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# Experiences of international social work graduates entering the labour market

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**Abstract**

The aim of the study is to explore the experiences of international social work graduates when looking for employment in the field of social work in Sweden after graduation. Because the aim of the study is to study the experiences a graduate face when entering the labor market, we have deemed that a qualitative method with semi structured interviews to collect data would be best suited for our research. The selection will be chosen from international social work graduates who studied in Sweden. The intention is to focus on both graduates with 210 study points and graduates with 180 study points. 4 participants together. The empirical data was analyzed with the mind of using the theory of capital by Pierre Bourdieu. This theory; the theory of capital is seen as an empirically orientated concept, that has been one of the most widely used concepts in international sociology and on the intersection of sociology and educational studies. The authors have put the findings in three (3) categories: *Background*, *labor market* and *further improvement*. These themes were found to be a commonality with the graduates interviewed.  This study found that it can be hard to acquire employment nationally, with an international social work degree.

**Acknowledgments**

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## 1. Introduction

The overall goal with this study is to study the experiences that former students face when trying to get into the labor market and furthermore employment within social work, after graduating the international social work program in Sweden.

It has been understood that there has not been any study regarding the international social work program in Sweden in relation to employment in the Swedish social work labor market after studies so we feel it is an important subject to study and could be valuable to the whole university. There has been a lot of talk and worry about employment possibilities among students currently studying international social work in Sweden, therefore it is seen that this study would also give clarity to confusion and more info of the possibilities after graduation. Starting a new career as a freshly new graduate does include some challenges for the individual. It is seen that recent graduates frequently face challenges when making the transition from student to the labor market and it can be seen that national social work services may not be ready for international social work graduates (Kahn & Sussman, 2015).

From this study, it could be interesting to see if former students have gained employment in the international social work field or more national level for example a Swedish municipality etc. The aim and research questions were chosen because of the interest of wanting to find out how it could look like after graduation for students seeking a job within the field of social work. It would be interesting to find out the challenges to finding a job within the field and having studied international social work. This subject is important to be discussed to hopefully in the end find clarity within the worry of being unemployed after graduation.  With addition a section for further improvement of the education to help graduates acquire employment.

### 1.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of the study is to explore the experiences among international social work graduates with 180 and 210 study points when looking for employment in the field of social work after graduation.

Research questions:

1. What can be the obstacles to get employed in the field of social work?

2. What can be done for employment in the field of social work after graduation?

3. What were the academic or work experience requirements, when trying to get employed?

## 1.2 Thesis structure

Chapter 1 for this thesis provides the idea and the topic by an introduction where the background of the issue is presented and moves on to the aim and the research questions, thereafter the concepts used in the essay in the thesis are explained and defined. Chapter 2 gives an overview on the previous research that has been conducted about international social work graduates. When it comes to chapter 3, what is presented here is the theoretical frameworks used for the thesis and how they are relatable for the subject, consisting of the theory of capital explaining how capital statuses could affect the entering of the labor market. Chapter 4 presents the methodology, here it includes the search of the literature, the selection of respondents, collecting the data, the conductions of the interviews, analysis, credibility of the essay, reliability and validity. The fourth chapter also includes generalization, the ethical conditions and the limitations of the study. The fifth chapter includes the results and analysis where the findings are presented and analyzed in relation to the theories and previous research used for the thesis. In chapter 6, what is presented here is the discussion on the four most important findings the authors made. The discussion includes how these findings are related to the aim, research questions and the theoretical framework including previous research.

## 1.3 Background

Here are important topics that relate to the author's aim being explained. Necessary topics that suit this thesis are; *1. Information about the programme, 2. Social work, 3. Challenges recent graduates face in a new career, 4. Careers in Social work and lastly 5. Labor market.* These topics give a better insight into what is being explored.

## 1.3.1 Information about the programme; Bachelor of Science in Social Work – Specialization International Social Work

Bachelor of science in social work - specialization international social work is a programme whereas work entails from an international perspective with people at three levels, them being; individually, in groups and in the community (Lindahl, 2016). This

programme covers issues such as human rights, social justice, children's rights and respect for diversity (Lindahl, 2016). Throughout the programme there are methodological and theoretical aspects of social work practice that become discussed with an international perspective in counting examples from different parts of the world (Lindahl, 2016). Within the semesters of the programme there are offerings of insight into the profession and the practice of social work within the different levels that were individual, group and societal (Lindahl, 2016). There are field studies that have relation to the ethical aspects of research and also observation etc. (Lindahl, 2016). There is a focus on methods and skills of social work for intervention with specification on different target groups such as families and victims of crime (Lindahl, 2016). There is a momentum of social work practice placement, the intentions of this momentum being that the theoretical knowledge that previously has been gained during the programme becomes observed in application on the field of practice (Lindahl, 2016). With having this bachelor of social work one can work to help people in vulnerable situations within the three levels mentioned above (Lindahl, 2016).

### 1.3.2 Social work

The global definition of social work according to International Federation of Social Workers shortened as IFSW, is that social work is a practice-based profession and also an academic discipline that do promote social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of humans, this definition has been approved by IFSW General Meeting and the IASSW (International Association of Schools of Social Work) General Assembly in July 2014 (Global Definition of Social Work | IFSW, 2020). The principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities is seen to be central to social work (Global Definition of Social Work | IFSW, 2020). Social work is a profession that has also its focus on engaging people and structures to address life challenged and enhancing wellbeing (Global Definition of Social Work | IFSW, 2020). It has also been seen that a bachelor social work degree is a preparation for an individual to go out into the workforce as a professional with the general knowledge and skills to assist individuals, families, groups and communities in coping with basic problems in their living occurring day to day (Ritter, Vakalahi & Kiernan-Stern, 2009).

Social work practice is recognized by variety of value, purpose, sanction, knowledge and method (Bartlett, 2003). There are certain philosophical concepts that are principles

to the practice of social work, some being; the individual is seen to be the primary concern of society, there are human needs common to each person, yet each person is unique and different from others (Bartlett, 2003). Social work practice has its values very clear and gives a foundation for social work practice. In hand with these values for social work practice there are also a purpose for the field of social work which is for example, to assist individuals and groups to identify and resolve or minimalize problems arising out of disequilibrium between themselves and their environment, to identify potential areas of inconsistency between individuals, groups and the environments in order to be able to prevent the occurrence of inconsistency etc. (Bartlett, 2003). The field of social work practice has helped to develop out of a community recognition of the need to provide services to meet basic needs. To have been able to develop and improve society in different levels in the field of social work have been like other professions derived knowledge from different sources and in application brought forth further knowledge from its own processes (Bartlett, 2003). And it shows that the practice of the social worker is typically guided by knowledge of for example, the meaning and effect on the individual, groups, and community of cultural heritage including its religious beliefs etc. (Bartlett, 2003). There are various parts of knowledge in the field of social work practice. One that is important to have for a social worker entering the field of social work is skills. It is important to have the ability to use knowledge effectively, competence in social work practice lies in developing skill in the use of the method and its techniques, that being able to use the tool used as a part of method for example, information giving (Bartlett, 2003). For this reason, the field of social work practice is a broad spectrum with the same values and purposes within different careers. Knowledge and its use play a huge role with how the field of social work practice functions.

### 1.3.3 Challenges recent graduates face in a new career

Starting a new career as a freshly new graduate does include some challenges for the individual. It is seen that recent graduates frequently face challenges when making the transition from student to the labor market (Petersen, 2016).

One common challenge that has been found is the lack of experience, what have been found is that many employers do prefer candidates with some experience in their industry, although graduates have a degree and presumably do know a lot about their chosen industry, practical experience does make one more marketable (Petersen, 2016).

This goes hand in hand with another challenge graduates can face which is the lack of experience in the field, not having many connections and not having much other experience that is applicable to the chosen job, this might require further education or make the job search process longer due to not having experience nor contacts within the field (Petersen, 2016).

### 1.3.4 Career options in Social Work

There are a big range of possible areas and careers for social workers Ritter, Vakalahi & Kiernan-Stern mentions 101 careers in Social Work in their book (2009). Four of these careers will be elaborated to give an understanding over how broad and different social work jobs could be and are.

The first career decided to touch on is; *Family Violence Counselor*. As known for a social worker all men, women and children should have the rights to be free from violence and to be safe in their homes, but unfortunately domestic violence is a major social problem (Ritter, Vakalahi & Kiernan-Stern, 2009). What is seen to be the most common setting for social workers that works in the field of domestic violence is to work in women's shelters, to temporary or emergency assistance shelters for women and children (Ritter, Vakalahi & Kiernan-Stern, 2009). Other ways this work field is seen is that some social workers might work with perpetrators of violence, to help and guide them to see and understand the root causes of their behaviors, such work usually takes the form of group counseling (Ritter, Vakalahi & Kiernan-Stern, 2009).

The second career chosen is; *Immigration Policy Advocate*. This career focuses on providing services to immigrants, for example socializing them into the community, providing the right path for help with language, place to stay etc. Social workers might also help immigrant communities on a macro level, meaning to advocate for changes to immigration policies (Ritter, Vakalahi & Kiernan-Stern, 2009).

Now for the third career that is; *Disaster Relief Worker*, here it is said that most disaster relief workers with social work backgrounds are employed by organizations, organizations such as the Red Cross and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to work within international settings (Ritter, Vakalahi & Kiernan-Stern, 2009). With these kinds of jobs, it is seen that there is a contribution of their specialized skills in crisis intervention, medicine, public health and mental health to those recovering from a

disaster for example war, poverty etc. and social workers in this work field usually provides with food and shelter (Ritter, Vakalahi & Kiernan-Stern, 2009).

And lastly for the fourth chosen career that is; *Mental Health Evaluator* there are in some criminal or civil cases individuals that brought before the court that might be suffering from mental illness or developmental disabilities that could in hand impact their ability to participate in and to understand the court proceedings (Ritter, Vakalahi & Kiernan-Stern, 2009). Criminal and civil courts do require a specific evaluation to determine whether or not an individual is competent to make appropriate decisions, here is where the social workers are needed (Ritter, Vakalahi & Kiernan-Stern, 2009). Social workers are called to make competency evaluations, these evaluations do often in most cases involve interviews with the individual and other family members, metal health assessments, medical and developmental histories and other materials that have been able to be gathered (Ritter, Vakalahi & Kiernan-Stern, 2009).

These four careers show the difference and range of work social workers are able to have, how their work field differs and that there are many possible areas to specialize in. Social work has more than one possible area and every work field is not the same yet all work fields and areas have the same goal and that is to help those in need of help.

### 1.3.5 Labor market in social work

Labor market according to Merriam-Webster (2020) is the number of workers who are available to be hired. Meaning the market of jobs in different fields by professions, in this case for this thesis the field of social work jobs.

It is mentioned that, a market is a place, real or conceptual, where suppliers and also demanders come together and within the case of labor agrees on the wage and conditions of employment (Barth, 2003). It is explained by Michael Barth (2003) in his study that wages of social workers become stable when a labor market clears, meaning that there is neither a significant number of job vacancies nor unemployment, he furthermore explains that if there are job vacancies, future wage offers will become higher. But it is seen that in the market for, for example child welfare workers that is a profession within social work, here job vacancies persist but wages do not increase (Barth, 2003).

Suggestive evidence on both sides of supply and demand do provide tentative insight into why the situation looks like this, when it comes to the supply side it is said that the market appears highly segmented by education level, whether the employees have a bachelors social work degree or a master social work degree (Barth, 2003). When it comes to the demand side, social worker compensation seems to constitute and economically material percentage of the cost of social work services, and seeing this should make demand for social workers fairly responsive to wage levels, but it has been seen that the demand of social work services appears relatively unresponsive to its price (Barth, 2003). As Barth (2003) stated 17 years ago no literature exists where studies and papers discuss the labor market of social work and during those 17 years the number has not reasonably risen. There seems to be little or no international social work labor market research, but when looking at national levels of the social work labor market it seems that social workers have been in great demand and have a trend of rising demand of workers (Barth, 2003). The different meaning and nature of social work in different cultures and countries (Kahn & Sussman, 2015) also makes it more difficult to study the social work labor market as a whole.

The labor market within social work thus becomes relevant for the authors due to it explaining the demand and the wage of social work on the fields of social work for graduates.

## 2. Previous research

When looking at earlier research there have been found studies and articles. These research articles and studies were chosen due to the authors seeing relevance with the information they contribute and with the aim and research questions for this thesis. Some of these articles gave information about graduating international students, factors of being an international graduate and also information about contributions of social workers' education and their services. This kind of information has an impact and gives the authors different perspectives on their subject.

### 2.1 Social Work Labor Market

These studies were chosen to map out what were the possibilities of a social work graduate in the labor market and more over in the international labor market. Also, to see what to do with a social work degree. *Life After Graduation: What do I do with a Social Work Degree?* (Iovu & Demain, 2019) is the a study conducted in Romania,

where they surveyed 291 social work graduates and one of the findings was that on average it took 5 months after graduation to obtain a job and only 33 per cent found jobs in the field of social work (Iovu & Demian, 2019) The paper describes the situation of young social workers in the perspective on competency, first job experiences and current working status. This study is a great resource when it comes to evaluating employment and unemployment within social work and its graduates and we can see that this paper gives us vast amounts of reference points in our research. This research also touches upon the concept of employability, from the individual's perspective.

A study by Barth (2003) wrote about the contribution of social work education to production of social work services, where it has been seen that the diversity of views regarding the education and tasking of social workers do suggest the need to examine the precise contributions of social work education to the delivery of social work services (Barth, 2003). Barth (2003) thinks that this kind of task is first and foremost for social work practitioners and educators; the economist's perspective could also be helpful to answer types of questions such as; what is the relative importance of the subjects studied by social work students? What is the trade-off between breadth versus depth of training in a particular field in determining the value of social work graduates to employers and to clients? What is crucial with this is the notoriously difficult task of defining and measuring the quality of services provided as distinct from the quality of the services providers (Barth, 2003).

The relevance of this research for the authors is how much the education matters within getting employed with a bachelor's degree of social work, due to the mention of that it has been seen that education is not always enough to practice social work, and that some positions are sometimes renamed and job descriptions rewritten to circumvent the licensed social worker requirement and having an international social work degree in Sweden you do not get the title that is required to work within social work in Sweden (Barth, 2003).

## 2.2 Obstacles in Getting Employed in Social Work

Research that relates to our first research question, explores the obstacles graduates face when trying to get employed in the field and the reasons why social work graduates choose directly not to pursue the profession after graduation. The study: *Voices from Social Work Graduates in China: Reasons for not choosing Social Work as Career*

(Zeng, Cheung, Leung & He, 2015) is a qualitative study interviewing Social Work graduates in China, published by the national association of social workers, and finding the reasons behind the unwillingness to work in social work. The study dissects the results into 9 different categories on why the graduates would not continue with social work. Some of these include: income insufficient, no commitment to social work, hard and stressful work and a few more (Zeng, Cheung, Leung & He, 2015). The researchers interviewed 20 BSW graduates with semi structured interviews and reported that more than 90 per cent had multiple reasons for unwillingness to work in social work (Ibid.). We do recognize that this study is focused on Chinese graduates and is not completely reliable to compare to our research due to cultural differences and differences in the field of social work, but it does give perspective and the reasons listed by the study could be universal. Also, the study made by Kahn and Sussman (2015) explores the obstacles graduates face when looking for employment in the field of social work and international social work which focuses more on licenses and recognition of international social work graduates.

## 2.3 Qualifications & Actions for Employment

The research that relates to our second and third research questions explores the actions needed to be taken and qualifications needed to get employed in the field of social work such as a study conducted by Cai (2013) is to understand more what employers think about graduates who have very similar credentials in work places, meaning their employability. The employer's belief about employability of a graduate is broken down into different factors like, graduate's appearance (ethnicity, race, gender etc.) and public vs private learning (Cai, 2013). This conceptual framework also touches upon the factors that same beliefs, culture and social status may affect a graduate's employability (Ibid.). It can be argued that that particular part of the study touches upon the consensus theory which we do not necessarily see valuable for our research but it gives some insight to the matter.  The paper also gives insight to the topic on what to do to provide graduates with information that helps them influence the employer's beliefs of employability (Ibid.). The study found that the bottom line that affects the employability of a graduate from the perspective of the employer lies in the graduate's actual productivity and performance at a work place like practical placement. So, graduates need to be aware that just gaining an international diploma does not guarantee more success in the labor market. Cai (2013) stating that  the skills to be developed during

studying international programs include ''a deeper understanding and respect for global issues'', ''more favorable attitudes toward other cultures'', ''stronger intercultural communication skills'', ''improved personal and professional self-image'', ''better foreign language skills'', ''self-confidence'', ''ability to handle ambiguity'', ''insight into their own value systems'' and ''overall maturity''.

Also, a study conducted by Kahn and Sussman (2015) discusses what qualifications and licenses an international social work graduate needs to practice social work internationally. In their study of graduates who are already employed in the field share their experiences on what needs to be done, some of these actions include, further education, recognition of their profession in another country and obtaining national licenses to practice. This research relates directly to our second and third research questions and thus is seen as valuable for the research.

## 3. Theoretical framework

Here is the theoretical framework presented. This framework is suitable to the subject for the thesis and within the presentation of the theory their relevance for the thesis is also mentioned.

The authors used this theory and its relevance to the thesis by finding connections with the answers and results of the aim and research questions by the participants participation and by the previous research done. The data that was gotten collected by the authors with the help of previous research and the interviews was broken down and within breaking down the data the results showed connections to the theories. Having clear connections between the theory and the data collected by the authors is how they used their theory. When it came to analyzing the data collected by the participants there was also usage of the theory by seeing connections and or answers to the answers gotten by the participants. Doing so the theory became more relevant also due to it having connections to the work done.

### 3.1 The theory of Capital

The theory used for the study is the theory of capital.  The theory of capital is seen to be an empirically orientated concept, that has been one of the most widely used concepts in international sociology and on the intersection of sociology and educational studies

(Gudmunsson & Mikiewicz, 2012). The theory of capital emphasizes that it does not have its home base within individuals but in social networks, yet social capital is used by individuals (Gudmunsson & Mikiewicz, 2012). Within the main theoretical contributions found by Bourdieu, Coleman etc. there is found an agreement that social capital is embedded in social relationships, yet there are different perspectives on the use of social capital (Gudmunsson & Mikiewicz, 2012). The suitable perspective for our research is Pierre Bourdieu's, where he focuses on the function of social capital by certain social groups, and the use of social capital in business or/and in search for jobs and social status (Gudmunsson & Mikiewicz, 2012). Researchers have found that for Bourdieu social capital is made of social obligations or connections, the aggregate of actual or also potential resources which are in hand linked to possession of a durable network of institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Gudmunsson & Mikiewicz, 2012). It is said that social capital cannot be seen freestanding though, which in hand gives us the theories of other concepts of capital such as the basic kinds of capital that does occur in a society; economic, cultural and the social (Häuberer, 2011). These capitals can be converted into one another by using transformation labor, for example economic capital is exchanged for objectified cultural capital (Häuberer, 2011). When it comes to societal groups according to Bourdieu's findings, societal groups in social fields tend to aim to reproduce themselves, which is seen to be a difficult task because the amount of capital is limited (Häuberer, 2011). And the societal groups have to compete for them (Häuberer, 2011). When it comes to the chances of one group acquiring rare goods do depend on their capacities or their economic, cultural and social capital, which could be interpreted as their connections within the field for example (Häuberer, 2011).

The theory of capital is suitable for the authors research due to it having a focus on the findings of a job, and the labor market. The authors research focuses on the field of social work and on the experiences of entering the labor market after graduation of international social work. It seems to be a theory that might give connections within trying to set a foot in to the labor market and this theory takes culture and economy into consideration which could possibly be factors either benefit or prevent the road into the labor market of social work.

## 4. Methodology

Because the aim of the study was to explore the experiences of individuals, a qualitative method was chosen to be the best way to conduct the research. The authors wanted to know how individual social work graduates experience the process of looking for social work employment and what do the individuals see that could be improved in the experience. This choice was backed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), who described that using qualitative it creates better opportunity for deeper analysis and understanding of the aim and research questions. The following part has been mostly backed by references from Kvale and Brinkmann (2015).

Triangulation is a method that is used with the purpose to achieve confirmation of constructs using multiple measurements methods/method to gain comprehensive information about a phenomenon (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005). It is seen that when it comes to qualitative researchers there is a seeking of trustworthiness in data collection by using multiple methods and divergent data sources and it has been identified four types of triangulation that are relevant for qualitative research (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005). Therefore, the authors for the thesis chose to use the type called Theory Triangulation, by using two theories instead of one. Theory Triangulation is explained to be the use of multiple theories/perspectives to interpret a single set of data with the goal to analyze study findings with different theoretical lenses (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005). This meaning that the results collected were analyzed with two different perspectives, them being the two chosen theoretical frameworks for the thesis.

## 4.1 Literature search

Literature search within relevance for the thesis was made by using different databases such as Scopus and SocINDEX, these databases helped to search for articles and books that had relevance for the subject by using keywords such as, social work graduate, labor market, social work experience etc. Doing so, articles that had relevance for the authors aim showed and gave other perspectives and discussions on the subject. Gaining more information about the theories and their relevance by searching for books about for example Pierre Bourdieu was a way for the authors to collect more information and provide more knowledge about the theory chosen, in this case the theory of capital by Pierre Bourdieu.

## 4.2 Selection of informants

When choosing who to interview it was clear that the interviewees had to be people that have graduated from the international social work programme, also having focus on them graduating in Sweden. Therefore, the next step was to send out information about the thesis. The authors asked Facebook groups that are specially made for the international social work programme with 180 credits and 210 credits due to it being the most suitable way to reach out to people that would be available to be interviewed. But due to the lack of interest there were only four participants that reached out and agreed on being interviewed and wanting to be participants for the thesis. The authors gained two informants that have studied 180 credits and two that have studied 210 credits.

Participant A is employed as a waitress and participant B is employed at the Swedish Migration Agency in Sweden. Both participant C and D are unemployed, so participant B is the only participant that is employed within the field of social work in Sweden with their degree of international bachelor social work programme. Important information here is that participant A and B are the ones that studied 210 credits while participants C and D studied with 180 credits.

## 4.3 Data collection

Data collection is known to be a critical step when it comes to the research process due to it being a link between theory and practice (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005). Data collection does have its role in connecting theory and practice to be understood when looking at the entire research process (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005). For the authors case, finding the connection between the chosen theories and the semi-structured interviews.

The data was collected with a semi-structured interview with three participants for this qualitative research, using the interview guide (see Appendix II). The interview guide was divided in three themes, about the background of studying social work, the labor market in the field of social work and lastly further improvement of the program. Each of these themes had one to four questions that gave answers that lead to answering the main research questions. The decision on using semi -structured interviews came from understanding what Kvale and Brinkman (2015) had stated. Kvale and Brinkman (2015) have stated that qualitative research does give an opportunity to learn more deeply about the aim at hand and that this research method has the ability to have the opportunity to be flexible and modify the structure of the interviews and study, therefore, a semi-structured interview was chosen. Within using a semi-structured interview, tape

recording did also take place, which was a part of the way of conducting data for the authors data collection. With qualitative interviews, tape recording is an important tool, recording the interview gives the authors the ability to have full focus on the respondents, which is mentioned by Rubin and Babbie (2011), ensuring verbatim recording and giving full attention to the respondents becomes easy when using such a method of interviewing.

## 4.4 Transcription of interviews

The interviews were transcribed from recorded oral data to text form by using VLC media player, that is a free and open source cross-platform that helped the transcription to go smoothly by being able to listen and write at the same time. VLC media player helped the authors to focus on the document of transcription by giving the opportunity to rewind the file without exiting the document by using a shortcut with the keyboard of the computer. This saved the authors time while transcribing the participants' interviews.

All the interviews were held in English so no translation was needed. After transcribing the texts were read and listened to again to make sure there are no transcribing errors. Once it was clear there were no errors in transcribing, the authors started to analyze the text with the aim of the research in mind and the theories chosen, highlighting the themes from the data that correspond with the themes in the interview guide.

## 4.5 Data analysis

The authors used the method called thematic analysis when analyzing the interviews after transcribing the interviews from oral format to text format. Thematic analysis is a method that is used for analyzing qualitative data, and is usually seen to be applied to a set of texts such as interview transcripts (Caulfield, 2016). With this method the researchers get to closely examine the data to be able to identify common themes, topics and patterns that do repeatedly occur (Caulfield, 2016). The authors for the thesis saw that this method of analysis would be the most suitable due to having a semi-structured interview with different themes already divided within the questions to the participants. Another reason to be using this method for the authors was that thematic analysis is seen to be an appropriate approach to research when the research is about trying to find out something about others views, opinions, experiences etc. from a qualitative data,

which in the authors favor is what the thesis is doing, studying international social work graduates experiences after graduation entering labor market. To conduct thematic analysis the authors decided to use the most common form that follows with a six-step process, being, familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and lastly writing up (Caulfield, 2016).

After dividing two interviews each to transcribe for the authors it was time to analyze. The first step being, familiarization meaning to get to know the data collected (Caulfield, 2016). In this stage the authors read through the text transcription of the interviews and overview the transcription data so the authors knew what the data was informing. When it was time to review the themes found in the transcripts, the authors did not find it difficult due to the themes being relatable to the aim. With this step it is said that it could help to see if there are any problems with the themes or if there are two similar themes that could be combined or removed, luckily that was not needed for the authors (Caulfield, 2016). The fifth step that is defining and naming the themes was not necessary for the authors due to already knowing the themes that were being searched for. Lastly, the sixth step was about writing up the analysis of the collected data from the four transcribed interviews and created a coherent narrative.

While finding the themes their name origin came from seeing the connection of the themes to the theories, for example for the theme labor market the could be seen that the theory of capital associated with that specific theme due to finding information from the participants that having contacts and connections could be a way to get your foot in to the labor market within social work. As stated, the theory of capital spoke about how it is made of social obligations or connections that is linked to possession of a durable network (Gudmunsson & Mikiewicz, 2012). Where here the authors made an understanding of that as the theory states having connections could bring a durable network in the labor market with new employers.

## 4.6 Credibility of the study

Credibility is known for the trustworthiness of the steps taken in a qualitative data analysis and the conclusions reached (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005). A way to maximize credibility for the thesis is the method of communicative validation, which comes up through the assessment of data by asking participants for their consensus, which the authors in this case did do (Flick, 2007). The participants did provide the authors the possibility to get back to them if there were any additional questions that arose during

the process of transcription, analyzing and the results. Having the possibility to re-contact the participants gives the thesis a better credibility.

### 4.6.1 Reliability

Reliability means consistency and trustworthiness of the outcome of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Since this is a social study, the authors realize that measurements are indirect compared to physical measurements and therefore pay attention that measurements may produce more errors, and this is supported by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015). This study used open ended questions which can be replicated in another study to strengthen the reliability of this study. Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) also states that leading questions can enhance the reliability, so this method was also used in the interviews, with additional checks that the subject understood the question.  The authors also recognize that they are inexperienced in qualitative research and this can lower the reliability of the study. All interviews were conducted in English to lower the chances of errors if translation were to be needed. Both authors transcribed the interviews separately so this factor may lower the reliability, but were in contact often during the study to minimize the risk for lowering reliability. In addition, since the interviews were held online because of the Covid-19 pandemic extra caution was taken with the connection issues and so forth.

### 4.6.2 Validity

Validity is to make sure that you are measuring what you intended to measure (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). In social sciences, measurements are indirect, and this creates the situation that the authors are never fully certain that the measurement procedure measures the right variable. Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) states that the authors must provide evidence that the measurement instrument does in fact measure the right variable. The authors of this paper recognize this, by putting the interview guide into themes to separate the data into sections in a clear manner. The interview guide created by the authors was referred back to strictly so that the validity of the data is not compromised.

### 4.6.3 Generalization

As Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) states, about qualitative studies, it is difficult to form any type of generalization since the sample of people is small. With a bigger sample and

previous research, it would be possible to make careful generalizations. (Ibid.). The authors recognize that this study cannot be generalized.

## 4.7 Ethical considerations

Because social sciences and social science research revolves around humans, and often their socio-political situations, ethical considerations play a significant role (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This study mostly used the ethical advice by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) and of course the author's experience in studying social sciences in the past years.

A consent form was created, but because of the Covid-19 pandemic these forms were read to the participants over the phone and the participants accepted them orally. The participants were made aware of what the study was for and who it was conducted by. The form also informs the participants how the collected data will be handled. The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point of the research process. Authors made sure to the participants that all the data collected will be de-contextualized so their names and other personal information is not available for anyone but the researchers. The participants got to choose the time and place for the interviews to make them more comfortable. Since social studies can involve private and vulnerable information, researchers need to protect the rights and anonymity of the participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Since these interviews were conducted online, the authors made sure that only three (3) people (the authors and participants), were present in the call. Extra precautions were taken by making sure no one else was in the rooms of the authors, to see or hear the collected data, thus securing the safety of the participant. The data was recorded and held in a secure place where only the authors had access to.

This study was independent and no monetary funds were obtained from any institution to conduct the research and no participant received any monetary payment to participate in the interviews.

## 4.8 Limitations within the study

The research was conducted in English, which is not the native language of either author nor any of the participants. This may be a limitation, since it may be harder to speak more freely and correctly in a different language.

Furthermore, a bigger number of participants would have given a more in-depth study, but because of the time frame and the lack of interest from the former international social work graduates to participate in the study only four were interviewed. The authors do recognize that the study can be replicated with more participants to have a better view of the researched subject.

## 5. Results and analysis

Three themes were found to be relevant to the aim and research question: *Expectations, In the labor market, Further Improvement.*

The following chapter is dedicated to analyzing the data with the help of previous research and theoretical framework. Quotations will be used if deemed necessary to the analysis.

### 5.1 Expectations

Within the first theme the authors explored the participants' expectations about the program, processes of finding suitable jobs, and obstacles occurring with the process of job hunting. Categories for this section were, *Job opportunities, Enough experience* and *Language*.

### 5.1.1 Job opportunities

When it came to the expectations for the international social work program graduates in relation to future work it was seen that two (2) of the participants mentioned the job opportunities they thought they would gain after graduation. Participant D mentioned that social work for them was seen as a broad domain to choose from. It was found with all participants that social work for them seemed as a broad field, where there are plenty different subcategories to choose from, such as, family, elderly or homeless, which concludes for them that there are available jobs in the labor market for social work after graduation.

All participants mentioned the Swedish public employment service "*Arbetsförmedlingen*" to be a big part of the process to search for jobs in the field of social work in Sweden. All participants showed in their answers that a lot is on searching on your own for jobs. Participant B and D that have studied the 180points program, mentioned that within searching for jobs in the Swedish public employment service, they mainly looked for jobs that had written in their qualifications "*similar education*" next to the qualification "*Socionom*" due to not being qualified for a professional social worker "*Socionom*" in Sweden. Participant D states:

> *"Some jobs did include in their qualifications socionom degree or equal degree, so to find a job in the field of social work is possible due to being qualified with a similar degree."*

### 5.1.2 Enough experience

It was shown in the transcriptions that the participants felt the lack of experience, and participant B mentioned that not having experience was the biggest obstacle when searching for jobs. Most applications require one to two years of experience in the field. Participant D did also mention this fact, that it is required experience, and feeling insecure over that they do not have the experience required and not knowing if their social skills thought where enough made them sometimes scared of searching for jobs within the field of social work. Participant B did although lacking job experience get interviews for jobs in the Swedish social services within the field of counseling. This shows that although not having the required title in Sweden there are possibilities to gain jobs within social services. Participant B mentioned that the supervisors in the interviews did not know much about the international social work degree, but with writing about the degree in their personal letter the supervisors got more knowledge and understood the degree and its outcome. Continuing the study of Swedish law was seen to be one way to gain enough qualification according to the respondents. It was found that there are courses in distance to take about the Swedish law that would be beneficial when applying to jobs in Sweden. More on qualification in theme 3. One participant mentioned that some jobs even did give the offer to give introduction to the Swedish law.

### 5.1.3 Language

The participants that did not have Swedish language as their primary language mentioned language to be one big obstacle that they had come across when searching for jobs in Sweden. Participant A states:

> *"That is how I see it, I think you need to have more or less profession in the language to be able to work with such complex situations, such as, human emotions etc. Language is really important."*

This topic was mentioned by two (2) of the participants and their own personal confidence also played a big role, thinking that they did not have enough Swedish language skills to work in the field, since the education was in English.

Participant D has the Swedish language and sees it as an advantage and gives a broader access to different social work fields in Sweden. Other participants as mentioned saw that not having the Swedish language is a disadvantage and reduces the chances of getting offered a job in Sweden. Participant C mentioned that what one could do was to further educate oneself with the Swedish language but that would extend the time of being jobless according to them.

## 5.2 In the labor market

What the authors explored within this theme was how the participants set a foot into the labor market. Relevant themes that were found here were *Preparation* and *Social contacts.*

### 5.2.1 Preparation

What is meant by preparation is how the education has prepared the students to enter the labor market and how has the graduate prepared to enter the labor market.

It was found that three (3) of the respondents felt that the education prepares you fairly well for the job market, academically but not practically. However, they felt that they were still not fully prepared since the education is very broad.

Participant D and A both mention that the education did not fulfill their preparation for the job market, practically. It was found from the participants that they knew how to proceed the work needed academically but not practically. Participant D gave an example; a doctor learns how to insert a syringe by practicing several times, there is no difference when it comes to social workers, they should have practical momentums in class when it comes to performing what is learnt academically, such as counseling.

### 5.2.2 Social Contacts

Social contacts were one the themes found in two (2) of the participants' answers. To elaborate the meaning of social contacts relating to the study, it is to have social contacts to help you get into the labor market.

> *" I met one socionom at my own workplace (waitress) and we talked a bit and she definitely tried to get me to apply for social services in town, so I think this contact could actually get me employed in the field."*

Stated participant A.

Participant C mentioned the contacts they made during the practical placement period of 5 weeks to be a great way to get your first step closer to employment. Since graduation they have made some individual projects for the organization they worked with and this happened because the organization remembered the student and offered some projects.

Participant D put emphasis on how much of an impact a social network was for them. Participant D mentioned that by having family members and friends that knew Swedish social workers they got the opportunity to call many organizations and different social service sections when it was time for them to search for a practical placement. Participant D stated:

> *"Without any contacts that put in a good word about me I would never have found a practical placement, and I thought about it for the future, I need to have my little social group that I could ask when I need employment."*

Participant D had beforehand known that they wanted their practical placement to be in Sweden and an advantage they had was that they already know the Swedish language, which according to participant D was appreciated by those that were called/emailed regarding placement.

### 5.3 Critique & further improvement

The third theme found in all interviews was further improvement of the program and critique from the perspective of the graduate. Patterns that were found: *Lack of depth, Lack of qualification.*

### 5.3.1 Lack of depth

The international social work program is broad and the content of information is great. The respondents felt that most of the subjects within social sciences were covered theoretically. But was lacking depth in certain courses and lacking focus on practical skills such as counseling. As Participant A states:

> *"I think that the content should be just as broad but I think they should go in depth in some topics, such as one on one work/therapy and counseling"*

This theme was present in every participant's response, as they felt that the program does cover the needed subjects and theories which does give the graduates proper academic knowledge base to practice social work. The critique of the program within the participants was the fact that all the respondents felt that they lacked practical skills after graduation, since everyone who participated in this study aimed to work on the field and not in the field of social science research. As Participant C states:

> *"...something, like practical placement or something like that, practical should be more in depth since that's what we are meant to do in the future. "*

As mentioned in theme *Expectations,* the lack of confidence in the skills and knowledge they have acquired, was a key factor in most of the respondents. Now this does not seem to be the lack of confidence in the academic knowledge but more about practical skills. The same type of results was found in the study conducted by Iovu & Demian (2019) where they found that employers do report social work students to lack socio-emotional skills when entering the labor market and the students confirming this by rating practical skills like interaction and negotiation below teamwork and analytical thinking. So, from the previous research (Iovu & Demian, 2019) and the data collected for this research it is clear that the depth lacks in the field of learning practical skills and knowledge, rather than theoretical knowledge.

### 5.3.2 Lack of qualification

This qualitative study was conducted with four (4) participants, three (3) of them graduating with 180p and one (1) with 210 points. Within the program of 210p, the program included a longer practical placement (15p) compared to 7,5p within the 180p

program. The 210p program also included national Swedish law studies which the lower point program did not include. Moreover, the 210p program also gave the graduates a legal license to practice social work and gave them the official and legal status of "socionom" in Sweden, this was not acquired in the 180p program.

As expected, the issue of qualification was a greater theme within the participants who had completed the 180p program. The meaning of *lack of qualification* relates, with both participants, to the lack of getting the "socionom" title in Sweden and lack of longer practical placement. With participant C stating:

> *"Because as how I see it, even for an international organization, that*
> *organization will pick a Swedish 'socionom' rather than me, without the*
> *license".*

It was clear from both participants that they wanted to stay in Sweden to work at least for the near future, but the insufficient education does limit their job opportunities, they feel. To be clear, in this study we do not aim to compare the two programs since the participant (A) with 210p does not have a social work job. Simply presenting their experiences and presenting what the participants stated.

## 6. Discussion

In this section the authors of this study are going to discuss the results in relation to the aim and research questions as well as theoretical framework and previous research. The section also includes method discussion and suggestions for further research.

### 6.1 Methodological discussion

When it comes to the chosen theory; the theory of capital, it provided a base for a certain finding, that being the finding of social contacts. This finding that was made from the participants was able to be supported by the theory. It was difficult to use the theory in other findings due to it being very specific on its aim, although the theory itself provided the authors findings regarding social contacts and its benefits and prevention for the road into the labor market of social work.

Regarding previous research, there were no qualitative studies that the research came across, that was made to explore the experiences of international social work graduates

from Sweden, which meant that all the previous research is from other cultures and countries where social work may be seen differently from Swedish social work. This means our research cannot be directly compared with the previous ones.

The readers of this thesis need to recognize that this study was made by bachelor students who lack years of experience in conducting research, which would mean there might be shortcomings in the thesis research and this could lead into a reliability reduction and validity reduction as well as overall results.

Language is another aspect we need to consider when reviewing this study. None of the interview participants nor the researchers have English as their first language, so misinterpretation from both sides can be possible and it may hinder the participants when they were describing their experiences.

We also need to address the global pandemic of covid-19 and how it has affected the research. Due to the covid-19 pandemic and the researchers residing in different countries, so all the interviews were held remotely, via zoom, and phone call. This means the researchers were unable to read body language and facial expressions, which can be seen as a limitation.

During the interviews held over internet connection, some answers from respondents did interrupt due to network issues, which led to the researchers needing to ask again which in turn could have led to slightly different answers. Furthermore, when listening to the recordings, when transcribing the interviews, some words were hard to distinguish which could affect results and analysis. These recording issues could possibly be fixed through more professional recording devices but the bad connection and interruption of answers was something that cannot be prevented except if the meeting would take place face to face.

## 6.2 Results discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of social work graduates who have graduated with specialization in international social work. To share their own experiences relating to these 3 research questions, which are:

1. What were the obstacles to get employed in the field of social work?

2. What needed to be done for employment in the field of social work after graduation?

3. What were the academic or work experience requirements, when trying to get employed?

In relation to our first research question the finding that lack of confidence in practical skills and its key factors, answers our research questions about obstacles for employment and what kind of work experience and academic requirements are needed when trying to get employed. When it comes to education, respondents felt that the education itself gives a good preparation for the job market academically but not practically. Yet, even if they felt they got good preparation academically there was still some feelings of not feeling ready for the job market due to them saying that the education is very broad, and there is still much to learn about specific areas such as, counseling etc. It was clear to conclude that the respondents felt the lack of confidence when it came to education and its way of preparing students practically. It was also mentioned that it would be necessary and useful if the education had more moments in the classroom that were practical instead of almost only relying on the practical placement momentum. Having such lectures where students could role play would help gain confidence, knowledge and preparation when it comes to the practical skills. The factor of lack of depth, goes hand in hand with education. Respondents felt that the education did not really go in depth when it came to some subjects and only touched the surface which in hand made some of them lack confidence in different areas. This did although also get positive responses from some respondents. It was mentioned that with only touching the surface and teaching out the most important findings within a topic, students could get interested to further educate themselves in the subject they found interesting and learn more in depth that way.

When looking at the expectations our respondents had, they varied a bit in relation to their study points received during the education, but one main theme that rose was lack of experience and or lack of knowledge to be a factor to affect graduates' expectations and this finding of low expectation is seen as an obstacle when entering the labor market. When looking at different studies where graduates share their experiences after graduation, what Zeng, Cheung, Leung & He (2015) found in their study of social work graduates in china had similar results, with 30 percent of their respondents claiming that they are unable to apply their learned skills on the field. They felt that they never

mastered the skills of social work that they learned during education and wished for more practical skills training and more assistance from the teachers when choosing a social work job (Zeng et. al, 2015). This lowered the expectations of the Chinese graduates of entering the social work field after graduation and so it did in all of our respondents. Now, our respondents gave similar statements in relation to the acquired knowledge during education that they may be lacking it, since the education is so broad and lacked sufficient practical training so they felt unsure if they could do the job properly once entering the social work field. These answers from both studies can also be theorized and connected to be a part of the individuals lack of confidence in the acquired knowledge and training. From both studies it is difficult to draw conclusions if the education is actually lacking, but we can theorize that the education of social work could in the future help the students more in finding their place in the field and bettering their practical skills and knowledge confidence to add positivity to their expectations which in turn could higher the students employability and lower the obstacles they are facing. This of course is something the university can address as Cai (2012) proposes in his study of graduate employability, that universities need more connection and interaction with the job market and employers, since it helps to signal employers, that the students from this school are competent and employable (Cai, 2012). This work needs to be done by an institute, like the university, to change the employer's beliefs and attitudes (Ibid.). We can theorize that for a clearer, more secure future in the job market means more positive expectations which can lead to higher employability.

Relating to our second research question our findings suggest that when it comes to social contacts founding from respondents in relation to the theory of social capital the connection could be seen directly by what researchers have found for the theory of capital, that is that it is made of social obligations or connections, the aggregate of actual and also potential resources that in hand are seen to be linked to possession of a durable network of institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognitions (Gudmunsson & Mikiewicz, 2012). This finding is interpreted as having contacts and connections within different fields should be used as a very potential resource to finding employment. Societal groups in social fields do have a tendency to have the aim of reproducing themselves, which is to be seen as another reason for the importance of the usage of social contacts (Häuberer, 2011). By having the aim to reproduce and create bigger societal groups, those who are trying to get in the labor market such as graduates, could have a great use of this due to the increasing demand.

The graduates could further develop other social contacts and or help increase different societal groups. Lastly, what had been seen in the results that have a connection with research question one and two is that without social contacts for some respondents was seen to be an obstacle. Having contacts for the participants was for them seen as a pathway that could be smooth and if not having the usage of contacts their pathway would be more demanding and difficult. Having social contacts was seen to remove one obstacle for getting employed in the social work field for our participants. Regarding research question two we could see from the respondents that one thing that would be good to do is to keep the contacts that they gathered from their practical placement for future reference and future employment.

It was seen that for some respondents having social contacts whether it is from family members, friends or people you know, social contacts are important and have great impact for the way to get employed and become a part of the field of social work. The respondents saw that when one has or knows people that are within the field of social work and have a foot in the labor market their opportunities increase. By that they meant that they do not only have the option of searching for available jobs with the use of the Swedish public employment service. They have the opportunity to call or email professionally personally about themselves and their inquiry of job searching. Having contacts and a social network within the field of social work was seen by the respondents to be a direction with higher increase of collecting a job and also collecting future references. With the help of having social contacts one founding from the respondents was that they had a further important equipment to search for their practical placement during their studies. With the contacts the respondent could introduce themselves to various fields and also have the opportunity to be spoken highly about from their contacts. This *social contact* finding makes it clear to say that social contacts do play a big role for graduates when trying to find a job and trying to enter the labor market of social work fields. Some of our respondents showed that they did rely on their social contacts when it was time for them to find a practical placement during their education. Social contacts according to our respondents are important for future development when it comes to work and experience for them.

The findings relating to our third research question suggest that when it comes to the lack of experience, the respondents saw that without having much experience with how the work executes itself in the chosen field would and is one of the biggest obstacles

when it came to searching for a job. According to respondents, most applications require one to two years of experience in the field. Respondents told us about feeling insecure over that their learned practical skills and experience would not be enough, and abstained from searching for jobs with these kinds of requirements, which in hand shows the lack of confidence within practical skills for the graduated participants. With the lack of experience as an obstacle the confidence reduces for the respondents. And, another factor for the lack of confidence with practical skills was seen to be the language for some respondents. Not only is this factor an obstacle for job searching in Sweden in the field of social work but it is also an obstacle in the workplace. Respondents showed that not having the Swedish language played a big role in their own personal confidence, thinking that they did not have enough Swedish language skills. One participant in particular mentioned that they see the need of having more or less proficiency in the language to be able to work with complex situations where human emotions take place. Not having such skill makes the participants gain more insouciance on how they will present in the field if they get a job in Sweden.

After finding these factors there were clear relations within the previous research that have been done. There were the same results that we found when it comes to lacking confidence regarding practical skills from our respondents was found in a study that is conducted by Iovu and Demain (2019). This study found that employers report social work students to be lacking socio-emotional skills when they enter the labor market and the students do confirm this by rating practical skills as interaction and negotiation below teamwork and analytical thinking (Iovu & Demain, 2019).

Also, in our findings, the lack of qualification played a major role of not finding a social work job. The lack of qualification came apparent from respondents with 180 study points. This is because 180 study points did not qualify the graduates to work as licensed social workers in Sweden, where the program was held. This can be seen as academic insufficiency when relating to our research questions. Sweden is not the only place where a social worker needs a license to practice, some other countries include, Canada (Kahn & Sussman, 2015), most states in the USA (Ibid.), Finland and more developed countries. Now this excludes the graduates with international qualifications to practice in numerous countries, to practice there usually means third party organizations or more studying, which can be expensive and time away from practicing the profession. Now the question arises, what is the object of international social work

education in Sweden, if they do not qualify to work in the country, they studied in. The goal needs to be made clear to the students when they study the program to make it clearer where they will end up in the labor market and what are the possibilities when they graduate. Said this, the authors acknowledge that even the licensed social workers in Sweden cannot work in these countries that require a license, possibly. Developed countries like in the EU and North America, you can apply for recognition of profession in that country, from the government. This possibility does not present itself to the graduate who has no qualified license after graduation, like it does to a social worker with a license. International aspect in the field of social work is growing its importance, but in this day and time we can see from our respondents and other research (Kahn & Sussman, 2015) the governments may not be ready yet for international graduates to enter their national social work services. These factors play a role in what can be seen and what is lacking in the academic requirements when trying to get employed. This showed us that the way to entering the labor market for international graduate students is not easy and has more than one factor, practically, academically and emotionally.

## 6.3 Further improvement of program discussion

Now during our research, we included a question to the respondents asking what is to be improved in the education program, possibly to fare better in job searching (see: Appendix II). This was done because it is understood that in social sciences there are no ultimate truths and nothing is completely perfect. Social work is always evolving with the times and so should the education with it. We feel that the graduates of social work are a good source to use when developing the program further. To see what their experiences are and how they fared in the job market.

The results show us that the graduates feel a lack of depth in their education, mainly in the practical skill area. The authors do not find this finding surprising since all the participants who graduated with 180 study points only had five (5) weeks of practical training that was part of the program. The respondent with 210 had a ten (10) week practical placement and still with the same result, stating that more practice was needed. Now we need to ask if the social work education is alienating the students from practice based social work, towards researching and theory. Kahn and Sussman (2015) studied social work graduates that already had been employed in the field for several years and worked in the international social work field more specifically. They proposed that the collusion with neoliberalism has tipped social work education more towards theory than

practice and thus has alienated itself more from humanitarian aid and development (Kahn & Sussman, 2015). There needs to be a development towards a more balanced education within international social work.

## 6.4 Suggestion for further research

Suggestion for further research regarding the subject of experiences of international social work graduates entering the labor market is critical. There are not countless studies done on international social work graduates regarding them entering the labor market. Universities that do offer international education have not themselves made many studies on for example how many of their students have entered the specific labor market with reference to their education, how the process has been for graduates etc. Nor are there many studies from universities with international students in relation to the education for example on how students found the education being in level to their expectations of the programme. Not finding research limits one's study and we the researchers, need to rely more on information gathered from our participants. So, to make conclusions and summaries that are based on information received from participants without much to compare to from previous research made specifically of this subject became difficult.

This study was conducted with four participants, all being international social work graduates, that had answers resembling each other, some answers unsimilar. Therefore, with this knowledge this study cannot speak for the international social work programme graduates' experiences entering the labor market, due to the lack of previous research and small respondent participation. But the findings made in this study, could instead show perspectives of different patterns for entering the labor market, the struggles, challenges and also the experiences gathered as a newly international social work graduate. So, there need to be more research that has its focus on numbers of students that enter labor market after graduating, in other countries and in countries graduates decided to study their international programme and then further on it needs to be more research made in relation to our study, exploring more on the experiences international social work graduates face.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this area of problem is not explored enough and could still further develop to create a bigger understanding on experiences international social work

graduates face when trying to enter the labor market. Further research for this subject as seen is needed When we started this study, our aim was to study the experiences of international social work graduates who are graduating in Sweden and see what the process of finding a social work job is for the graduates personally. The findings suggest that social contacts, qualification and personal confidence are major factors in what makes a graduate employable. There are fortunately previous studies made that explore the experiences of social work graduates that provided valuable information and surprising connections to our study. Since this was the first qualitative study researching the experiences of students, we needed to get some improvement points from the respondents since we felt that the data, they give is invaluable for the university and program coordinators.

We also acknowledge that this is a small selection of respondents and this subject need more studying and a bigger selection group to make any conclusions and to get a better and broader spectrum results. A new study would possibly and quite surely provide more themes than what is presented in this study. It is also important for the university to do tracer studies and present them to the students to make clear for the students' what objectives and goals can be achieved after graduating the program, and to see how many are employed in the field. Even though the demand for international social workers is looking like it is rising we need more evidence of international social workers who are succeeding in social work in the global arena.

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## Appendices

## Appendix I – Information letter

## Consent form:

The purpose of our study is to understand the experiences that former students that have studied international social work 180/210p face when trying to get into the labor market within the field of social work. The purpose of this thesis is to find out the experience, struggles and methods to get a foot into the field of social work.

The interviews will be taken part in form of internet interview using either phone or another platform to be able to have the interview. This said the interview will still be recorded for the purpose to analyze and describe the answers from the interviewees. The material is going to be used only in research purposes and it will only be the researchers, the supervisor and the examiner that will have access to the material collected.

The consent form is sent beforehand to contribute knowledge and information about the study to the interviewees and the agreement will be said over phone/online before the interview starts. Reasons for this are due to the recent and current events with COVID-19.

**Appendix II – Interview guide**

**Theme 1. Background**

1. What were the expectations for your future work related within this program?

2. After graduation, what process did you have to find a suitable job?

3. With searching for jobs in the field of social work what were the obstacles you came across?

4. Was your academic experience enough to get employed in the field of social work?

          - if no, what requirements were missing?

**Theme 2. Labor market**

1. How much do you feel your job is related to your education? - meaning, do you use your learned skills at work if yes/no, how?

2. How has the education prepared you to work in social work?

3. What have you done, to seek social work jobs? -CV? Interviews?

**Theme 3. Further improvement**

1. In your experience, what is to be improved in the program to fare better at the job you are doing?