getting back the looted funds and demanded the leaving of the ruling class.

Furthermore, the burdens left behind by the Covid-19 pandemic have made numerous hospitals in Lebanon suffer from a lack of medical supplies, and they have become almost unable to receive patients, as well as many institutions being unable to pay the wages of employees and having to lay off a large part of them due to the comprehensive economic crisis that the country is witnessing.

Amid all these crises that have burdened the Lebanese people and drained all their energy, the explosion of Beirut came as a fatal blow. In the afternoon of Tuesday August 4th, 2020, an enormous explosion - called "Beirutshima" in analogy to what happened in Hiroshima due to the nuclear explosion - rang out in the Port of Beirut, which led to massive damages in the port and the shattering of glass facades of buildings and homes across all neighbourhoods of the Lebanese capital Beirut.

The explosion extended to houses and buildings located 10 kilometres away from the site of the blast. According to analysts, the explosion is regarded as the biggest in Lebanon's history, and the Lebanese people have not experienced the likes of it before, not even in the middle of the Lebanese civil war and during the operations of heavy Israeli air bombings that have targeted Beirut.

From another perspective, nine hospitals were destroyed, three of them completely and six of them partially, and a governmental hospital provided services to approximately one million people. The nearby hospitals were not capable of receiving the dozens of wounded who were transferred to them due to the massive damages that had been caused to these hospitals, and some of them were forced to treat the injured in the street because of the severe damages that had befallen the medical facilities. In addition to that, damages were caused to 23 community health centres and 120 schools, as well as to 15.000 businesses, leaving thousands of people without work, and large damages were also caused to the transmission and distribution networks at the Électricité du Liban headquarters and to the water networks.

The civil society has responded immediately to this catastrophe, and that manifested itself in hundreds of individual and collective initiatives and in the thousands of volunteers of different nationalities from all regions of

Lebanon, who headed straight away to the stricken areas to offer their help and salvage the wreckage and to provide food and drink in light of the negligence of the state institutions.

3.2.2. Problems and difficulties

Lebanon has witnessed a major collapse in fundamental services propelled by the depletion of foreign exchange reserves and the rising cost of foreign currency import subsidies on food, fuel, and medicine. Poverty has increased, with the proportion of the Lebanese population who live below the international poverty line of US\$5,50 having risen by 13 percentage points by the end of 2020, and it is expected to rise by up to 28 percentage points by the end of 2021.

The proportion of families that are facing challenges in obtaining food, health care and other fundamental services is on the rise. The effects of inflation are extremely regressive factors that disproportionately affect the poor and the middle class.

Although Lebanon is regarded as one of the countries that have tested numerous disaster scenarios continuously over the course of many years, the country still lacks general plans and policies for managing catastrophes, and according to the social workers, the weak spots revolved around the following:

- The absence of a national strategy for disaster management, and a lack in taking the necessary measurements to be able to face catastrophes.
- The complete lack of coordination and cooperation between civil organizations and state institutions.
- The difficulty of quick emergency intervention and of responding to all appeals when facing shortage of supporting resources.

- The absence of a field manual of observation for social and health institutions, and the failure to provide organizations with maps to guide them in the process of observation and intervention.
- The repetition of activities of questionnaires and observation via frequent forms which exhausted people and made them lose confidence in the helping authorities.
- The inability to maintain professional discretion due to the high influx of affected people, and insufficient closed places to receive them.
- The failure to respect the rules of social distancing imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, and overcrowding in places providing in-kind services, and the exposing of workers and beneficiaries to risks of infection.
- The inability to provide support and non-verbal communication encouraging the presence of protective masks measures.

3.2.3. Social work

The social and humanitarian institutions present in the surroundings of Beirut were mobilized to respond to this catastrophe, and most of them formed coalitions to coordinate and unify their efforts, and groups on social media, especially on WhatsApp, contributed to spreading the needs and responding to them. The intervention of these organizations came in three stages:

The **first stage** (from the first day until the fifth), where most of the organizations proceeded to quick and urgent intervention at the following humanitarian levels: Responding to emergency health cases, ensuring food security, ensuring alternative shelter, providing urgent psychosocial support, contact-

ing all the beneficiaries and checking up on them, guiding them to the available sources and services, and providing them with necessary information. They also monitored the initial emergency needs and worked to meet them.

The **second stage** (from the fifth day until the second week), which began after people had realized the horror of the disaster. The organizations began the process of coordination to pour efforts into the work more effectively. Committees then appeared, and intensive field visits were held to assess needs and to observe the most fragile of those affected. The social workers described this phase as shocking, since seeing the painful reality firsthand does not in any way resemble the work being performed through the centres of the organizations. Their presence in the neighbourhoods was of the utmost importance, as they were able to evaluate several aspects of life and offer support to the victims. Usually, these field trips were held by a multidisciplinary team, in addition to young volunteers, and everyone, in accordance with their specialty, would observe and assess the damages and make a list of priorities.

The **third stage**, which stretched from the second week until the second month and beyond. New needs appeared after the return of those who had been forced to evacuate their houses. Disabilities and cases of PTSD became apparent, as well as unemployment, malnutrition, and cases of non-treated diseases, all of which demanded strengthening the adaptive performance of the survivors and keeping an eye on the post-shock phase.

The resulting impact on the social workers: The social workers who intervened during this period evaluated the response of the state and the governmental institutions as being ineffective and described it as being slow, with their response being dominated by

a lack of coordination and the inability to supervise so as to organize the role of civil society and to regulate voluntary initiatives and groups.

"I am from the generation of social worker who are used to intervene in emergency cases, but what seems strange to me is that even today we have not learned from the lessons of the past, especially our state which has not worked on activating the disaster management authority, so that it becomes our main reference and we all work under its banner. We are not the state, but unfortunately we play the unsupervised role of it.", said one of the Social Workers interviewed.

The social workers describe their intervention in the first stage as spontaneous and unforeseen:

"There is no time to think or analyse. Some of us would stay at the centre and work to meet the basic needs that were being heaped upon us from everywhere, and others would head to the neighbourhoods to visit people in their homes and often to pull them out of their shock and help them pick up the debris and understand what had happened."

The social workers consider that the horror of the disaster required them to have several skills, and often they would take the leadership role upon themselves within multi-disciplinary teams.

" Our speedy intervention required a lot of skills from us such as quick thinking, planning and organization, the ability to manage and direct groups, good knowledge of the environment and the available resources, the wisdom to make the rights decisions, and the ability to keep control over charged emotions so as to embrace the feelings of the afflicted."

Most of the social workers who intervened during this disaster were among the ones who directly or indirectly suffered from the explosion, and it was not easy for them to comprehend their shock and adapt themselves to it before heading to the afflicted people and the relatives of the victims. This reality created for them what is known as "compassion fatigue".

It was difficult for them to separate between feeling with the other and feeling like the other. All of them spoke about negative feelings such as powerlessness, severe pain, frustration, despair, anger, anxiety, and severe stress, which was also reflected in their psychological health, as psychological symptoms such as insomnia, sporadic pains, and difficulty in concentration appeared.

Likewise, most of them talked about "Professional exhaustion" Ou l'épuisement professionnel, as they did not have fixed working hours because they were in a state of emergency, and this required them to work continuously and perform multiple tasks at an accelerating pace. Most often they would lack the time to evaluate the quality of their intervention and would be forced to meet late at night to coordinate and correct the accomplished work.

All the social workers viewed that there is an absolute necessity of them being accompanied by a team specialized in disaster management who can offer them individual and group support and advice.

"We often felt despair and frustration, and we felt it important to empty ourselves, because what we were seeing and hearing of daily tragedy is beyond human capacity to comprehend."

Some of them talked about the feeling of inner peace despite everything.

4. Social work in the face of crises and disasters

Based on all the above, we are of the view that social work in the face of cases of disasters and crises require a lot of efforts, persistence, and active presence of the social workers. Despite the multiplicity of causes for disasters and crises and their differences in form, size, impact, and consequences, their effects on individuals, families, and communities remain similar: Violence, death, destruction, displacement, loss of loved ones and friends, loss of possessions, disabilities, mental crises, and tragedies that may not heal for years.

Social work between 1975 to 1990 and after the August 4th explosion, and the help that it offered to everyone who were exposed to the catastrophes and emergencies and went through the crises that they caused, may be similar in terms of the compassion shown for the afflicted and the helping of them, providing them with the appropriate services by all means available and at the required speed, supporting them in obtaining their remaining rights, and striving to ease their tragedies.

What changed, however, are the means to which social work resorted and the possibilities that were available to it. During the period extending from 1975 to 1990 with all the events that came in between, relief work was based in a fundamental way on family support and on the local civilian organizations and bodies. Governmental institutions were also present, albeit with limited possibilities. Whereas we notice that after the August 4th explosion, the role of these associations and organizations had become secondary, despite all the many effective initiatives from the civil society bodies and the community-based groupings, the spontaneous initiatives, the unlimited willingness to accommodate families, friends, and neighbours, and the clear

solidarity from people despite the catastrophe reaching them as well.

We notice the almost complete absence of the governmental institutions as well and the clear resignation of the public authorities, and the presence of the Lebanese army in the field of the relief work may be the only presence of the state that has remained marginalised.

On the other hand, we also noticeably see the phenomenon of the heavy presence of United Nations agencies, international organizations, and foreign NGOs, as these organizations took the lead in much of the relief work and in the work of rebuilding what had been destroyed, and the Lebanese government was neutralized for numerous and manifold reasons which we will not address in this study. The local actors and the civilian Lebanese organizations, which are considered closest to the Lebanese reality, remained secondary.

Perhaps what is mentioned in the article by Mona Fawaz and Mona Harb (2020), that Lebanon “cannot become a republic of NGOs”, is the best proof of that. And perhaps what is stated in the article about the importance of “gathering all strengths that aim to save any portion, however small, of the public sphere ... to start rebuilding the state, to which there is no alternative” should resonate with us.

If material assistance, whatever the form and value of it, is not combined with the pursuit of real, structural changes that allow the seeker of help to move towards being able to do without it and arrive at independence, and if it does not have a political and social dimension of supporting these people in demanding the rights that every state must ensure for all its citizens, then it is considered incomplete and even insulting to the individual, the group, society, and even to social work.

In the end, we must present some suggestions that we consider important to complete the research work that we have begun. The return to the history of social work in Lebanon, which actually began in 1948, to derive knowledge from the ancients, which the 1975-1990 war has erased; investigation into the experiences of social work from 1990 until the August 4th explosion, not just to archive them, but to anticipate and benefit from the knowledge that they bring, and to connect from it what is possible to the academic field of social work for a hopefully promising future.

Afterword

The social worker, whatever names he is given and called, is every person who tries to help those whom life has let down and deemed weak and contributes to defending them.

He might feel angry and rebellious, and he might feel frustrated and tired...

But his occupational commitment, like the commitment of all professions that are concerned with the human being, is what distinguishes him.

Many questions are put to social workers as a professional:

- How does he face the bitter reality without denying it or being neutral towards it?
- How does he let communication, understanding the other and listening to him prevail over his feelings of rejection and denial?
- How does he view the future in light of a circumstantial and stumbling reality, yet strive to build a society in which the common good, common right, respect for the law and a rightful social policy reign?
- How does he commit to political work without slipping into ideological and partisan alignments and sectarian isolation?
- How does he reject the notion of “the republic of NGOs”, yet, to contribute the return of the “state of rights and citizenship”?

In hope of a better tomorrow.

References:

- Amiot, H. (2013, 10 30).** *Chronologie illustrée du conflit libanais (1975-1990)*. Retrieved from <https://www.lesclesdumoyenorient.com/Chronologie-illustrée-du-conflit-libanais-1975-1990.html>
- Fawaz, M., Harb.M (2020).** *Le Liban ne doit pas devenir une république des ONG*, in “L’Orient le Jour <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1241866/le-liban-ne-doit-pas-devenir-une-republique-des-ong.html>
- Haddad, G. (1988).** Letter dedicated to the Social Workers in Lebanon, Social Movement, Beirut
- Hazzaz,M. (1985).** *Le travailleur social et les situations d’urgence*. Service social,34 (1), 148–157.
- Kasparian, R.; Beaudouin,A.; Abou, S. (1995).** “*La population déplacée par la guerre au Liban*”, Université Saint Joseph de Beyrouth, Université Laval de Québec, Editions l’Harmattan, Paris dans <https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/10625/13691/102030.pdf>
- Kassir, S. (2018).** *La Guerre Du Liban*. Orient Des Livres/Actes Sud.
- Lambert D. I.R.F.E.D. (1968).** Liban (Mission)- *Besoins et possibilités de développement du Liban*.In: *Revue économique*, volume 19, n°2, pp. 364-365. www.persee.fr/doc/reco_0035-2764_1968_num_19_2_407816_t1_0364_0000_001
- Salibi, k. (1976).** *Crossroads To Civil War, Lebanon 1958-1976*. Caravan Books.
- Salibi, K. (1988).** *A House of Many Mansions: The History Of Lebanon Reconsidered*. London: IB Tauris & Co.
- Samaha Kahi Hyam :** L’Ecole Libanaise de Formation Sociale Cinquante ans de défis. Travail Social et Société. Actes du colloque tenu à Beyrouth le 4-5-6 Juin 1998. Université Saint Joseph FLSH, Ecole Libanaise de Formation Sociale. Beyrouth 1999.
- Traboulsi, F. (2012).** *A History of Modern Lebanon*. Pluto Press.

