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**The Influence of Spirituality on Social Work Teaching, Practice, and  
Public Well-Being: An Aotearoa New Zealand Research Project**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of**

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### **Abstract**

Over the past two decades, social work education has witnessed positive attitudes from teachers and practitioners towards including spirituality in social work education and practice. Several studies highlighted that spirituality increased the coping of individuals suffering from mental health issues, which expanded the scope of integrating spirituality into the social work profession. Social work teachers' and practitioners' spirituality guide their practice behaviours related to the inclusion of spiritual components into social work education programmes and social work practice. However, few qualitative studies have investigated the influence of spirituality on teaching and practice internationally and in Aotearoa New Zealand. Therefore, this study was designed to explore the influence of spirituality on social work teachers, practitioners, and the public and determine how this can be utilised in social work education and practice.

This study had five objectives. The first objective was to explore social work teachers', practitioners' and the public's understanding of spirituality. As social work teachers are accountable for teaching their students how to address clients' diverse religious and spiritual beliefs, addressing students' beliefs and consequent actions is a significant teaching task and an important requirement for social work teachers and practitioners to achieve cultural competence. Thus, both social work teachers and practitioners need to examine their own beliefs and how these beliefs influence the way they address spirituality in either social work teaching or social work practice. Therefore, the second and third objectives of the study focused on exploring social work teachers' and practitioners' experiences and perceptions of the influence of spirituality on social work teachings and practice. As there are relatively few studies around spirituality and social work regarding clients' perceptions, the fourth objective was to explore the public perspective of the influence of spirituality in their lives and their views about incorporating it into social work practice. The final objective of this study was to

develop a conceptual framework that addresses spirituality in social work education and practice in a way that respects diverse spiritual views.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten social work teachers, six social work practitioners and nine members of the public and the data were analysed using grounded theory methods. Findings indicated that social work teachers, practitioners, and members of the public constructed meaning and purpose in unique ways, and their experiences of spirituality also vary. The experience of spirituality for social work teachers and practitioners included awareness of having a personal relationship with God, nature, social work, and family. Public participants showed religious and spiritual pluralism and diverse beliefs about the meaning and purpose of their lives, including self-improvement, listening to people, being creative and holding aspirations. This study suggests that a critical examination of the spiritual beliefs of social work teachers and practitioners is essential to include spirituality in teaching and practice effectively. A conceptual framework for addressing spirituality in social work education and practice was developed considering findings obtained from social work teachers, practitioners, and members of the public.

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## Preface

I was raised in an Islamic family, where my family members taught me that a higher power, God, created the universe, human beings, and animals. My connectedness with my parents influenced me to follow the Islamic faith, which made them happy. Since my childhood, I did not assume any shape, size, or gender to my God, which helped me to accommodate and respect other people's beliefs about God. I perceive God as superior to humans, plants, animals, and nature, and that perception influenced how I construct hope and perseverance during difficult situations in my life.

There are five practical aspects of Islamic worship that I perceive as incredibly significant in retaining my connection with God. These include wudu (purification using water), namaz (the five-time everyday prayers), zakat (charity), sawm (fasting), and performing hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia). The experience of having physical movements during namaz motivated me to learn yoga when I was eighteen. I experienced greater connectedness with my mind, body, and soul through hatha yoga practices, while I felt connected to God through namaz. God is a good listener and source of love, caring, and hope for me, which aligns with many people's experiences, irrespective of the religion they belong to.

Even though I believe in God, I do not accept the monotheist religious philosophy that people who do not connect with God through prayers or reading religious books would go to hell. My grandfather was a farmer, and I was very close to him, when I was a child. I have never seen my grandfather do five-time prayers or read religious books. Because of that, I never wanted God to judge him as a person who was not eligible to get into heaven, and I did not want to imagine my God as unkind and unforgiving. I believe that doing religious rituals is not an indicator that solely determines one's morality. This view shaped my social work practice as I am against devaluing people based on whether they believe in God.

Personal experiences can shape our social work practice interventions. My personal experiences shaped the perception that spirituality is more important for older people to become calm than younger adults. When I was 12 years old, my grandfather died. An hour before he was going to die, he asked me to sit close to him and read the Quran. I obeyed him, and while reading Quran, I saw his eyes fill with tears. He held my hands tightly, and after a few seconds, the hands loosened, and he died. This experience influenced me to accept and respect my client's religious beliefs. The following paragraph describes an example from my social work practice where I demonstrate how I relate a personal experience with professional social work practice with a terminally ill client.

When I was working as a social worker within a palliative care team, I had a terminally ill client aged 75. She was crying continuously. I thought she was in pain. I called the physician and the nurse, but she refused to take any medications to relieve the pain. When they left, she asked me to close the door and told me that she was afraid to stay in the hospital as she believed taking medication was a sin. She would need to go home and pray with her family members before leaving the Earth. As the doctors knew she could not live much longer, I was sent with the patient and her daughter to make them feel comfortable at home. When we got into the house, she asked us to help her lie down in the room where she prayed with her family members, and neighbours started to come to the house to see her. She stopped crying, and I found that she was more comfortable in her house than in the hospital. She reminded me of my grandfather, who asked the doctors to send him home when he was terminally ill. It transformed my interactions with other clients as I took the initiative to explore my terminally ill clients' interest in prayer and getting the love and care of their families.

Furthermore, my experience of living and studying in Aotearoa New Zealand as an international student transformed my spirituality. My daughter was three and a half years old

when I started my PhD, and she was living with my parents in India. It was distressing to stay away from her and my family. Two incidents during my PhD study negatively affected my peace of mind: the flood in Kerala in 2018 and the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020. My spirituality helped me to create peace of mind in my everyday life. My view of God as a protector influenced me to believe that he would save the lives of my dearest people. Moreover, I perceive my supervisors as the greatest spiritual mentors I have ever had, as they taught me how to forge strong connections with self and nature. The experience of love, compassion and fun in our relationships helped me feel much closer to them, enhancing my learning process. They allowed me to start meetings with my prayer, which enhanced my confidence. I used to ask my interview participants whether they would like to start the interview with a prayer. Some of them began with prayers and songs, which enhanced our sense of togetherness and facilitated a more natural flow of conversation.

The appreciation of spirituality within the social work practice context of Aotearoa New Zealand led me to review some literature on spirituality in social work education and practice. Undertaking this PhD research has allowed me to expand my understanding and connections with diverse people, and I found the most heart-warming part of this PhD listening to my participants' spiritual and religious beliefs and practices. Listening to the research participants' perceptions expanded my understanding of diverse spiritual beliefs and broadened my understanding of spirituality. I hope social work teachers and practitioners can find this PhD study helps in understanding the diverse ways in which personal experiences of spirituality can affect both themselves and the people they work with.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This research explores the experience of spirituality among social work teachers, social work practitioners, and the public. Spirituality is a critical component of social work and a universal human quality (Canda & Furman, 2010). Existing research pointed out that personal spiritual experiences can play an important role in considering the inclusion of spirituality in social work education and practice (Bhagwan, 2013; Kvarfordt et al., 2018). Canda and Furman (2010) indicated that spiritually sensitive social work practice is client-centred, meaning that social work practitioners could prioritise accepting and respecting clients' beliefs and values over their religious or spiritual beliefs and values. Social work teachers play a significant role in developing students' awareness of spirituality to be spiritually sensitive in their social work practice with clients (Barker & Floersch, 2010).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, there is a significant spiritual component in social work, and the profession requires social work practitioners to demonstrate respect and knowledge of diverse people's beliefs (Social Workers Registration Board, 2022). After reading the Social Workers' Registration Board competence standards, I became interested in conducting my PhD research in Aotearoa New Zealand. The third competence, "competence to work respectfully and inclusively with diversity and difference in practice" (Social Workers Registration Board, 2022) motivated me to focus on spirituality. This competence standard provided Aotearoa New Zealand social work practitioners with the insight that they would need to consider people's faiths and beliefs as an essential aspect of cultural diversity.

Practising social work within the culturally diverse context of Aotearoa New Zealand requires practitioners to be aware of their own beliefs and values. Such an awareness became the basis for Aotearoa New Zealand social work practitioners to critically reflect on different ways they could manage the effect of personal biases on their social work practice. My view of spirituality as an all-encompassing concept covering different faiths and diverse beliefs about the meaning and purpose of life and values made me consider spiritual experiences as

valuable tools social work practitioners can apply to demonstrate competence to work with diverse people, which shaped this research. I set my heart on exploring whether and how social work teachers' and practitioners' application of personal spirituality can benefit them in building effective connections with people and showing cultural respectfulness.

Connor and Napan (2021) assert that Indigenous teaching methods that employ storytelling practices can effectively address biculturalism in educational settings. I remember I had a campfire event organised by my lecturers before my MSW graduation. After reading the research article by Connor and Napan (2021), I felt the campfire event I participated in provided more of a farewell experience than an educational insight. The central focus of the conversation at the campfire was on ways to be bicultural in the teaching and learning context and their understanding of how that affects the reciprocal teaching and learning process, *ako*<sup>1</sup>. I realised that in Aotearoa New Zealand, teachers considered the campfire method as an innovative pedagogy to make students aware of the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand. This realisation affected my perception that the social work practice contexts of Aotearoa New Zealand, and India differ.

Spirituality is an essential aspect of health and well-being reflected in Māori health models, and social work practitioners need to integrate Māori people's spirituality (Durie, 1998; Pere, 1997; Pitama et al., 2007). Therefore, the scope of my research sheds light on social work practitioners' spirituality as it may shape practice decisions on integrating Māori spirituality in social work practice. Tallom and Domdom (2022) indicated that Christian social work practitioners who practise social work in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, experience conflicts between their religious identity, personal values, and social work values. Their indication that religious pluralism and the recognition of Māori spirituality as an

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<sup>1</sup> *Ako* describes the reciprocal teaching and learning relationships between teachers and students, which is the basis of effective teaching. Teachers must reflect on their teaching practice and be informed by the latest research.

authentic expression of the people of the land and a wide cosmology compatible with social work values strengthened my curiosity to learn about experiences of conflicts between personal and professional values and effective ways of dealing with them.

Nash and Stewart (2002) identified that spirituality is a significant aspect of cultural diversity and that it is challenging to integrate personal spiritual knowledge into social work practice professionally. According to Nash and Stewart (2002), integrating spiritual knowledge into social work requires practitioners' knowledge of the influence of personal spirituality on well-being. I found my view of spirituality as a self-care strategy affected the framing of this research, and while I was searching for articles related to self-care, I listened to a podcast episode titled, "Burn out and self-care in social work: We share our stories" (Murphy & Fox, 2021 ). One of the hosts, Mim Fox, suggested that social work practitioners explore how they understood self-care as a part of professional identity and a powerful resource to avoid burnout and promote longevity in social work careers.

I have noticed that social work practitioners' inclusion of spirituality seems acceptable as a self-care strategy for themselves and their clients (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2019). Therefore, acceptance of spirituality as an essential value in the code of ethics (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2019) can be supportive of developing the knowledge base on how personal spirituality can build social work practitioners' professional identities and enhance longevity in social work careers, which can address some of the podcast concerns (Murphy & Fox, 2021 ).

As I strongly agree with Canda and Furman (2010) in understanding spirituality as a fundamental human experience, I, wanted to include public participants in my research as potential clients to reflect on their experience of spirituality on well-being. My curiosity to develop a deeper knowledge of public participants' views strengthened after reading Rothman's (2009) research, which found varied spiritual experiences within the general

population in California. I aspire to increase social work practitioners' and teachers' knowledge of spiritual diversity and their ability to relate to clients' diverse spiritual expressions. During my PhD journey, I realised that Māori spirituality is highly relevant to social work in Aotearoa New Zealand and endeavoured to educate myself about it. However, as an international student, a comprehensive exploration of Māori spiritual experience is difficult to achieve and is therefore beyond the scope of the thesis.

The literature review conducted as part of my PhD studies informed me to identify that there is an insufficient number of qualitative research existing in the international and Aotearoa New Zealand literature around the influence of spirituality on social work teachers' and practitioners' practice. I wanted to address this research gap and develop a conceptual framework to inform social work teachers and practitioners how to address personal spirituality collaboratively and respectfully without imposing beliefs on others.

### **Locating the Researcher**

I observed my parents to explore whether I could intentionally inherit any of their behaviours. My father worked full-time in a bank, and my mother was a housewife during my childhood. My mother was very committed to looking after my family members and others, and she taught me to behave calmly. It shaped my behaviour. I experienced inner conflicts between my identity and my mother's instruction about using a low-pitched voice when talking to men and giving them more respect than women. I felt that culture was discriminatory towards girls as they were less likely to be treated as individuals with the right to freely choose and express views related to their lives, unlike their male counterparts, who had power and privilege from the day they were born. I raised this experience in my degree class and asked my friends and the teacher in charge to share their feelings. While a group of friends supported me in the violation of using a low-pitched voice, others told me to obey my mother. My teacher had a different view as she encouraged me to use a combination of both

low and high-pitched voices. I followed teacher's instructions and found that my mother wanted me to practise showing respect instead of dominance. Thus, the teacher's instruction influenced me to connect mother's instruction with her identity and the family context where she lives.

My teenage eyes portrayed my mother as a victim of child marriage as she married at sixteen and did not attend any university to earn a degree. When I asked my parents about the purpose of their lives, they connected it with family well-being. As the family followed a patriarchal system, I viewed my father's role as an authoritarian and my mother's role as a housemaid. My parents expected me to do more household chores than my younger brother, and my father treated him as brilliant over me. Even though I struggled to accommodate the patriarchal beliefs associated with the domination of men over women in various aspects, the ability to show respect helped me manage inner conflicts successfully. While managing inner conflicts implicitly without being expressed or sharing my thoughts and feelings, reflecting on those adolescent years, I understood that I was suppressing my ability to think critically and express myself authentically. Strengthening relationships with parents through expressing love and respect seems to be a sign of being spiritual in relationships because the Islamic belief is that God blesses humans more when they obey their parents and respect them (Ghuddah, 2022). Such beliefs from the Muslim faith influenced me to perceive respect as a significant value which I need to develop to deepen my relationships with my parents. This belief also affected me to view demonstrating respect towards my clients as an effective strategy for building relationships with them. In an earlier stage of this doctoral study, I still remember when I presented the influence of spiritual experiences on my well-being, they were misinterpreted as preconceived notions which could impact my thoughts. I could not completely erase the influence of culture, religion, and spirituality on interpreting diverse

spiritual experiences. Therefore, providing a background to the Indian culture I was exposed to while growing up can help delineate the researcher's position to a certain extent.

I was open to acquiring knowledge through different religions and cultures while living in an Indian context. Visiting temples with friends and walking around those spaces barefoot, sensing the smells of flowers, and scented sticks, hearing bells ringing, and lightening camphor were some of the valuable spiritual experiences that enhanced my well-being while experiencing Hinduist rituals in India. Twenty-six years of living in India have provided me with beautiful experiences with diverse religions, clothing, foods, customs, art forms, music, and religious festivals.

I was fortunate to study and practise social work during my young adulthood, from 18 to 26. Studying and practising social work influenced me to connect with people's and their family's well-being. After completing my master's degree in social work, I worked as a school social worker, followed by working in a hospital. My last social work job was as a youth-development coordinator with Kudumbashree, the largest women empowerment governmental organisation in India. I experienced joy while connecting with diverse people through social work, which I perceive as different from my experience of establishing a connectedness with God from an Islamic point of view.

I experienced spirituality as a personal source of patience during difficult circumstances, and it is a significant aspect of my mind that became functional even in professional encounters. For example, when I had difficult conversations with clients, faith operationalised internally to produce peace, giving me the patience to actively listen to clients' problems and direct them to solve their issues themselves. It took long years to acquire the confidence to say that faith has a role in social work practice. I started my PhD in February 2017, when I was twenty-seven years old, and I have experienced that my living experiences in the country of Aotearoa New Zealand, while studying PhD raised my confidence as there were several

instances where I practised my participants' ways of healing to myself. I had not imagined Aotearoa New Zealand, as a country with many people who held spiritual experiences, and I was amazed by Māori spirituality and its relevance to social work.

The relevance of building reciprocal relationships between students and teachers by employing the concept of *Ako* in the tertiary education context of Aotearoa New Zealand seems to be a very different learning experience from the Indian education system. Even though my teachers in India were friendly, the classroom space always became their avenue to read the teaching and learning materials and students were active listeners. I was the best student who never challenged any topic in my class, and I earned teachers' love by getting better grades. Therefore, this PhD research was a real challenge, and I developed my ability to think critically and reflect on everything I read and experienced.

Critical analysis of literature related to spirituality in social work education and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand helped me identify research gaps, guiding the formation of research aims and objectives. In chapter two, I present my critical reflection on various articles and the research gaps. The following section defines spirituality and religion, explains how I operationalise these terms and presents the research background.

### **Defining Spirituality and Religion**

Spirituality and religion can be distinguishable (Canda & Furman, 1999). Spirituality encapsulates individual processes that can embed diverse beliefs associated with searching for meaning in life, and it can include religion. This thesis operationalises the terms religion and spirituality as different, but interrelated concepts. It means that while religion is understood as an institutionalised structure which covers certain beliefs and practices of the subscribers of established faith communities (Canda & Furman, 1999), I viewed attaining spirituality as the ultimate purpose of believing in God and following religious practices.

However, spirituality is not a unique experience only religious people have. It is a human experience.

Canda and Furman (1999) defined religion as “an organized structured set of beliefs and practices shared by a community related to spirituality” (p.54). Canda and Furman (2010) defined spirituality as “a universal and fundamental human quality involving the search for a sense of meaning, purpose, morality, well-being, and profundity in relationships with ourselves, others, and ultimate reality, however understood” (p. 59). Canda and Furman (2010) have identified six common attributes in various definitions of spirituality and provided an integrated definition of spirituality as:

- (a) An essential quality of a person that is inherently valuable, sacred, or immaterial
- (b) a person’s search for meaning, moral frameworks, relationship with self and others and ultimate reality;
- (c) experiences of a transpersonal nature;
- (d) a developmental process of moving toward a sense of wholeness in oneself and with others;
- (e) participation in religious and non-religious support groups;
- and (f) engagement in particular beliefs and behaviours, such as prayer or meditation in spiritual or religious contexts. (p.74)

These definitions influenced me in operationalising the concept of spirituality as participants’ ways of constructing meaning and purpose in their lives through religious or non-religious experiences. While working on this thesis, I learned that some individuals might employ reading textbooks related to religion or following the teachings of God to develop morality and a sense of meaning and purpose for them to live in this world. In contrast, others may experience spirituality differently, such as connectedness with nature or family members. I intended to enable participants to freely share how they experienced spirituality if it was not connected to religious beliefs and practices. Therefore, one of the purposes of this research was to discover participants’ understandings of what and to whom

they are connected. I used the term spirituality to explain participants' experience of transcending self by making the awareness of their connections with various entities such as the universe, nature, spiritual leaders, or human and non-human beings. Individuals can perceive their connections with friends, family members, and nature as essential aspects of their spirituality, indicating the multidimensional nature of the concept and its relationality. The concept of religion is used in the research to identify participants' different faiths, beliefs, principles, and values, impacting how they perceive their identities, the meaning and purpose of their lives and their understanding of spirituality through the lens of organised religion.

### **Research Aim and Objectives**

The aim of the research is:

- To explore different ways spirituality can be addressed in social work education and practice.

The objectives of this study are:

- To explore social work teachers', social work practitioners' and public participants' understandings of the meaning and purpose of their lives and spirituality
- To explore the influence of spirituality on social work teachers' teaching
- To explore the influence of spirituality on social work practitioners' social work practice
- To explore the influence of spirituality on the well-being of public and their perceptions about the role of the social worker in addressing spirituality

- To develop a conceptual framework to integrate spirituality in a collaborative and client-centred way for promoting clients' well-being.

### **Significance of the Study**

- The exploration of the influence of teachers' spirituality on social work teaching created practical knowledge on social work teachers' sense of meaning and purpose in their lives and understandings of spirituality and how that reflects in their teaching practice.
- Exploring social work practitioners' spirituality informs social work professionals about their personal religious or spiritual beliefs and practices and how they impact their social work practice.
- Exploring public views of spirituality in social work practice strengthens social work teachers' and practitioners' understandings of diverse religious or spiritual experiences among people who are potential social work clients and enables them to relate respectfully with a range of diverse clients they encounter in their everyday practice.
- The conceptual framework that emerged from the research attempts to facilitate the inclusion of spirituality into social work practice and education in a way that fully respects a range of understandings of spirituality and cultural diversity.

### **Research Questions**

- What gives social work teachers, practitioners, and public participants a sense of meaning and purpose, and how do they link it with spirituality?
- What are the experiences and perceptions of social work teachers regarding the influence of spirituality on their teaching?
- What are the experiences and perceptions of social work practitioners regarding the influence of spirituality on their practice?

- What are the experiences and perceptions of the public (potential clients) regarding the influence of spirituality in their lives and incorporating spirituality into social work?
- What would be an appropriate conceptual framework for addressing spirituality in social work education and practice?

### **Structure of the Thesis**

Chapter one locates the researcher, defines religion and spirituality, explains the research background, research aim and objectives and significance of the study, and outlines the thesis structure. Chapter two presents a summary of relevant studies published across the international literature and in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the research gap. Chapter three describes the methodology of the study. Chapter four presents the findings of the interviews with social work teachers, and Chapter five presents findings delineated from social work practitioners' data. Chapter six describes the results obtained from the interviews with the public participants. Chapter seven discusses the findings and presents the conceptual framework. Chapter eight concludes the thesis and provides recommendations.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of literature related to spirituality in social work education and practice. Before starting this research, an initial literature review was conducted to examine whether a knowledge gap existed in the literature to present a rationale for conducting this PhD research in Aotearoa New Zealand. Literature is treated as a significant data source to develop while adopting grounded theory steps to data analysis, including theoretical sampling, comparative analysis, and memo writing. Throughout this chapter, I reveal the gaps which set the stage for the present research and reflect on how the knowledge I have gained through reading literature impacted the research process.

This chapter begins by outlining the literature search parameters employed to discover the articles and books. It then examines the historical relationships between spirituality and global social work. It continues by presenting international research on spirituality in social work education and practice, followed by critically reflecting on studies conducted on spirituality in general yet related to the research topic. The international literature on spirituality and social work has a comprehensive nature compared to the Aotearoa New Zealand knowledge base, which influenced me to present the international texts first and then present the studies conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand. The second section begins by contextualizing the importance of spirituality in the social work practice context of Aotearoa New Zealand. It continues by presenting research conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand, on spirituality in social work education, social work practice and spirituality in general in relation to social work practice.

### **Literature Review Search Parameters**

This thesis only examined literature published in English. I have used the online search tool of Massey University (“Discover”) to access articles from multiple databases across the

world. “Discover” offers the opportunity to type in different keywords that fit with the purpose of this thesis, and options to use limiters such as year and books or articles, to extract information. Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Sciences were used as well.

### **Interconnection Between Spirituality and Social Work: A Historical Analysis**

This section describes how spirituality and religious relationship were manifested in the history of the development of the social work profession.

A comprehensive assessment of the history of the development of the social work profession in North America showed that religion and spirituality are related to the social work profession in different ways through different historical stages. Canda and Furman (2010) explained the interrelatedness between spirituality and the social work profession in America based on five historical stages:

Indigenous social welfare (pre-colonial period); sectarian origins (colonial period through early 20th century); professionalisation and secularisation (the 1920s through 1970s); the resurgence of interest in spirituality (1980s to mid-1990s); and transcending boundaries (mid-1990s to present). (p. 110)

During the pre-colonial period, the Native Americans integrated religious and spiritual beliefs to be significant aspects in helping people to attain their well-being. The Indigenous cultures in North America perceived that spirituality-based patterns of helping, soothing, collaborating, and respecting the universe were influential in providing social welfare assistance to deprived people (Canda & Furman, 2010). Nevertheless, during the American colonial period (1492-1763), Euro-American professional social work pioneers who were Spanish explorers identified as Catholics abandoned Indigenous spirituality-based social welfare services of the pre-colonial period (Canda & Furman, 2010). The American social welfare policies became shaped either explicitly or implicitly by Christian and Jewish

viewpoints of charity and governance (Bullis, 2013). While, to some extent social work profession in America originated from the influence of the values of the Christian tradition, such as expressing love and caring for one another, the delivery of social services through religious institutions increased the risks of proselytization and the exclusion of non-religious people from social welfare (Henrickson, 2022). Henrickson (2022) pointed out that the Aotearoa New Zealand context of social work practice has strong ties with the United Kingdom culturally, politically, and economically as the Government representatives of the country were directly involved in Aotearoa New Zealand's colonisation.

The British missionary activists who arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand, during the mid-1810s intended to convert Māori to God-fearing Christians (Ballantyne, 2014). Reverend Samuel Marsden formed the first Anglican mission station in the Bay of Islands in 1814 (Ballantyne, 2014). The British colonisation occurred in Aotearoa New Zealand, from 1840 to 1907, and most Māori people were converted into Protestants and Catholics by the 1850s (Ballantyne, 2014). The cultural context of Christianity in Aotearoa New Zealand is unique as Catholicism often incorporated aspects of the Māori language, customs, and the knowledge of the Treaty of Waitangi (Henrickson, 2022).

The Aotearoa New Zealand's colonial period witnessed rapid urbanisation, which created social challenges such as poverty and inadequate housing (Oliver, 1960). British colonisation impacted the formation of social welfare policies and the development of the social work profession in Aotearoa New Zealand (Henrickson, 2022). During the British colonisation, whether or not the social workers were motivated by Christian values, the Māori people of Aotearoa New Zealand, experienced a loss of power and autonomy, feeling subjugated under the guise of philanthropy (Henrickson, 2022). The origin of the social work profession in Aotearoa New Zealand, during the time of colonisation, was marked by significant disagreements between colonial settlers and the Māori people around matters related to land

ownership, allocation of resources, and cultural conflicts (Henrickson, 2022). Some social work practitioners played a significant role in enforcing assimilation policies, which intended to make Māori people surrender their spiritual beliefs, practices, and identities to embrace Western cultural norms and values (Henrickson, 2022). For instance, social work practitioners removed some Māori children from working-class low-income families and placed them in state care facilities (Hyslop, 2022). Non-Māori parents fostered those Māori children, which challenged the provision of children getting an opportunity to enhance their sense of cultural identity and connections with family (Hyslop, 2022). During the early twentieth century, some of the social work pioneers, such as Jane Adams, the settlement house movement leader in the United States of America, were motivated by spiritual beliefs but opposed narrowing down the scope of social welfare services to religious institutions (Henrickson, 2022; Simkhovitch, 1950). Compared to Aotearoa New Zealand, Christianity was significant in American society, and many Americans were actively engaged in church-based social services (Henrickson, 2022).

During the 1920s to 1970s American social work progressed towards professionalisation and secularisation (Canda & Furman, 2010). The social work profession asked for the governance and delivery of social welfare from the church to the state. As a result, in 1952, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) was formed as a professional organisation in the United States that described the secular nature of social work education. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the government played a significant role in delivering social services during the 1950; therefore, churches' role in social service delivery was limited (Nash, 2001). The formation of the New Zealand Association of Social Workers (NZASW) in 1964 marked the beginning of the professionalization of social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the association monitored the involvement of faith-based organisations in social services (Nash, 2001).

The CSWE curriculum policy guidelines in the 1970s and 1980s removed the contents of religion and spirituality from American social work education, which was included in the 1950s and 1960s versions of the policy guideline (Russel, 1998). However, many religiously influenced organizations (such as Catholic social services and the Salvation Army) and non-sectarian spiritual perspectives (such as 12 Step programs) continued providing social services, and many social workers brought their spirituality into practice at the minimum implicitly (Canda & Furman, 2010). Roozen et al. (1995) indicated that the baby boomer generation (born between 1946 and 1964) witnessed changes in public interest in religious and spiritual matters following the second world war. The baby boomer generation was open to new spiritual sensitivities (Canda, 1989; Sheridan et al., 1992). Many baby boomers attempted to explore ways of discovering themselves through alternative spiritual practices such as meditation and acknowledge the interconnection between nature and human well-being outside of following traditional religious practices (Canda and Furman, 2010).

The baby boomer generation questioned the religious ideologies they grew up with and exhibited a lack of interest in following traditional religious beliefs (Roozen et al., 1995). Roof (1993) marked the late 1960s and 1970s as years of spiritual awakening as people from various countries, including Canada, Great Britain, and Australia, began experimenting with alternative spiritual practices such as Reiki healing, and yoga. New age spiritual movements during the late twentieth century also influenced many baby boomers to focus on holistic healing via developing individualistic spiritual practices (Roof, 1993). The transpersonal

The professional literature after the 1980s highlighted the re-emergence of international interest in incorporating spirituality into social work education and practice (Canda, 1989; Canda & Furman, 1999; Joseph, 1988; Russel, 1998). Canda and Furman's (1999) seminal book spread the idea that social work is a spiritually sensitive profession committed to accepting and respecting the diversity of clients' beliefs and values. Some social work

practitioners adopted transpersonal psychology to integrate people's spiritual experiences of self-transcendence and liberation through meditation and mindfulness (Davis, 2003). Cowley (1993) indicated that social workers of the postmodern age addressed several social issues of the 1990s, such as aggression, drug addiction, and spiritual discomfort, through the successful integration of transpersonal theory into social work practice, which enhances the development of spiritual connection and higher consciousness of their clients. Canda and Furman (1999) motivated social workers to study clients' transpersonal experience of self to fulfil the social work value of respecting clients' right to self-determination. The existentialism that developed in Europe during the early nineteenth century also emphasised that human beings need to understand that they are unique and have the individual freedom to act according to the meaning they perceive in their lives (Krill, 2017).

In the middle of the twentieth century, North America witnessed an increase in the diversification of the Christian denominations and a rise in Eastern and Western spiritual practices due to emigration from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia (Canda & Furman, 2010). As a result, the 1995 version of the United States CSWE curriculum guidelines paid attention to teaching religion and spirituality in the North American schools of social work (Russel, 1998).

The twenty-first-century postmodern perspectives, for instance, feminist, eco-philosophical, and post-colonial perspectives, suggested: "social work to extend its inclusive approach to spirituality to all people and nations, with special attention to the oppressed and marginalized, to all beings on the planet, and to earth itself as a living being deserving of honor and respect" (Canda, 2005a, p. 100). The number of spirituality-related courses, research, and conferences increased in North America and worldwide from 1995 to the present, and Canda and Furman (2010) included them in the phase they named "transcending

boundaries". The following section presents international research conducted on spirituality in social work education.

### **Spirituality in Social Work Education**

Should social work researchers devote their time to exploring social work teachers' spirituality when addressing the inclusion of spirituality content in social work education programmes? Is teachers' spirituality relevant in social work?

I was encouraged by Russel's (1998) interview with seventeen US social work teachers who had established courses on spirituality in social work education programmes and teaching spirituality while building foundations for this research. Russel (1998) found that addressing spirituality increased the personal learning outcomes of social work teachers. Social work teachers viewed developing courses on spirituality in social work and teaching them as a way of integrating their spirituality into their work. According to this view, teachers' spirituality can shape their teaching practice, so addressing their spirituality seems relevant for exploring how they teach social work and spirituality to social work students. I raised the question of whether social work teachers understand personal religious or spiritual beliefs as a professional resource that helps them address the spiritual needs of students and clients.

Canda and Furman's (2010) book outlined spirituality as a process by which human beings search for meaning and purpose in their lives. There is a knowledge gap in the contemporary literature regarding social work teachers' sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. Therefore, this study seeks to explore social work teachers' beliefs about the meaning and purpose of their lives and their ways of linking it with the experience of spirituality and social work teaching. The following section presents whether and how spirituality is addressed in contemporary social work research conducted within social work education.

### *How is Spirituality Addressed in Contemporary Research?*

More recent attention has focused on surveying religion and spirituality related content in social work education programmes across the United States (Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018; Moffatt, Oxhandler, & Baldwin, 2021; Moffatt, Oxhandler, & Ellor, 2021). Moffatt and Oxhandler's (2018) survey assessed accredited Master of Social Work (MSW) education programs across the United States to study their contents on religion and spirituality. They found that MSW programs which included courses on religion and spirituality, increased to 78 (30.4%) from 17 (14.4%) as reported in Russel's (1998) research. The increased number of courses in social work education programmes predicts that the scope of spirituality integrated social work practice has increased over the years, and the educational programmes have paid attention to including spirituality in the curriculum. However, there was a lack of focus on exploring social work teachers' beliefs about the meaning and purpose of their lives and spirituality as part of integrating spirituality into the curriculum.

My concern with Moffatt and Oxhandler's (2018) survey was that the data was not gathered directly from social work teachers, but they relied on the MSW programme website contents for data. It affected my perceptions about how I relate my thesis with their survey findings. For example, one of the findings from Moffatt and Oxhandler's (2018) survey results indicated that fifteen courses prioritized developing social work students' self-awareness about their religious or spiritual beliefs and practices in the twenty reviewed course syllabi. Even though Moffatt and Oxhandler's (2018) survey results were published after my research commenced, the finding mentioned above shaped my thoughts during data analysis. I wondered whether social work teachers' interest in addressing students' spiritual development might originate from their personal experience of the influence of spirituality on their lives.

Recently, two surveys gathered data from social work teachers (Moffatt, Oxhandler, & Baldwin, 2021; Moffatt, Oxhandler, & Ellor, 2021). Moffatt, Oxhandler, and Baldwin's (2021) survey results indicated that many factors could support integrating spirituality content into social work education. Social work teachers' and students' interests, the university's religious affiliation, students' religious and spiritual diversity, and the need to educate students to adopt a client-centred approach were significant support factors. The survey results only mentioned that social work teachers' interest in spirituality is essential for the inclusion of spirituality courses into social work education programmes and that they linked teachers' interest with the university's religious affiliation. Social work teachers' religious affiliations, understandings of spirituality and their impact on their teachings are ignored for further examination. Consistent with Moffatt, Oxhandler and Baldwin (2021), Moffatt, Oxhandler and Ellor (2021) did not investigate the influence of social work teachers' spirituality on social work teachings.

Nasrollahi et al. (2020) undertook a qualitative content analysis approach to investigate medical teachers' spirituality-related factors influencing teaching processes. They found that teachers' attachment to their religious beliefs, principles and worldview can shape how they transfer spiritual beliefs to students in the teaching and learning environment. Nasrollahi et al. (2020) point out a knowledge gap in the medical literature on the impact of teachers' spirituality in the teaching process, which is consistent with the knowledge gap I found in the social work literature globally and in Aotearoa New Zealand. Therefore, I set out to explore the influence of Aotearoa New Zealand social work teachers' spirituality on their social work teachings. The following section presents a few grounded theory research studies on spirituality in social work education.

### *Grounded Theory Studies on Spirituality in Social Work Education*

Two qualitative investigations conducted with social work teachers employed grounded theory methods for data analysis (Bhagwan, 2011; Coholic, 2006). Coholic's (2006) study interviewed eight social work teachers and ten students to explore their perspectives about incorporating spirituality in teaching social work in Canadian social work education programmes. All the participants argued that spirituality and religion should be addressed in social work teachings. In her storyline, Coholic (2006) depicted that while social work teachers preferred to be silent over discussing religion and spirituality in the classroom, social work students experienced a lack of opportunity to discuss social work practice issues around religion and spirituality. This meant that social work practice issues around spirituality and religion are unaddressed by social work teachers, which may leave social work students not confident about addressing their clients' spirituality-related issues in their social work practice.

Bhagwan's (2011) research conducted semi-structured interviews with seventeen South African social work teachers. Bhagwan (2011) also employed grounded theory methods for data analysis and addressed how social work teachers experience personal spirituality and their perceptions of its influence on social work teaching. Three social work teachers indicated that spirituality is about immersing themselves in religious rules and values. They experience spirituality through their more profound connections with God and religion, while fourteen participants viewed spirituality as the interconnectedness with others and nature. Half of the social work teachers (n=8) involved in Bhagwan's (2011) study successfully linked their experience of spirituality with their teaching roles.

Coholic's (2006) study informed that building a context for discussing spirituality in the classroom is paramount, and personal spirituality can be a supporting factor that could help build effective classroom relationships with students. Reviewing Coholic's (2006) findings

directed me to gather data on how social work teachers use spiritual beliefs to connect themselves with building relationships with students and their teaching methods. Therefore, this thesis intends to explore whether any social work teachers who teach social work within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand involved in my PhD research integrated the notion of personal spirituality in their classrooms and how.

### ***Social Work Teachers' Views on the Inclusion of Spirituality***

Much of the quantitative investigations on spirituality in social work education were focused on the exploration of social work teachers' attitudes towards the incorporation of spirituality content into the social work curriculum (Bhagwan, 2013; Dudley & Helfgott, 1990; Kvarfordt, Taylor, & Sheridan, 2018; Pandya, 2015; Sheridan, Wilmer, & Atcheson, 1994). Bhagwan's (2013) survey with sixty-six social work teachers from South Africa explored social work teachers' views on including spirituality in social work education. 72% (n=66) of the social work teachers indicated they engaged in daily spiritual practices such as prayers or meditation. 56.1% (n=37) of social work teachers believed in God, and 15.2% (n=10) believed in nature as the higher power. Kvarfordt et al. (2018) survey with 190 social work teachers from Canada also reported that 25.6% (n=45) of the participants engaged in personal religious or spiritual practices daily. These studies found that social work teachers' experience of personal spirituality in their everyday lives influenced them to support integrating spirituality in social work education and practice. Even though these studies informed social work education that social work teachers believe in God, there is a significant lack of information about how social work teachers experience a personal relationship with God every day and how that affects their teaching practice.

Social work teachers' rationales for the inclusion of spirituality content in social work education were addressed in all these studies (Bhagwan, 2013; Dudley & Helfgott, 1990; Kvarfordt, Taylor, & Sheridan, 2018; Pandya, 2015; Sheridan, Wilmer, & Atcheson, 1994).

The cultural diversity rationale underlined the importance of considering various religious and spiritual beliefs, values and practices while working with diverse clients and the need for developing social work practitioners' knowledge and skills in this area. The biopsychosocial rationale suggested that social work education should address the dimension of spirituality to understand human existence and behaviour. Findings indicated that more than 90 per cent of the educators from the USA (Dudley & Helfgott, 1990), 84 per cent of the educators from Canada (Kvarfordt et al., 2018), and 92.4 per cent of the educators from South Africa (Bhagwan, 2013), and 80.4 per cent from Australia (Lindsay, 2002) strongly agreed with the cultural diversity rationale and supported the inclusion of spirituality into social work education. While all these studies linked social work teachers' positive attitude toward incorporating spirituality into the social work curriculum with two of these rationales, they did not qualitatively link social work teachers' diverse personal experiences of spirituality and their everyday teaching tasks in depth.

Kvarfordt et al.'s (2018) cross-sectional research found that some social work teachers experience conflicts between their religious or spiritual beliefs and students' beliefs, which made them reluctant to address spiritual or religious issues in their social work teachings. They indicated that social work teachers feel unequipped to address their biases around spirituality. Therefore, according to Kvarfordt et al. (2018), the inclusion of spirituality content in social work education seemed to be a significant aspect of making social work teachers feel confident in addressing spiritual issues in the classroom. In Lindsay's (2002) survey, Australian social work teachers expressed their concern that it is crucial to ensure social work teachers who held rigid fundamentalist beliefs did not impose their beliefs and values on students while addressing spirituality content in their teachings.

A few studies were also conducted around spirituality in social work education in South Asian countries. For example, Pandya (2015) studied 1084 South Asian social work teachers'

perspectives about incorporating spirituality content in social work education. Social work teachers supported the inclusion of a course on spirituality into social work education, similar to the findings from studies conducted with social work teachers from Canada, South Africa, and Australia (Bhagwan, 2013; Kvarfordt et al., 2018; Lindsay, 2002).

Pandya (2015) studied South Asian social work teachers' understandings of the meaning of spirituality. Findings indicated that South Asian social work teachers' interpretation of spirituality included searching for transcendent connections, connecting mind and soul, developing knowledge of being, and exploring personal relationships with humans. When Pandya (2015) indicated that her research failed to explain why some social work teachers opposed the integration of spirituality into social work education, I wondered whether social work teachers' understanding of the meaning of the term spirituality itself could make them reluctant to address it in the classroom. This motivated me to explore whether social work teachers' understandings of spirituality shaped their views about the appropriateness of discussing spirituality with students.

Overall, these studies highlighted that social work teachers held personal religious or spiritual experiences and were interested in having spirituality content in social work education programmes. Kvarfordt et al.'s (2018) and Lyndsay's (2002) research support the notion that social work teachers' religious or spiritual beliefs may conflict with students' beliefs. Therefore, reviewing Kvarfordt et al.'s (2018) and Lyndsay's (2002) study during data analysis increased my curiosity to explore whether any Aotearoa New Zealand social work teachers who identified themselves as integrating their spirituality in social work teaching identified conflicts or power issues between them and their students due to differences in religious or spiritual beliefs and values. The following section presents studies on social work practitioners around personal spirituality and their use of spirituality-based interventions with clients.

## **Personal Spirituality and Social Work Practitioners' Use of Spirituality-Based Interventions with Clients**

Numerous quantitative investigations explored the influence of social work practitioners' spirituality on their use of spirituality-based interventions (Kvarfordt & Sheridan, 2009; Larsen, 2011; Larsen & Rinkel, 2016; Oxhandler & Giardina, 2017; Sheridan, 2004). Sheridan's (2004) survey of 204 US social work practitioners found that social work practitioners' spirituality shaped their attitudes, which guided their social work practice behaviours in using spirituality-based interventions with clients. Some of the interventions used in their social work practice were "pray or meditate with a client", "gather information on clients' religious or spiritual background", "recommend regular religious or spiritual self-reflective diary/ journal", "help clients consider spiritual meaning of current life situation", and "touch clients for healing purposes". According to Sheridan (2004), social work practitioners' interest in using these interventions was influenced by clients' preference in discussing religious or spiritual issues and social work practitioners' participation in everyday spiritual or religious practices.

Consistent with Sheridan's (2004) research, Larsen's (2011) findings indicated that US social work practitioners held personal spiritual experiences. Most of the social work practitioners (81.8%, n=225) believed in God or a higher power, which they stated increased their well-being in everyday lives and directed their social work practice. Half of the social work practitioners indicated that social work practice played a significant role in their spiritual development. A Christian social work practitioner who participated in Larsen's (2011) study reported that she often encouraged non-Christian clients to explore how their beliefs or practices can be harmful. This raises the question of how religion and belief in God affect social work practitioners' perception of viewing social work as a spiritual vocation. If they viewed doing social work as a spiritual vocation in line with their religious beliefs,

how would they manage their practice without imposing their beliefs unpredictably on clients? This is a significant question I wanted to address through my PhD thesis.

Oxhandler and Giardina's (2017) study with 329 social work practitioners found that 20.7 per cent (n=66) of social work practitioners addressed their clients' spirituality. Consistent with Sheridan (2004), they indicated that personal religious or spiritual journeys shaped social work practitioners' use of spirituality-based interventions with clients. Oxhandler and Giardina (2017) found a lack of education provided to social work practitioners to guide their use of spirituality in their social work practice. Oxhandler and Giardina's (2017) study also provided various justifications regarding what hinders practitioners from addressing clients' spirituality in social work practice. Their justification included "fear or discomfort in how to discuss this topic, unfamiliarity with other faith traditions, negative classroom messages on the subject, and the belief that such integration is not supported by the profession" (p.330). These findings support the importance of including education on spirituality in social work programs, which require research to develop the knowledge base on spirituality. Sheridan's (2004) study recommended that social work researchers undertake "a shift in focus from whether the topic should be included to how to integrate spirituality within the profession in an ethical, effective, and spiritually sensitive manner" (p.23). While adopting the qualitative research method, I considered this recommendation and preferred asking "how" questions to advance the knowledge base and for the thesis to have practical value.

In studies reviewed in this section, personal religion or spirituality was a significant aspect of social work practitioners' everyday living experience. So far, very little attention has been paid to qualitatively addressing the influence of personal religion or spirituality on social work practitioners' behaviours. Oxhandler and Giardina's (2017) finding regarding social work practitioners' lack of education regarding incorporating spirituality in social work practice brings into question how social work practitioners' use of self, including religious

beliefs, might play a significant role in their integration of spirituality. Therefore, in contrast with previous research (Larsen, 2011; Oxhandler & Giardina, 2017; Sheridan, 2004), this thesis explores how social work practitioners connect their beliefs to their social work practice, including teaching practice.

### **Spirituality as a Personal Resource for Social Work Practitioners**

Larsen and Rinkel (2016) grouped social work practitioners' understandings of religion and spirituality into four themes, including religion and spirituality as guiding, finding meaning and purpose in life, connecting, and influencing practice. The theme of finding meaning and purpose in life presented social work practitioners' experience of how religion and spirituality guided them in constructing a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. Few social work practitioners from Larsen and Rinkel's (2016) research mentioned that belief in God, and their religion influenced them to consider doing social work as God's plan and the meaning and purpose of their lives.

Larsen and Rinkel's (2016) findings supported the view that personal spirituality can shape social work practitioners' perceptions of the role of a social worker in integrating spirituality. Social workers' spirituality played three important roles in their social work practice: "helper, healer, and separator". When social workers act as helpers, spirituality can guide social work practitioners to use personal beliefs as practical tools to build relationships and help clients. In the helper's role, social work practitioners indicated that spirituality made them aware of the importance of integrating their understanding of God's love and religious learnings into their social work practice with clients. In a role of a healer, addressing spirituality can create a sense of agency among social work practitioners to integrate spiritual and religious interventions to help the clients solve their problems. A social work practitioner who participated in Larsen and Rinkel's (2016) study indicated, "I believe in a God who

guides and protects me, provides me with gifts to help people heal” (p.215). Finally, in the role of a separator, one social work practitioner stated, “religion is based on different beliefs which people use to separate themselves from others” (p.216). Therefore, it is clear from this quote that religion and spirituality can serve as frameworks for social work practitioners to separate their religious or spiritual beliefs from their clients’ beliefs in the role of a separator.

Larsen and Rinkel (2016) suggested that social work education should include discussions to increase students’ self-awareness about their values, religious or spiritual beliefs and ethics, as they found that social work practitioners’ self-awareness is not deemed to be sufficient. Oxhandler et al.’s (2015) study found that social work practitioners’ intrinsic religiosity and prior training determined their integration of clients’ spirituality, and a few of them addressed their clients’ spiritual needs. This finding is a critical rationale for social work education to train social work practitioners to understand when and how spirituality-based interventions are appropriate while addressing clients’ spiritual needs. Social work practitioners’ examination of personal religious or spiritual beliefs and values can help them develop an awareness of how their spirituality can affect addressing clients’ spirituality and enhance their ability to critically reflect on practice interventions related to spirituality (Gardner, 2011).

Mattison et al.’s (2000) study found that social work practitioners’ religiosity influenced them in viewing prayer as an appropriate practice behaviour. For example, social work practitioners perceived that praying with their clients as per their clients’ requests seems to be a more appropriate practice behaviour rather than sharing their religious beliefs with the clients. This finding indicated that social work practitioners expected their clients to begin conversations about their religious beliefs and this expectation shapes their decisions on conducting interventions such as prayer. In contrast to Mattison et al. (2000), Oxhandler and Pargament (2014) revealed that clients expected social work practitioners would need to

begin conversations on religion or spirituality in their social work practice. This discrepancy regarding clients' and social workers' views about who should bring up conversations on spirituality or religion into the social work practice shaped the research objectives. This thesis addresses social work practitioners' perceptions about the role of social workers in integrating clients' spirituality into social work practice.

While the above-mentioned studies were conducted in Western countries, Ma'seb's (2019) study conducted with 235 clinical social workers working in Kuwait also confirmed that personal religiosity can influence practitioners to become self-aware of the importance of incorporating significant aspects of clients' religion and spirituality into social work practice. Kvarfordt and Sheridan's (2009) study also informed that social work practitioners' experience of engaging in personal religious or spiritual practices such as prayers and meditation can shape their professional attitudes about the relevance of spirituality-based interventions with clients and their professional behaviours. Their study highlighted that professional education and training did not emerge as a predictive factor for social work practitioners' professional behaviours associated with integrating spirituality into social work practice. Therefore, it is crucial to explore social work practitioners' religious or spiritual experiences and how they shaped their professional attitudes and practice behaviours, which was beyond the scope of Kvarfordt and Sheridan's (2009) study.

Oxhandler and Pargament (2014) reviewed studies conducted with social work practitioners and other allied health professionals regarding integrating clients' spirituality into their work. They pointed out that clients preferred their social work practitioners to begin a conversation on spirituality. Therefore, in their literature review, they indicated that there is a need for social work practitioners to develop knowledge of clients' spiritual beliefs and recommended research on social work practitioners' spiritual beliefs and how they integrate them into practice. Mattison et al.'s (2000) study pointed out that it is a critical need for

social work practitioners to develop self-awareness of the impact of their own religious beliefs in their social work practice with clients. It can help social work practitioners avoid imposing their own religious beliefs and practices on clients. As Mattison et al. (2000) indicated, further work is required to explore the effectiveness of incorporating religion and spirituality into social work education and evidence-based practice with clients. This thesis intends to fill this gap by linking social work practitioners' spiritual or religious beliefs and different ways of integrating them to enhance their creativity in their social work careers.

Previous research (Kvarfordt & Sheridan, 2009; Oxhandler et al., 2015) indicates that social work practitioners held positive attitudes about incorporating clients' religion and spirituality. Oxhandler et al. (2015) indicated that their research did not address whether social work practitioners' religious beliefs allow them to address spirituality in a client-centred manner. This is a significant research gap as Oxhandler and Pargament (2014) believe that if social work practitioners were unaware of how their religious beliefs and experiences shaped attitudes towards incorporating clients' spirituality, it may cause boundary violations in a way that could impact their clients negatively. This research gap influenced me to focus on discovering social work practitioners' different ways of being aware of their spiritual beliefs and practices while exploring clients' or students' beliefs and values related to religion and spirituality in their social work practice. Moreover, few studies have investigated whether and how social work practitioners derive meaning and purpose in their lives from their religious or spiritual beliefs. Therefore, this thesis seeks to explain social work practitioners' meaning and purpose and how they connect them with their social work practice.

## **Social Work Practitioners' Views on Addressing Spirituality in Social Work Education**

### **Building Students' Awareness of Spirituality**

Barker and Floersch (2010) conducted qualitative research with twenty social work practitioners to study how spirituality can be integrated into social work education. Social work practitioners understood spirituality as their perceptions of meaning and purpose in their lives. They also indicated that social work practitioners' ways of experiencing meaning and purpose could differ. Barker and Floersch (2010) found that a significant way of addressing spirituality in social work education is by promoting students' self-awareness and self-reflection about their spirituality. Barker and Floresch (2010) asserted that developing students' self-awareness about spirituality is an effective strategy to enhance their critical thinking on the influence of spirituality on their clients.

Australian social work practitioners involved in Lyndsay's (2002) research pointed out that social work education should prepare students to respect differences in values and beliefs between them and their clients. Social work practitioners from Lyndsay's (2002) study recommended that social work teachers ask their students two questions about religion and spirituality during their training. The questions were: "How might my faith or spiritual beliefs (or lack of same) affect my practice?" and "are there places where I shouldn't be working because of my beliefs?" (p.84). The first question was included in my interviews and the second one was implicitly mentioned by some participants. Additionally, Barker and Floersch (2010) specified that there is limited understanding of how to incorporate spirituality content in social work education. Hence, this thesis aims to develop knowledge of social work teachers' ways of addressing spirituality in their social work teachings and social work practitioners' self-awareness about the relevance of spirituality in their personal and professional lives.

## Addressing Ethical Issues

Social work practitioners viewed addressing ethical issues in social work education as necessary when considering the integration of spirituality (Sheridan, 2009; Sheridan, 2010). Sheridan (2009) conducted a literature review to address the ethical issues associated with integrating spirituality into the social work profession. The literature review found that social work practitioners used different spirituality-based interventions, such as suggesting clients read spiritual or religious books and praying with clients followed by their requests. Sheridan (2009) assessed social work practitioners' and social work students' views of the appropriateness of spirituality-based interventions and found that they were not feeling confident of knowing the ethical implications underlying their attitudes and spirituality-integrated practice behaviours. This finding is consistent with Sheridan's (2010) research that reported that social work practitioners' use of prayer-related interventions was driven by the influence of their personal religious or spiritual beliefs rather than clients' needs or ethical guidelines.

Sheridan (2010) highlighted the concern that if social work practitioners are not trained to manage the influence of personal spirituality on social work practice, they may overuse or underuse spirituality-based interventions such as prayers, which might violate clients' right to self-determination. Canda et al.'s (2004) mixed methods research investigated social work practitioners' opinions about the use of ethics concerning whether and how they can apply their religious or spiritual beliefs and experiences in their social work practice. Six-hundred social work practitioners highlighted the importance of providing clients with the right to have self-determination while addressing spirituality in their practice and indicated that competence for ethical practice is essential. Forty-four social work practitioners pointed out that developing self-awareness of personal religious or spiritual beliefs, values, and views are an important requirement for incorporating spirituality in practice. Canda et al.'s (2004)

survey also investigated social work practitioners' views about applying their religious or spiritual beliefs and experiences in their social work practice. Participants expressed different views. While some social work practitioners who participated in Canda et al.'s (2004) study viewed disclosing their religious or spiritual beliefs in social work practice as relevant for clients, others were against disclosing their faith. Consistent with Canda et al. (2004), Sheridan and Hemert (1999) found that some social work practitioners used Canda and Furman's (1999) framework for the ethical inclusion of spirituality in social work practice. Canda and Furman's (1999) framework informed social work practitioners of the importance of demonstrating empathy, respect, self-awareness regarding spirituality, and commitment to social work values while addressing spirituality in social work practice.

Canda et al.'s (2004) study has not dealt with exploring social work practitioners' feelings and thoughts regarding how their spirituality affects their personal and professional lives. The studies presented thus far provide evidence that social work practitioners' spirituality may direct social work practice interventions, and therefore how to address ethical issues may be influenced by their experience of spirituality. This shaped my thesis as I focus on whether spirituality influenced the well-being of social work practitioners in their everyday lives. It is the intention of this thesis to go deeper into social work teachers' and practitioners' beliefs that may lead to unintentional violation of students' or clients' right to self-determination and reduced the appreciation of spiritual diversity.

### **Addressing Religious Beliefs in Social Work Practice**

Knitter's (2010) reflective paper informed that social work practitioners need to discuss their clients' religious beliefs and values as part of addressing religious diversity, which requires social work practitioners to hold various strengths such as humility, commitment, trust, empathy, and willingness to change. Knitter (2010) indicated that social work

practitioners' religious beliefs could shape these strengths. Knitter (2010) mentioned that social work practitioners' belief in monotheism could hinder their ability to demonstrate these strengths. He acknowledged himself as a Roman Catholic and mentioned that Brethren's beliefs such as understanding Jesus Christ as the only God may affect some social work practitioners to view other religious teachings as valueless. I wondered whether social work teachers and practitioners who identified themselves as Christians applied religious beliefs to strengthen empathy, humility, willingness to change and commitment and how they do it.

Previous research highlighted that faith and social justice are connected (Hodge, 2012; Lee & Barrett, 2007; Sheridan, 2012). Lee and Barrett (2007) conducted interviews with thirty social work practitioners to study the impact of faith and personal spirituality on promoting social justice and social change through social work practice. They used the grounded theory method to analyse the interview data. Lee and Barret's (2007) research found that half of the social work practitioners (n=15) believed that faith and spirituality inspired them to choose the social work profession and increased their commitment to social justice. They raised the concern that social work education should focus on developing social work practitioners' ability to connect faith and spirituality with professional social work and social justice. Lee and Barrett (2007) found that there is a need to understand how personal spirituality connects social workers with social justice. However, it was beyond the scope of their study to explore in-depth how social work practitioners' experiences of spiritual motivation strengthened their commitment to social justice.

The literature reviewed suggests that social work practitioners' faith and spirituality are pertinent in determining social work practice behaviours. Knitter's (2010) reflections raised the question of whether and how social work teachers' religious beliefs can affect addressing cultural diversity and commitment to social work values. I wanted to find out whether social work teachers who held monotheistic faith examined the influence of faith on their social

work teachings and made stronger alignments between faith-based personal values and professional social work values such as social justice and respecting students' dignity.

### **Social Work Practice Contexts**

Social work practice contexts can also determine social work practitioners' views about the significance of spirituality (Furman et al., 2005). Furman et al.'s (2005) study compared the social work practice context of the UK and the US and the social workers' views of the relevance of addressing spirituality in social work practice and education. In the social work practice context of US, social workers (90%) were more likely to acknowledge their childhood and adulthood experiences related to spirituality. They expressed greater interest in increasing the knowledge level of social workers related to religion and spirituality than UK social workers (57%) (Furman et al., 2005). Compared to the UK social workers, US social workers had a greater interest in integrating religion and spirituality into social work practice and education. Holloway (2007) also found that UK social workers paid little attention to integrating spirituality into their social work practice and education.

The national survey conducted in the US in August 2022 identified 43% of the adult population as Catholics and 21% of adults as Protestants (Pew Research Centre, 2023). The Aotearoa New Zealand's 2018 census results indicated that 37% of the population affiliated with the Christian religion, and there were different denominations, with Anglicanism (6.70%) being higher than Catholicism (3.68%) and Presbyterian (5.21%) (Stats NZ, 2018). While Christianity remained the most common religion, 48.6% of New Zealanders identified themselves as having no religion (Stats NZ, 2018). In Aotearoa New Zealand, Ratana (0.94%) and Ringatu (0.26%) were identified as two church denominations where Māori culture combined with Christian beliefs and practices (Stats NZ, 2018).

Carlisle's (2016) grounded theory research with 12 social work practitioners and 12 mental health service users in Northern Ireland found that most social work practitioners did not ask questions related to religion and spirituality during clients' assessments. They considered it very personal and culturally sensitive, which would conflict with the values of secularism in the UK's political context and also because of the troubles in Northern Ireland (Catholic versus protestant). Vetvik et al. (2018) compared American and Norwegian social work practitioners' perspectives about the place of religion and spirituality within the context of their professional social work. Findings indicated that North American social work practitioners perceived addressing religion and spirituality as more important in their social work practice than Norwegian social workers indicated. Vetvik et al. (2018) linked social work practitioners' interest in integrating spirituality with the significance of spirituality in the social work practice context of the country. The secularity of Norway and the religiosity of the US may be an issue for social work practitioners to deal with separately within their own social work practice contexts.

The context of the present study is Aotearoa New Zealand, a secular country. Tallon and Domdom (2022) defined the term secular within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The term secular can refer to the freedom of religion, where the state or an organization is neutral toward religion, and to freedom from religion, where the state or an organization works to provide a religion-free zone which some people with religious convictions may find offensive. (p. 5)

In the social work practice of Aotearoa New Zealand, social work practitioners would need to keep their religious beliefs and practices distinct from their clients, and they need to set aside their own to protect their client's right to have self-determination (Social Workers Registration Board, 2022). Moreover, the social work practice context of the country required social work practitioners to connect themselves with the spiritual beliefs of Māori people

(Stirling, 2008). Tallon and Domdom (2022) discussed three areas of tension Christian social work practitioners faced within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand: revealing religious identity, experiencing incongruity between social work interventions and personal values, and showing religious inclusivity.

The evidence presented in this section suggests that the relevance to religion or spirituality within social work practice contexts may affect practitioners' interest in integrating spirituality into social work practice. In contrast to the international literature (Furman et al., 2005; Holloway, 2007; Vetvik et al., 2018), this thesis focuses on social work practitioners' and teachers' insight into addressing spirituality as a person's sense of meaning and purpose in their life and linking social workers' spiritual or religious beliefs and values with respecting the individual's inherent dignity and the religious and spiritual diversity among their clients.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Furness and Gilligan (2010) recognise that social work practitioners as individuals may hold personal religious beliefs, which could determine how they live and work. They proposed a framework for social work practitioners to guide their exploration of the significance of clients' spiritual beliefs during difficult circumstances and ethical integration of spirituality-based interventions. Their framework informs social work practitioners in developing self-awareness about how personal religion and beliefs may impact them during various social work practice stages such as assessment, planning, intervention, and evaluation. It emphasizes that social work practitioners accept clients as experts of their own beliefs, practices and show trust, respect, and openness to learn from them.

Furness and Gilligan (2010) collected suggestions from social work students to improve the standards of the framework related to social work practice. Social work students indicated

that the framework should integrate information for social work practitioners about clients' diverse expressions of spirituality. The conceptual framework developed from this thesis incorporates knowledge of various spiritual beliefs. As Furness and Gilligan (2010) recommended, this thesis explores social work practitioners' ways of resolving potential conflicts between their beliefs, beliefs of their clients and social work values.

Cole (2021) developed a conceptual framework for integrating spirituality into US social work education. Cole's (2021) framework helped social work teachers in building social work students' contextual knowledge about the historical relationship between spirituality and social work. It addresses cultural diversity as an important rationale for the social work profession to incorporate spirituality into social work. Social work teachers asked their students to reflect on how they view their religious or spiritual beliefs as strengths and identify whether they experience them as sources of conflicts in personal and professional lives. There is little knowledge about guidelines on how to help students integrate their spirituality to support the diverse spiritual needs of clients. It was my intention to address this research gap in my PhD research.

### **Research Conducted on the Public**

Rothman's (2009) research informed this thesis by suggesting that developing knowledge of the diverse spiritual experiences of the public can strengthen social work teachings on spirituality. Rothman (2009) conducted 40 interviews with the members of the general population in California. The aim of Rothman's (2009) research was to increase students' understanding of diverse expressions of spirituality and inform them on how they can engage in meaningful conversations on spirituality with clients in their social work practice. Participants were asked to share their perceptions and experiences about spirituality and their views about effective ways to integrate spirituality related conversations into social work

practice. Participants' interpretation of the meaning of the term spirituality' varied. Their understanding of spirituality included "a sense of meaning and purpose", "relationship with God", "relationship with the universe", "following God's desire", and "helping others". Meditation, yoga, and prayers were indicated as spiritual practices. Rothman (2009) found that some participants created an individual experience of spirituality through activities such as playing music, art, and walking alone in nature. Rothman's (2009) research spoke about most of the public participants' view that "the actual spiritual experience is a non-verbal one – there are no words in language that can capture the essence of the experience" (p.179). My research intends to expand on Rothman's (2009) findings by developing knowledge of public participants' ways of experiencing meaning and purpose in their lives and spirituality.

In his article titled "Spirituality and religion among the general public: Implications for social work discourse", Hodge (2015) collected information from different articles on how the public conceptualizes the terms spirituality and religion, and the inference was made on the fundamental commonality between the conceptualizations of religion and spirituality among the public. He indicated that social workers' understanding of public views about religion and spirituality is valuable. It was a conscious choice to interview members of the public to gather data about their perceptions of the role of religion and spirituality in social work practice. It will help the social work profession develop effective ways to provide spiritually sensitive and client-centred social work practices. This thesis hopes to advance the knowledge base in this area.

Some recent studies employed quantitative approaches to measure clients' interest in spirituality (Oxhandler, Ellor, et al., 2018; Oxhandler et al., 2021). These studies found that clients preferred including their religious or spiritual beliefs in mental health treatments. Yamada et al. (2020) found two factors that predict adult mental health service recipients' interest in integrating spirituality into their mental health treatments. They were service

recipients' attitudes toward incorporating spirituality into mental health services and mental health service providers' attitudes of respect towards diverse adults' religious or spiritual beliefs. In Yamada et al.'s (2020) study, participants expressed interest in spiritual practices such as attending religious services, prayer, chanting, yoga, singing, reading, meditation, sacred texts, and spending time in nature as sources of mental health.

Ghafournia (2017) conducted semi-structured interviews with fourteen Muslim women who were the victims of domestic violence and lived in Sydney. Ghafournia (2017) employed thematic analysis to develop knowledge of the influence of faith on women's lived experience of domestic violence. Muslim women indicated that prayers and reading Quran provided them with strength and resilience while dealing with domestic violence, which resonates with Ghafournia's (2017) research, which also confirmed faith-based practices such as prayers as sources of strength. I was concerned about whether faith could keep women in abusive relationships and maintain the status quo.

Several studies examined the influence of religion and spirituality on individuals having a mental illness (Heffernan et al., 2016; Oxhandler, Moffatt, et al., 2018; Tepper et al., 2001). Tepper et al. (2001) found that prayers, attending religious services, and worshipping God were important religious coping strategies for US individuals with persistent mental illness. Consistent with the finding of Tepper et al. (2001), Oxhandler and Moffatt et al.'s (2018) study with fifty-five young adults with severe mental illness also found that 62 per cent (n=34) of the young adults expressed interest in bringing their religious and spiritual beliefs in coping. Heffernan's (2016) qualitative research explored the relevance of religion among adults with psychosis. Heffernan (2016) employed a social constructionist grounded theory for analysing the interview data and discovered the process by which religion impacted the recovery of these individuals. Heffernan's (2016) study found that having a personal connection with God and involvement in religious practices such as prayers provides them

hope and a sense of meaning in their lives, which facilitated the recovery process. Stanley et al. (2011) investigated older adult patients' views on incorporating spirituality into treating anxiety and depression in a clinical centre in the USA. Their study found that older adults preferred discussing their spiritual issues during counselling sessions.

The studies presented thus far provide evidence that religion and spirituality could be effective sources of support and that individuals might develop strengths from their religious or spiritual beliefs during difficult circumstances. I was interested in interviewing participants from the public and asking them to share their experience of how religion and experiences of spirituality influenced them to overcome difficulties in life and well-being in general. This thesis also explores how public participants expected social workers to respond to their varied perceptions of how they make meaning and purpose in life.

This PhD research is conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand, so it is crucial to provide background information to the understanding and relevance of spirituality in this country. The following section introduces the background of spirituality in social work in Aotearoa New Zealand and presents research on spirituality and social work in this country.

### **Spirituality in Aotearoa New Zealand**

In Aotearoa New Zealand, spirituality has been given special recognition in social work because of its significance in the lives of the Māori people. In contrast to monotheism, Māori believe in multiple gods and have a significant creation story. During the time of nothingness, two of the ancient atua (gods), Ranginui or Rangi (the sky father) and Papatūānuku or Papa (the earth mother), merged and have lived in loving embrace. Seven children were born to them in the period of darkness: Tāwhirimātea (God of the weather), Tangaroa (God of the sea), Haumia (God of the fernroot), Rongomatāne (God of the kumara and other cultivated crops), Tāne Mahuta (God of the forest), Rūaumoko (God of earthquakes), and Tūmatauenga

(God of the man and war) (Barlow, 1991). Tāne Mahuta (God of the forest) separated the parents from each other, leading to the emergence of light, representing the formation of the universe (Barlow, 1991). This story was significant learning during my PhD journey as I started experiencing Māori spirituality as different from experiencing spirituality through connectedness with one God. Learning about mauri, all permeating life force expanded my understanding of spirituality and enabled me to feel connected to this land, its volcanic mountains, rivers, winds, animals, and people (Pitama et al., 2007).

According to Māori culture, spirituality is fundamental to the health and well-being of people, and different whānau (extended family) and hapū (subtribe) understood spirituality differently (Valentine et al., 2017). Moorfield (2011) indicated that wairua (spirit) is a significant part of the whole person, formed when the human eye starts to develop during the embryonic stage and is never dying. Wairua can either locate within the heart or reside separately from the physical realm. Māori world encompassed the notion that everything has a wairua, including people, children, ancestors, land and spoken words (Valentine et al., 2017). Pere (1982) indicated that “every act, natural phenomena, and other influences were considered to have both physical and spiritual implications” (p.12).

Durie (1985) also highlighted the importance of the spiritual dimension and stated, “without a spiritual awareness, individual is considered to be lacking in well-being and more prone to disability or misfortune” (p.483). This quote demonstrates that in Aotearoa New Zealand, spirituality is linked with people’s experience of well-being. Therefore, when coming to mental health and well-being, spirituality has a significant place. The history of Aotearoa New Zealand shows that the country was colonised by the British, and by using brutal colonial methods of subjugation and land grab, they attempted to damage the spirit of Māori. British colonisers disenfranchised Māori well-being by enacting the Tohunga Suppression Act in 1907, which prevented the use of Māori spiritual healing methods and

medicines to support trained Western doctors (Came, 2012). The signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi is a turning point in the history of Aotearoa New Zealand.

In the 1840 context, the English, who came to Aotearoa New Zealand considered Māori as inferior to them in terms of scientific knowledge, culture, and religion (Naumann, 2016). The Treaty of Waitangi is the constitutional document written in 1840 as an agreement between the British Crown and the Māori chiefs of Aotearoa New Zealand (Morris, 2003). The British aim of the Treaty of Waitangi was to make Aotearoa New Zealand, a colony under British governance. The document's written version included three articles related to ensuring the Māori people's right to participation, protection, and partnership in New Zealand's policy affairs, and it built compelling grounds for biculturalism (Nayar, 2013). Naumann (2016) highlighted that the treaty was first written in English, and its translation to Māori was unsuccessful in meeting Māori needs and desires. For example, in Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Māori version of the treaty), guaranteeing Tino Rangatiratanga meant giving Māori chiefs the right to have complete authority over their lands, fisheries, and other taonga (treasures). The British crown agreed that they would refuse to buy Māori land even if any Māori would express interest in selling the land. In contrast, the English version of the treaty indicated that the crown held the power to purchase land from the Māori people (Naumann, 2016). The third article of the treaty did not make any distinctions between the Māori people and the non-Māori, whilst the British crown mentioned offering people the same citizenship rights and protection (Barrett & Connolly-Stone, 1998).

Māori people's connection with the land originated from spirituality, which is recognised as a significant aspect of personal lives (Lockhart et al., 2019). Several authors indicated the importance of whakapapa to Māori spirituality (Mahuika, 2019; Mahuika & Ngata, 1998). Māori societies viewed reciting whakapapa as the core of sustaining cultural identity, which acknowledged their connections with landmarks, ancestors, and other animate and non-

animate objects (Mahuika, 2019). Haupapa-o-Tane (1920) added Io as the supreme God who held power over multiple Gods included in the story of the formation of the universe and was consulted only for issues of paramount importance. In summary, reviewing the literature cited in this section has proven that spirituality has a creative and intellectual context shaped by Maori spiritual beliefs. The following section addresses the place of spirituality in the social work practice context.

### ***Place of spirituality in the Social Work Context of Aotearoa New Zealand***

Addressing spirituality is significant in the social work practice context of Aotearoa New Zealand. For example, the Social Workers' Registration Board (SWRB) is the legislative authority in Aotearoa New Zealand, that monitors the cultural competence of social work practitioners. Its scope of practice document includes spirituality in the social work practice statement, "Social work is a relationship-based profession and an academic discipline that incorporates analyses of current and historical influences including ecological, social, political, economic, spiritual, and psychological factors" (Social Workers Registration Board. (n.d.). para.1). Social work practitioners as treaty partners need to demonstrate knowledge about Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Māori culture (Social Workers Registration Board, 2022). Consequently, social work practitioners should be able to address Māori spiritual beliefs. The intention of my research was to find out what kind of knowledge and experience would social workers need to be able to respectfully address Māori spiritual beliefs. This is relevant as social work practitioners' and teachers' spirituality may differ from Māori spirituality, and they would need to be respectful of appreciating the difference.

Several authors suggested that Māori people should be supported to incorporate their traditional spirituality-based healing practices to overcome psychological trauma resulting from British colonisation and sustain well-being (Pihama et al., 2014; Wirihana, 2019). Waiata (songs), haka (dance), and whakawhanuanga (building relationships) were some

of the healing practices which included spirituality (Wirihana, 2019). In Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori healing practices are prioritised to promote Māori well-being (Pihama et al., 2020). Social work practitioners are responsible for respecting the cultural identity of Māori and ensuring equity in the delivery of social work services between Māori and Tauwiwi (non-Māori) (Treaty Resource Centre, 2016). The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers' (ANZASW's) code of ethics which is committed to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and built its ethical principles on Māori values (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2019). Wairuatanga (spirituality) is included in the code of ethics, which requires social work practitioners to ensure their clients' spiritual well-being (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2019). This required social work practitioners to know how faith, spirituality or religion is significant in people's lives. Therefore, I set out to explore public perspectives about the influence of spirituality or religion on their well-being.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, social work teachers are engaged in developing decolonizing and democratizing ways to deliver social work services which align with social work values such as equity and social justice, human rights, and self-determination (McNabb, 2017, 2019). McNabb (2019) developed a Te Tiriti based teaching and learning framework for social work educators to enforce the treaty within social work education through decolonization practices such as focusing on teaching based on Mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge). Social work teachers reported that they used to start and end their everyday teachings with karakia (invocation/ prayer) and integrate terms from Te Reo Māori (Māori language) as part of decolonization practices (McNabb, 2019).

Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1995), Te Wheke (Pere, 1979), and Te Whetu (Mark & Lyons, 2010) were some of the Māori health and wellbeing models that significantly contributed to ethical, competent, and holistic social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. In Aotearoa New Zealand, health care professionals need to apply spirituality integrated

Māori health models (Ministry of Health, 2015). The following section presents three of the health models that integrate spirituality.

***Māori Health Models Commonly Used in Social Work Practice in Aotearoa New Zealand***

Te Whare Tapa Whā model (Durie, 1998) compared the health and wellbeing of the Māori to the four walls of a wharenuī (Māori communal house). The model represents a wharenuī with four walls, Taha tinana (physical health), Taha whānau (family health), Taha hinengaro (mental health), and Taha wairua (spiritual wellbeing) and all these four walls are perceived to be equally important in maintaining the wharenuī strong.

Te Wheke model was developed by Rangimarie Rose Pere (1997). This model explained the traditional concept of family health using the image of an octopus. The octopus has eight tentacles which are interconnected, and each of them represents a particular dimension that can determine holistic health. The tentacles are Te whānau (the family), Waiora (total wellbeing for the individual and family), Wairuatanga (spirituality), Hinengaro (the mind), Taha tinana (physical wellbeing), Whanaungatanga (extended family), Mauri (life force in people and objects), Mana Ake (unique identity of individuals and family), Ha A Koro Ma, a Kui Ma (breath of life from forebearers) and Whatumanawa (the open and healthy expression of emotion). Many social work practitioners and teachers in my research mentioned that Te Whare Tapa Whā model guided them in integrating spirituality into social work practice and education.

Meihana model is also used as an assessment framework for understanding the needs of Māori clients and guide mental health practitioners' interventions (Pitama et al., 2007). This model described different ways mental health practitioners can adopt to address Māori patients' health status using the image of a double hulled boat. According to this model, the family and the client are very connected and therefore, assessment of the clients included

collecting information from the whanau regarding the treatment expectations. Spirituality is an important component of the model, where the practitioner needs to assess Māori clients' beliefs about spirituality and their sense of connectedness with religion, landmarks, and people.

The prevalence of spirituality in health models signifies the importance of recognising indigenous people's spiritual beliefs. Therefore, in Aotearoa New Zealand, social work practitioners' acceptance of people's spiritual beliefs is essential to support their well-being in everyday lives. The following section presents research conducted around spirituality in social work practice.

### **Aotearoa New Zealand Research on Spirituality in Social Work**

Few studies were conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand related to spirituality in social work education (Akhter & Leonard, 2014; Fox, 2021; Napan et al., 2020; Phillips, 2014). Napan et al. (2020) studied the effectiveness of spirituality in addressing the needs of social work students within a tertiary education setting. They applied spirituality-integrated teaching methods such as Academic Co-Creative Inquiry (ACCI) to develop students' awareness of their own culture, spirituality, and learn how to relate to a range of different cultures and beliefs that were present in the class. ACCI is an innovative teaching method developed by the first author, which provides students with the freedom to personalise the prescribed learning outcomes of the course based on their needs and learning interests. Social work students were asked to engage in the art of co-creating knowledge by connecting to their own indigenous, to one another, to the spiritually abundant teaching and learning marae space and their calling to become better practitioners. The ACCI method was nested within “ako” (a Māori teaching philosophy that recognises teachers and students as reciprocal learners). Classes for the Spirituality and social practice course were conducted in the Māori cultural

meeting environment, the marae and indigenous values and principles were not only acknowledged but experienced and enacted throughout the course. Students reported that they developed a sense of meaning and purpose and enhanced their body, mind, and spirit (soul) connections (Napan et al., 2020).

Fox (2021) conducted semi-structured interviews with six Māori social work practitioners who completed their education at Te Wananga o Aotearoa, one of the indigenous tertiary institutes in Aotearoa New Zealand, which offers a Bachelor of Social Work. He used a narrative inquiry approach to explore Māori social work practitioners' perceptions about how their knowledge of indigenous spirituality can influence their social work practice. Fox (2021) found that social work practitioners' Māori cultural identity influenced them to link spirituality with their connectedness with nature, cultural spaces, ancestors, wairua (spirit), and atua (gods), and they used these understandings to construct a sense of meaning and purpose. Fox's (2021) study indicated that social work practitioners spoke about creating space for their clients to experience spiritual safety while discussing spirituality. They used karakia (prayers, invocations), Te Whare Tapa Whā framework, and takepu (Māori principles) to build spiritual connections with clients. Social work practitioners' use of takepu principles such as āhurutanga (safe space) and whanaungatanga (respectful relationships) signaled that spirituality-integrated social work teachings can impact social work students' social work practice as the participants' BSW program at Te Wananga o Aotearoa was based on spiritually integrated takepu principles. Reflecting on Fox's (2021) study, I wondered whether Māori beliefs related to spirituality shaped their social work practice and if those beliefs were absorbed or accepted by non-Māori practitioners.

Akhter and Leonard (2014) conducted qualitative research with third-year graduate students of the BSW program at Te Wananga o Aotearoa. They studied the impact of spirituality-integrated teaching methods on students' transformations. The takepu principles

incorporated into the teaching and learning context were “āhurutanga (safe space), te whakakoharangatiratanga (respectful relationship), kaitiakitanga (responsible trusteeship and stewardship), tino rangatiratanga (absolute integrity), tau kumekume (positive and negative tensions), and mauri-ora (well-being)” (Akhter & Leonard, 2014, p. 96).

Phillips (2014) conducted a qualitative study to explore non-Māori social work practitioners' experience of spirituality while studying Bachelor of Social Work at the Te Wānanga o Aotearoa campus. Phillips' (2014) findings indicated that experiences of attending a pōwhiri (the Māori welcoming ceremony), noho marae (staying at a marae, the Māori meeting place and experiencing Māori protocol) and participating in Māori karakia and waiata (prayers and songs) enhanced students' confidence to practise social work with Māori. This meant that spirituality-integrated teaching methods could allow students the opportunity to learn from other cultures and make connections with one another. Phillips (2014) also found that incorporating spirituality into social work teaching helped students' personal spiritual development, which influenced them to express empathy, non-judgmental attitude, and acceptance while addressing the spiritual beliefs of Māori and non-Māori clients in their social work practice.

Stirling's (2008) mixed methods investigation explored the role of religion and spirituality in Aotearoa New Zealand social work. Stirling (2008) found that social work practitioners identified spirituality as their strength, and they expect clients to initiate conversations related to their spirituality first. They indicated their perception that social workers' initiation of conversations on spiritual or religious issues can hinder clients' right to self-determination as they related it to proselytization. Stirling (2008) indicated that one of the limitations of his research is that it excludes gathering data from clients regarding their perceptions about the role of religion and spirituality in their lives. Moreover, Stirling (2008) recommended that social work researchers conduct further studies that could explore the potential ways social

work practitioners can include spirituality in an ethically appropriate manner and the development of evidence-based practice models.

Stirling et al.'s (2010) research with social work practitioners from the United Kingdom and Aotearoa New Zealand studied social work practitioners' attitudes towards integrating religion and spirituality into social work practice. Social work practitioners from both countries indicated that their silencing on matters around clients' religion and spirituality could cause discomfort in clients with issues such as terminal illness and bereavement. In contrast to UK social work practitioners, more Aotearoa New Zealand social workers believed that their use of spirituality-based interventions such as asking clients to reflect on their spiritual and religious experiences would not contradict the scope of practice of social work. However, social work practitioners from both countries are not satisfied with the content of spirituality in their social work education programs. While considering the results of Stirling et al. (2010) study, limitations in the survey design need to be considered. Firstly, the survey instrument adopted to study UK social workers' attitudes was the Religion and Spirituality Practice Issue scale (RSPIS) developed from the US questionnaire (Canda & Furman, 1999). While Stirling et al. (2010) altered the survey instrument to study the responses of Aotearoa New Zealand social workers, questions related to some vital context-specific matters such as multiculturalism, and varied understandings of God, were not included. This thesis explores different understandings of God and social work practitioners' ways of managing conflicts between personal beliefs and professional values while practising social work within a multicultural environment.

Stirling (2008) highlighted that little research explored public participants' views about the role of social workers in integrating spirituality into social work practice. Therefore, I set out to explore the diverse spiritual experiences of public participants and their expectations of the role of social workers in integrating spirituality into social work practice assuming that every

public member can become a social work client at some stage of their life. Consistent with Phillips (2014), Stirling (2008) also indicated that in Aotearoa New Zealand, there is a need to train social work practitioners adequately to address spirituality in social work. Therefore, I wanted to discover if a conceptual framework developed from the findings of this thesis can support Aotearoa social work teachers and practitioners to address spirituality in an ethical and non-imposing way.

The studies reviewed here support the notion that addressing spirituality in social work education is within the scope of practice of social work. Data from several studies (Akhter & Leonard, 2014; Napan et al., 2020) suggest that social work teachers helped Māori and non-Māori students to identify who they are and deepen their connections with their culture, spirituality, and social work practice. Napan et al.'s (2020) article transformed my awareness that teachers' willingness to accept themselves as learners can be an instrumental aspect of their spirituality which can influence their teachings to build connections with students. Consistent with Napan (2020), Fox's study (2014) conducted with social work practitioners did not attempt to explore social work teachers' views about the influence of spirituality on their teaching. Therefore, these studies motivated to explore how social work teachers' spirituality influenced them to understand and build a connection with their students and social work teachers' spirituality-integrated teaching methods.

### **Nature Connectedness and Well-Being**

Several studies indicated that individual's experience of having a connection with nature can be an effective source of wellbeing in their everyday lives (Choe et al., 2020; Nisbet et al., 2011; Sadowski et al., 2020). Choe et al. (2020) studied how nature can enhance the wellbeing of individuals involved in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). The participants involved in MBSR intervention in the natural environment achieved mental health and well-being faster than those involved outdoors. Consistent with Choe et al. (2020),

a number of studies (Nisbet et al., 2011; Sadowski et al., 2020) reported that connectedness with nature can improve subjective well-being.

### **Research on Spirituality in General in Aotearoa New Zealand**

Several studies have found that addressing older Māori people's spirituality is a significant concern while providing care (Apiti, 2020; Moeke-Maxwell, Mason, et al., 2020; Nelson-Becker & Moeke-Maxwell, 2020). These studies employed Kaupapa Māori and social constructivist approaches to generate knowledge. Kaupapa Māori research approach requires Māori researcher to lead the research with Māori participants.

Nelson-Becker and Moeke-Maxwell's research (2020) reported the findings of the Pae Herenga study conducted in between 2017 and 2020. Their qualitative study explored the influence of spirituality on achieving a sense of fulfilment (ka ea) at the end of life. Sixty-one Māori participants included caregiving family members, rongoā healers (natural healers who use Māori medicines), Māori professional helpers, and tohunga (spiritual or religious experts) who were involved with a kaumatua during the period of life-threatening illness were interviewed and thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Kaumatua viewed their connectedness with family members, and ancestors as a relational aspect of spirituality. They experienced a greater sense of fulfillment at the end of life when they were looked after by family members and supported by spiritual practices such as waiata (songs) and spiritual beliefs about Hawaiki.

Nelson-Becker and Moeke-Maxwell (2020) indicated that future qualitative research should focus on assessing the spiritual needs of other cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand. They highlighted that deepening knowledge about spiritual diversity is essential to improve the quality of spiritual services being given to older people at the end of their lives. It was my intention to include a range of spiritual diversities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Moreover, my

view that spirituality is significant in the well-being of human beings shaped this thesis as public members were recruited based on their interest in participating in the study.

Several studies supported the view that Māori cultural identity and spirituality provide Māori people with greater connectedness with nature (Apiti, 2020; Lockhart et al., 2019; Tassell-Matamua et al., 2021). Moeke-Maxwell, Collier, et al.'s (2020) qualitative research interviewed both Māori and non-Māori family members from bereaved families who looked after a family member who deceased over the age of 80. The participants of this study revealed that attending to spirituality has paramount importance in providing good health care to older people, and it confirmed Te Whare Tapa Wha could be applicable to meet the health care needs of both Māori and non-Māori older people. Consistent with this research, many of the studies conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand health care sector supported bringing spirituality integrated care in hospice settings (Egan et al., 2011; Egan et al., 2017).

James and Buttle (2008) surveyed 125 people who lived in the North Auckland area of Aotearoa New Zealand, aged 27 to 91, to investigate how younger and older adults differ in their attitudes towards utilizing mental health services. They found that older adults' help-seeking attitudes differed from younger adults' attitudes. In seeking support for mental health issues, older adults were more likely to consult physicians than social workers. They were more inclined to consider God and clergy as options for support than younger adults. It indicates that some older people may believe God is the source of guidance and view that mental health problems arise in life due to the neglect of their religious beliefs about God. James and Buttle (2008) mentioned that the inclusion of several mental health services such as psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, and psychotherapists confused many participants as they lacked an understanding of the differences between these roles. This inspired me to check whether the public members involved in my PhD research held an understanding of social workers' scope of practice. As James and Buttle (2008) advised

future researchers to focus on one specific mental health service, I asked public participants' perceptions about the role of social workers' in addressing spirituality in social work practice. Consistent with Rothman's (2009) research, no previous study has addressed the diversity of religious and spiritual beliefs among public, and their views about the role of social workers in integrating spirituality into social work. Reviewing some studies conducted by Aotearoa New Zealand scholars (Apiti, 2020; Lockhart et al., 2019; Tassell-Matamua et al., 2021) influenced this thesis as I asked whether public participants experienced a sense of connection with nature and how that influenced their well-being.

### **Chapter Three: Research Methodology**

This chapter presents the rationale for using a qualitative research approach informed by a constructivist research paradigm and grounded theory method. The research process is outlined, and the chapter concludes with a summary of the data analysis stages.

#### **The Rationale for Using a Qualitative Approach**

Qualitative research examines meaningful experiences and perspectives to develop a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of the phenomena to be studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). I employed a qualitative approach and used open-ended questions such as what and how to explore participants' spiritual beliefs and experiences and how they shaped their actions. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) indicated that "the word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency" (p. 14).

Canda and Furman (2010) perceived spirituality as an unquantifiable and complex concept that can interpret how human beings experience the meaning and purpose of their lives. Thus, adopting a qualitative approach can be beneficial for the in-depth exploration of complex processes and people's subjective experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Moreover, qualitative research is context specific as it posits that participants' cultural contexts are inextricably linked to their subjective experience and the interpretation of the phenomena. Hence contextualization of findings was significant for the researcher in describing the complexity of the phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Qualitative research was guided by different paradigms or a range of beliefs representing the researcher's ontological, epistemological, and methodological stances (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), "the constructivist paradigm assumes a

relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent cocreate understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (p.32). Creswell and Poth (2018) called this paradigm social constructivism because individuals’ social interactions and cultural and historical standards may affect how they construct realities in their idiosyncratic ways. I have found that this paradigm fits well with my philosophical assumptions and the methodological preference for grounded theory. Gray (2018) points out that social constructivism is closely related to another qualitative research paradigm, interpretivism, because of the similarity in subjectivist epistemological underpinnings. This study used grounded theory methods embedded within a constructivist research paradigm.

### **Grounded Theory Methods**

According to Charmaz (2006), grounded theory is a group of methods which “consists of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories grounded in the data themselves” (p.2). Grounded theory method is iterative as the researcher moves back and forth between the simultaneous processes of data collection and data analysis, which focuses more on developing a theory deeply grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2014). Bryant and Charmaz (2007) have noted that the term grounded theory is not only useful as the representation of research method, but also the result of the study that generates theory. As a “method”, the term grounded theory explains specific guidelines on how to discover categories from the data and how they relate to each other, and as a result, it is an explanatory framework that describes the phenomena (Willig, 2013). According to Birks and Mills (2015), grounded theory is “an explanatory scheme comprising a set of concepts related to each other through logical patterns of connectivity” (p.108).

The grounded theory method was chosen, as it can produce theories directly from social work practice and guide social work practitioners' interventions to improve the quality of social work services (Oktaý, 2012). This seemed appropriate as I intended to explore and explain the inherent processes employed while addressing spirituality in the social work profession, which is often not explicit yet impacts social work practice (Birks & Mills, 2015). Moreover, Oktaý (2012) pointed out that grounded theory as a method, in its history of origin, shared two common perspectives with social work: symbolic interactionism and pragmatism, making it suitable for social work research. Symbolic interactionism is the theoretical perspective that assumes that people's interactions may influence how individuals construct meanings, interpretations and taking actions (Charmaz, 2006). Pragmatism assumes that human beings' experiences and beliefs are socially constructed and are inseparable from the context and researcher (Willig, 2013).

Furthermore, Gibson and Hartman (2014) recommended researchers study the meaning of the term "theory" in grounded theory to discuss what kind of theory they will produce. Charmaz (2006) postulated two forms of theory: positivist and interpretivist. The concept of interpretive theory focuses on developing an imaginative understanding and interpretation of participants' actions and the meanings. Constructivist grounded theory is a type of interpretive theory that also attempts to theorize the interpretations made by researchers and participants about how they produce actions and meanings differently within their social contexts (Charmaz, 2014). Bryant and Charmaz (2007) maintain that even if researchers do not intend to generate grounded theories, they can use the term grounded theory methods to describe their research methods closely linked with research approaches.

Grounded theory methods gave high priority to the phenomena of study and acknowledged that both data and analysis were created from shared experiences, rapport with participants and other sources of data (Charmaz, 2014). This characteristic implies that the

constructed perspectives of the researcher and the respondents are equally valuable, and hence the researcher cannot be separated from the study (Oktay, 2012). Nevertheless, Taylor et al. (2015) indicated that researchers could be biased because of their direct involvement in the research process and preconceived ideas. Therefore, reflexivity is a crucial strategy that should be included in the constructivist grounded theory design (Charmaz, 2006). According to Robson (2002), reflexivity is “an awareness of the ways in which the researcher as an individual with a particular social identity and background has an impact on the research process” (p.22). Memos were the written evidence for integrating reflexivity into the grounded theory research process (Birks & Mills, 2015).

Moreover, grounded theory methods effectively minimised sampling bias through constant comparison, theoretical saturation, and making connections between subcategories and categories (Glaser, 1978). Therefore, it is impossible to generalize the study results, which is not the aim of grounded theory research (Sengstock, 2015). Instead, my focus was to develop a conceptual framework. Birks and Mills (2022) indicated that the grounded theory data analysis process is highly effective in developing a high-quality conceptual framework with explanatory potential.

### **The Rationale for Choosing Constructivist Approach to Grounded Theory**

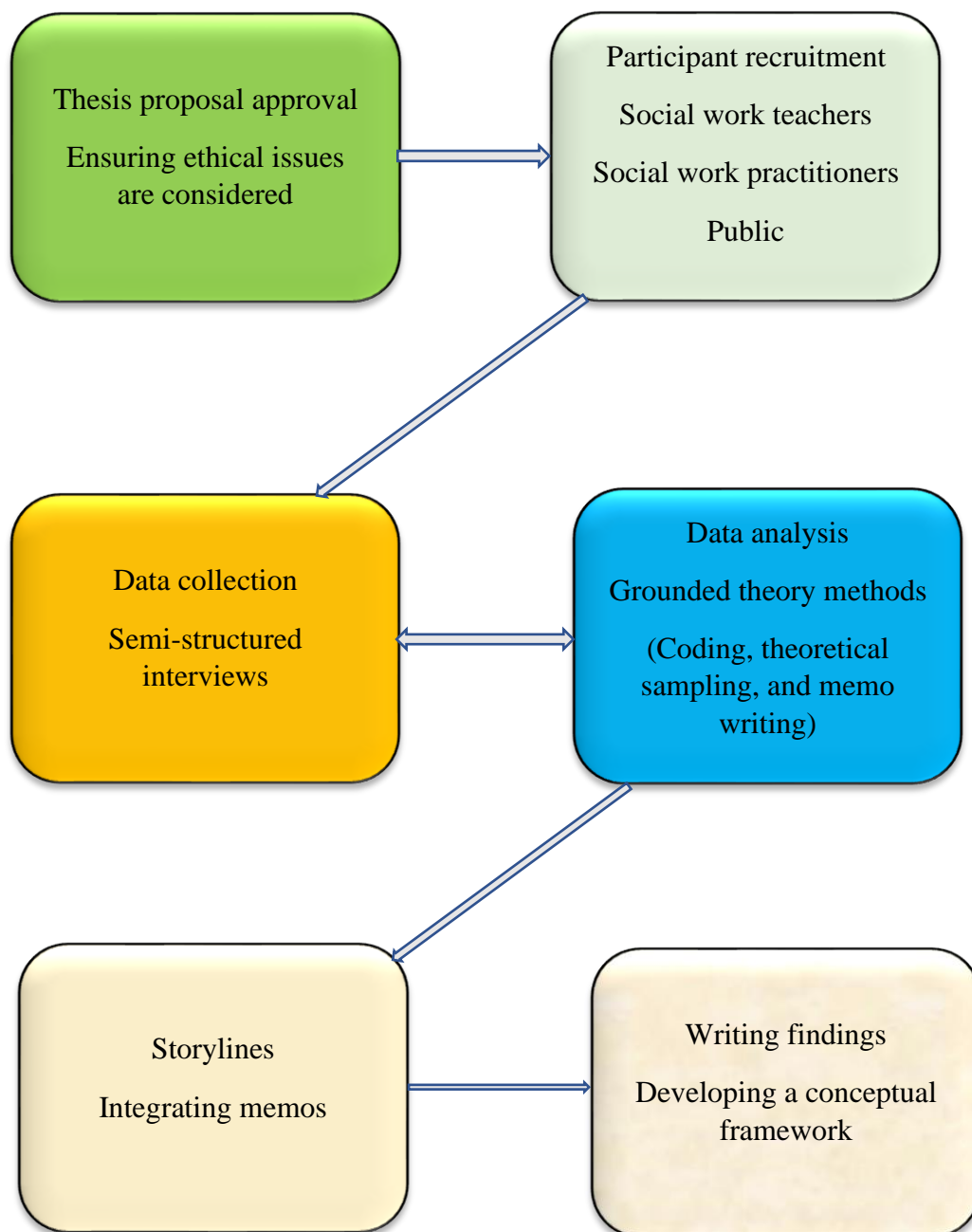
The classical grounded theory advocated that researchers conduct the literature review at the end of the data analysis to avoid the imposition of the researcher’s preconceived knowledge into the research process (Glaser, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In contrast, Thornberg (2012) proposed the idea of informed grounded theory which is defined as “a product of a research process as well as to the research process itself, in which both the process and the product have been thoroughly grounded in data by grounded theory methods while being informed by existing research literature and theoretical frameworks” (p. 249).

Consistent with Thornberg (2012), Charmaz (2006) recognises that the literature review would be another data source to increase the researcher's creativity, critical thinking, and reflexivity. Though informed grounded theory fits very well into the constructivist approach, Corbin and Strauss (2008) advocated that researchers ensure that they are not importing significant concepts directly from the literature into the data rather than allowing the concepts to be derived from the data. However, checking for similarities and or differences between the derived concepts and the concepts that already exist in the literature is very significant (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The constructivist approach allows grounded theorists to use research methods more flexibly within their own studies (Charmaz, 2014). While the classic grounded theory approach does not support researchers in developing an initial interview schedule (Glaser, 1978), the constructivist approach and informed grounded theory allowed me to develop and modify the interview schedule as the research proceeded (Charmaz, 2014). According to Charmaz (2014), interviewing without an interview schedule is like "asking awkward, poorly timed, intrusive questions that you may fill with unexamined preconceptions" (p. 63).

Given the uniqueness of spirituality being a very personal topic and therefore being experienced and expressed differently, critical subjectivity is an essential aspect in the application of grounded theory methods, as different researchers can develop different categories by coding similar transcripts in different ways based on their subjective experiences (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). Consistent with Corbin (2009), I agree with the constructivist viewpoint that knowledge does not emerge naturally from data. Instead, the knowledge emerges through the researcher's interpretation of participants' stories that explained the meanings participants constructed out of their social experiences. Even though Corbin and Strauss's (2008) approach to grounded theory informed grounded theorists to adopt a symbolic interactionist perspective of constructing meaning out of people's

interactions, Charmaz (2006) stresses the importance of assuming a social constructivist paradigmatic stance to grounded theory research. By adopting the social constructivist approach, I acknowledge that there is no single experience of spirituality and that people experience it in multiple ways. Therefore, I intended to make sense of the meaning of these multiple experiences. The following figure presents the research process.

**Figure 1***Research Process*

## **Research Process**

### ***Ethical Issues***

Massey University Human Ethics assessed this research as low risk, following a peer review, consultation, and risk assessment. This research considered universal ethical principles and Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) principles. This project initially considered interviewing social work clients instead of the public. However, issues of confidentiality and selection presented an ethical issue. Another issue was the possibility of causing harm to social work practitioners' reputations, as I originally thought to use social work practitioners' contacts or references to recruit clients. There were potential power issues and clients felt pressured to participate when recommended by their social workers. Confidentiality and privacy issues were discussed, and as a result the actual social work clients (who may be perceived as vulnerable) were replaced with the general public (as any person can become a social work client at some stage in their life). Autonomy and justice are the two universal ethical principles relevant to this study. All participants took part voluntarily and without any coercion or even minor pressure.

### ***Autonomy***

Participants were given time to read the information sheet and the initially developed interview schedule to decide voluntarily whether to participate in the study. The information sheet contained the full details of the study, including the researcher and the supervisors' details, the aim of the research, participants' rights, the research process, the research benefits, and privacy and confidentiality (Appendix D). Participants were interviewed in their natural settings. Prior to the interviews, I confirmed that they understood the information sheet, including the voluntary nature of research participation and asked the participant to sign the participant consent form (Appendix F). Participants were given the freedom to ask

the voice recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview if they did not want any part of the interview to be recorded.

### ***Fairness and Impartiality***

Participants were treated fairly, and their right to privacy was considered. The recruitment was based on the research topic, participants' interests, and willingness to participate. After attending the interview, some of the participants referred the names of their friends and colleagues who they thought might be interested. I have asked them to get their permission to transfer the names and email addresses to me rather than them sharing the details about the research and asking them to participate to avoid any miscommunication. I emailed the referred participants the information sheet and the interview schedule, and the participants who rejected my invitation to participate in the research were not mistreated. I have not particularly focused on recruiting participants with specific beliefs. Different belief systems were welcomed, and culturally diverse participants were treated equally regarding their right to participate in the study. Māori participants were not intentionally recruited but were able to choose to participate. The researcher transcribed the interviews, and pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to make them anonymous and respect their privacy. Special permission was taken from the participants to use the data for publications related to this study. All data was transferred to the researcher's password-protected system.

### **Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) Principles**

Understanding biculturalism allowed me to respect the culture and values of two distinct cultural groups within Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori, and non-Māori and accept the unique position of Māori as tangata whenua (the people of the land). In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Treaty of Waitangi is recognised to be the central document made between the British Crown and the Māori chiefs in 1840, which comprised three principles (Morgan & Guthrie, 2014).

The principles were partnership, protection, and participation. The principle of partnership is concerned with acknowledging that Māori and the British Crown have equal rights and promoting the active engagement of Māori in making decisions related to their lives. The principle of protection recognises the importance of protecting Māori culture, values, and rights, which is regarded as the British Crown's responsibility. The principle of participation emphasizes the participation of Māori in policy-making decisions related to different aspects of society, including culture, society, and economy.

The key concepts embedded in the Māori culture, strongly associated with the Treaty of Waitangi, Whanaungatanga (a sense of relationship through shared experiences and working together) and Manaakitanga (cultural and social responsibility) were considered.

Whanaungatanga was created with the help of a cultural advisor assigned to the project. It included encouraging the Māori participants to start the interview with Karakia. After welcoming them, I spent a substantial time exchanging cultural information and listened to their cultural needs with great interest. Other participants were allowed to start the interview with prayer, story, song, or anything they would like to do, and I appreciated their values and beliefs by showing respect.

## **Participant Recruitment**

### ***Research Sample***

The research sample consisted of twenty-five participants, including ten social work educators, six social work practitioners, and nine persons from the public. Social work teachers' selection criteria were that they engaged in teaching social work in accredited social work education programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand. They were all registered social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. Teaching or embedding spirituality into their current teaching practice was not set as the primary criteria to be selected, but their interest in the topic has drawn them to participate. Social work teachers were recruited using purposive

sampling. The researcher obtained the email addresses of fifteen social work teachers from university websites and sent personal invitations. Seven social work teachers agreed to participate in the research, and eight declined via email. Three social work teachers raised time constraints as their rationale for declining participation, whilst five social work teachers did not perceive the research topic as directly related to their research expertise. Three social work teachers were recruited by asking an educational institution to circulate the information sheet and request participants.

Social work practitioners and public participants were recruited through linear snowball sampling. The criteria for social work practitioners were to have a social work registration in Aotearoa New Zealand, be interested in the research topic and be willing to talk about the influence of spirituality in their social work practice. The public participants were selected based on their interest in participating in the study. Initial participants from social work practitioners and the public were recruited purposively using the criteria through professional networks. They were asked to provide referrals they may perceive as knowledgeable to contribute to the study. The referral process was repeated until enough participants were obtained and diverse perspectives and experiences related to the topic were acquired.

Of the twenty-five participants, eight were males, and seventeen were females. The male participants, aged between twenty-two and fifty-nine, and the females, aged between thirty-five and sixty-three, were included in the study. The average age of the public participants (40.2) was lesser than social work teachers (50.9) and practitioners (44.5) due to the participation of three students. The female-to-male gender ratio (17: 8) indicated that female participants were more likely to be interested in sharing their spirituality-related experiences than males.

**Table 1***Social Work Teachers' Demographics Table*

	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Attended courses on spirituality and social work (Yes/No)</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>
<b>1</b>	53	M	European New Zealand/ Pākehā	No	Tony
<b>2</b>	54	F	European New Zealand/ Pākehā	Yes	Catherin
<b>3</b>	56	M	European New Zealand/ Pākehā	No	Charlie
<b>4</b>	43	F	South African	No	Kelsey
<b>5</b>	38	F	Indian	No	Amelia
<b>6</b>	63	F	European New Zealand/ Pākehā	No	Julia
<b>7</b>	43	M	Samoan	No	Daniel
<b>8</b>	52	F	New Zealand Māori	No	Moana
<b>9</b>	48	M	Asian (Korean)	No	Mathew
<b>10</b>	59	M	European New Zealand/ Pākehā	No	Philip

**Table 2***Social Work Practitioners' Demographics Table*

	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Field of practice</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>
<b>1</b>	52	F	South African	Child protection	Oceana
<b>2</b>	39	M	Indian	Adult Community mental health	Vance
<b>3</b>	39	F	Indian	Mental health	Diana
<b>4</b>	49	F	New Zealand Māori	Child welfare, youth, and family services	Maia
<b>5</b>	52	F	Niuean	Community development and social services	Nancy
<b>6</b>	36	F	Pakistani	Psychiatric social work	Ameena

**Table 3***Public Participants' Demographic Table*

	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Profession	Pseudonym
<b>1</b>	57	F	European New Zealand/ Pākehā	Medical administration	Megan
<b>2</b>	37	F	Pakistani	Nutrition	Laila
<b>3</b>	35	F	Croatian	Master of Social Work student	Olivia
<b>4</b>	34	M	Fijian	Nursing	Donald
<b>5</b>	36	F	Thailand	Master of Social Work student	Poppy
<b>6</b>	22	M	European New Zealand/ Pākehā	Psychology student	Harold
<b>7</b>	35	F	European New Zealand/ Pākehā	Lifestyle coach - student service	Fiona
<b>8</b>	59	F	Denmark	Social work visiting professor	Emily
<b>9</b>	47	F	European New Zealand/ Pākehā	Administration: Public Health sector	Luna

### ***Data Collection***

Semi-structured interviewing was the method adopted for data collection. This method was advantageous over emailing questionnaires because research participants enjoyed talking about their spiritual experiences and asking the researcher to reframe the research questions if they did not understand (Gochros, 2014). Thus, this method helped me explore participants' spiritual feelings in-depth and maintain the idiographic element of qualitative interpretive research, which often focuses on uncovering processes and relationships (King et al., 2018). Semi-structured interviews offered me the flexibility to revise the questions in the interview guide and the freedom to cover them if they seemed significant (Patton, 1990). As Charmaz (2006) recommended, interview guides were prepared before data collection. The questions were discussed with supervisors, and the pilot interviews were conducted, which increased my confidence and focus. The interviews were audio recorded, and I undertook fieldwork, which involved writing observations and informal conversations with the interview participants. I manually transcribed all the interview recordings to immerse myself fully in the data. Participants were asked for their consent to receive the interview transcripts as part of the research process. One social work teacher and one public member expressed interest in receiving the interview transcript, while other participants rejected it. They reviewed the interview transcripts and confirmed their satisfaction with the contents. The interview questions are presented in Appendices A, B and C on pages 264, 266, and 268, respectively.

### ***Data Analysis***

After the completion of transcription, the data was analysed using grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2014). The data analysis process seemed very dynamic due to the implementation of grounded theory methods where the analyst needs to be iterative by performing back-and-forth movements between the data collection and data analysis stages. A set of grounded theory methods suggested by Birks and Mills (2015) for the data analysis

process were “initial coding and categorisation of data; concurrent data generation or collection and analysis; writing memos; theoretical sampling; constant comparative analysis using inductive and abductive logic; theoretical sensitivity; intermediate coding; selecting a core category; theoretical saturation; and theoretical integration” (p.9).

“Coding” was the prominent technique applied first to the transcribed interview data. Charmaz (2006) identified seven strategies for coding that involve “breaking up the data into their component parts, defining the actions on which they rest, looking for tacit assumptions, explicating implicit actions and meanings, crystallising the significance of the points, comparing data with data and identifying gaps in the data” (p.50). The data segments were labelled with specific codes for data analysis (Urquhart, 2022). The codes focused on developing knowledge of research participants’ actions which could explain how spirituality would influence them to fulfil their responsibilities associated with personal and professional contexts and roles (Charmaz, 2006).

The coding process had three phases which included initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding. Initial coding was line-by-line coding, and that coded data as gerunds which can explain participants’ actions within processes and contexts (Charmaz, 2014). Even though every line of the interview transcript may not contain an action verb, the practice of line-by-line coding seemed to help me connect myself with participants’ spiritual worlds more closely. As a researcher who held my own experiences and perceptions related to spirituality, I kept open-minded by being receptive to participants’ ideas. To clearly distinguish the spiritual experiences and perceptions of myself from the participants, the data was compared with my experiences, and reflective memos on the difference between us were prepared (Appendix I).

Examples of some initial codes from one of the participant’s data analyses were “felt being connected to God”, “consistent in expressing self”, “being resilient”, and “felt Bible reading

and prayer helpful”. One of these open codes, “consistent in expressing self” represented participant’s feeling of how believing in God influenced her actions in the teaching context. The initial codes developed through line-by-line coding were compared and double checked with the interview transcript to ensure the codes captured exactly what participants had said. Most initial codes used participants’ own terminologies to explain their understanding of the phenomena.

Several codes emerged from an interviewee’s initial coding, and that was compared across other interviewees’ data and their line-by-line codes. This comparison helped explore similarities and differences between participants’ perceptions and experiences and found gaps in the data. To fill the gap, theoretical sampling was an important grounded theory strategy integrated during the data analysis. Charmaz (2006) defined theoretical sampling as “seeking and collecting pertinent data to elaborate and refine categories in the emerging theory” (p.192). As I understood spirituality as a deeply individual experience, I returned to the same participants whose interview data seemed inadequate in answering questions that emerged during data analysis.

The second phase of the grounded theory analysis was “focused coding”. During this phase, I selected the most frequent initial codes which were significant in summarising the data completely (Charmaz, 2006). Meaningful sub-categories were developed through focused coding and that marked the beginning of early theoretical analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Diagrams such as maps and figures were used to draw the relationships between the sub-categories that emerged through focused coding. Birks and Mills (2015) noted that this technique could be beneficial for the researcher to check for theoretical saturation.

The final phase of the grounded theory analysis was theoretical coding. In this phase, I have analysed the relationships between the categories that emerged through focused coding (Charmaz, 2006). Memos written during the data collection and the initial stages of data

analysis and the constant comparison of codes and categories throughout the data analysis process seemed beneficial in presenting the findings as storylines.

## **Chapter Four: Findings - Spirituality and Social Work Teaching**

### **Spirituality and Social Work Teaching**

This chapter presents the stories of social work teachers, which were selected based on the significant themes that emerged during the data analysis process. This chapter begins by presenting beliefs that provided social work teachers with a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives, and it continues by demonstrating the influence of beliefs on teaching. Under the category “examined beliefs”, I present social work teachers’ ways of analysing their connections with the numinous, the presence of divine power and how they relate it to social work teaching and addressing spirituality in their classrooms. This is followed by presenting how unexamined beliefs and values can affect teaching philosophies, leading to misuse of power. In the second section, I present a social work teacher’s story of how belief in the universe affected teaching philosophy and the story of bringing indigenous ways of learning into teaching.

### **Meaning and Purpose**

Social work teachers who participated in the study experienced meaning and purpose differently. These are presented under five sub-categories: Christian faith, transformed beliefs, social work, family and nature and a wider sense of belonging.

#### ***Christian Faith***

Christian faith, irrespective of denominational difference gives some social work teachers a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives and considerably shapes their practice. Catherin believes God loves humans and intends to have stable relationships with them. Therefore, he came in the form of man, Jesus Christ. She called him the son of God and said that the son walked through the world in the form of the holy spirit. She indicated that faith meant her

acceptance and love towards Jesus Christ in these three forms (father, son, and the holy spirit). Catherin understood that viewing the Christian faith as the source of love, hope, guidance, and strength gave her a sense of meaning and purpose in adverse circumstances.

My faith in Jesus Christ is my absolute guiding purpose in life. So, it motivates me, keeps me on track, and strengthens me; that is probably a big part of it. I lived long enough to know God is good, and I could not go through some of life's stuff without his support. I looked back at tough times to know good came out of them, and I am aware of his voice, kind of leading, guiding, and direction; probably in the most challenging times, I felt his presence was most valuable. I am in daily conversation with the Lord, and I am aware of his voice in my heart, which helps guide my everyday activities and decisions, from minor to big things (L. Catherin, personal communication, August 18, 2018).

Prayer is the spiritual practice that helped Catherin experience numinous and spirituality. Catherin interpreted prayer as an everyday silent conversation between her and God, which differs from ordinary conversations with people. She asked for the advice of God in adverse circumstances through prayer, and she felt that through prayer, God provided her with the strength and guidance to deal with the challenges even though the voice of God was not audible to her. The following quote presents how Catherin described prayer influenced her everyday life.

I am just trying to find a word for it. It is not an audible voice. It is a sense of something. So, I would often ask for God's advice on how I would do about this, and I am aware of a sense of direction after it. For example, if there is a difficulty while working with the computer, I would say, I do not know; some virus or software is causing these problems. I will pray about it, walk away, come back,

and have a sense of moving forward. I will be aware of it in the relationship.

Sometimes, we have to deal with difficult conversations with people, and I know that he gives me wisdom beyond myself. Because I have probably not thought about that, it is an ongoing silent conversation, a sense of direction (L. Catherin, personal communication, August 18, 2018).

Like Catherin, Daniel experienced personal spirituality through his connection with the numinous. Christian faith also influences his everyday life through prayer and reading scriptures. Daniel also indicated that prayer intends to “ask for the guidance of God” and “thank God for protecting him and family”. His experience of prayer helped him overcome challenges.

You cannot see God. If you are having a problem and you pray, even though you cannot see him, he will help you if you believe. Many of my issues have been eliminated or alleviated, not immediately, but over time, financial, social, whatever the problems are. That is how I know he is here, and he is around (A. Daniel, personal communication, January 12, 2019).

Daniel’s emphasis on prayer as an effective strategy to seek help from God resonates with Catherin and many of the participants’ experiences. Daniel’s construction of meaning and purpose in life was based on God’s action of sending his Son, Jesus Christ, to the earth as the mediator between God and human beings. The way Jesus Christ lived on the planet influenced his thoughts, teachings, and social work practice. “I see God as the creator and as the father. I see God as powerful above all others, and he has a huge influence on my thinking, behaviour, and interactions with people” (A. Daniel, personal communication, January 12, 2019). Daniel was more self-referential as he indicated that the meaning and

purpose of his life was to ensure equality by supporting equity and diversity for clients and being the best version of himself but with a final purpose of accessing eternal life.

I guess the purpose of life for me is about treating everybody as you would like to be treated, which is harmonious and equal. It is also about living a life where you know you are trying to be your best. So, I think life is also about we are here for a reason, and some of these reasons are about being good, and some of these reasons are about helping others. But there is another life after this as well. So, I think here, you work hard and be good to people, but at the same time, there is another life after that, so I guess the other part of the purpose of life is to gain access to that other life after you have done this life on earth. (A. Daniel, personal communication, January 12, 2019)

Charlie specified that belief in the second coming of Jesus Christ provided meaning and purpose to his life. Charlie indicated that Jesus Christ is the true God. Christian faith and belief in the second coming of Jesus Christ motivated him to do worthwhile actions in front of God to avoid getting punished for doing wrong actions when Jesus comes back to the Earth. According to Charlie, Jesus Christ will return from heaven to the Earth to prevent more sins to be committed by humans. Christian faith taught him that Jesus Christ is the only one who can save human beings from sin. Charlie believes he will be punished if his actions are not worthwhile, which resonates with Daniel's sense of accessing eternal life as another aspect of his life's meaning and purpose. However, Charlie did not link the meaning and purpose of his life with ensuring equity and respecting diversity. The following quote describes how Charlie explained the meaning and purpose of his life.

Christians believed that he would come back one day. Therefore, what gives me meaning and purpose is that my life made sense because of the coming of Jesus

Christ to prevent sins. It encompasses every aspect of my life. So, I do not compartmentalize my life. So, my life at university, my life with students, my life in teaching, my research life, my family, my marriage, my children, and everything is part of the Kingdom of God. So, from that point of view, it is holistic, profound, and meaningful. (F. Charlie, personal communication, August 9, 2018)

This quote indicates that belief in the second coming of Jesus Christ is inseparable from various aspects of Charlie's life, such as teaching, research, and family life. As he understood, life is an integral part of the kingdom of God, and this belief is inseparable from social work teaching and research. This reflects that the professional context of social work teaching and the personal context of faith are not examined separately while constructing meaning and purpose. I wonder how this manifest when working with students whose beliefs may differ. Does the belief in a judgmental God transfer to judging those with different beliefs? I explored that in the section, "Influence of beliefs on social work teaching" on page 90.

Philip did not view God as a punishment giver and did not construct the meaning and purpose of his life out of any belief, such as the second coming of Jesus Christ and his punishment, as Charlie did. He understood God as loving, compassionate, and generous. His faith in being created in the image of God, and the moral teachings of Jesus Christ, such as loving neighbours like himself, provided meaning and purpose to Philip's life.

I would come from a perspective of Christian faith understanding, particularly driving a sense of personal value. I guess the idea of being created in the image of God and being valuable and that sort of thinking is still significant for me. I think that my motivation for getting into social work comes from the idea of loving

your neighbours as yourself and caring for people, which drives me in this sort of area of work. (M. Philip, personal communication, August 25, 2018)

Philip used the creation story of human beings in Genesis to understand himself as different from other creatures. According to him, as he is created in the image of God, he is a living soul blessed with the capacity to love, interact with one another, and help marginalized people.

Many social work teachers who held the Christian faith understood spirituality as experiencing the numinous. However, they interpreted the meaning and purpose of their lives differently. Some participants provided precedence to viewing God as the source of love, compassion, and generosity while finding meaning and purpose in their lives. Others viewed God as a judge and expressed the fear of being punished by God for doing wrong actions in their everyday lives. Despite faith, social work practice can also impact teachers in reconstructing a sense of meaning and purpose. The following section describes a social work teacher's experience of how social work practice transformed his faith to rebuild a sense of meaning and purpose in his life.

### ***Transformed Beliefs***

One social work teacher transformed his beliefs by being influenced by social work practice, and that provided him with a sense of meaning and purpose. The influence of social work practice presented challenges to Tony's faith. Tony grew up with conservative Christian beliefs, and held a "realist view of God", which meant that one true God exists, Jesus Christ. He understood that Jesus Christ would punish people who do not believe in the Bible and whose actions would not reflect the moral standards of religion. He perceived spirituality as experiencing numinous and believed in the second coming of Jesus Christ, which is also like

Charlie, who held a conservative Christian faith. In contrast to Charlie, Tony changed his conservative Christian beliefs.

Tony identified that his belief in one real God could conflict with Māori spiritual beliefs about the existence of multiple Gods while practising social work. Because Māori spiritual beliefs are comprised of their belief in multiple Gods, spirits and life forces embedded in the living things. To align with Māori spirituality, Tony adopted a progressive Christian faith. The following quote presents how Tony described what provides his life meaning and purpose.

This is part of my interest in religion and spirituality. I have done a Bachelor of Divinity degree, and a few years later, I did social work and some practice. So, I am very interested in having a look at it. So partly where it has taken me is a type of faith and theology and interest that could be sometimes called progressive Christianity or progressive theology, which is less about a realist view of God and faith and far more in a sense of a human centred view of faith and religion. So, I am far more interested in a broader sense of spirituality, which I think aligns very well with, for example, Māori spirituality, just accepting it is there, it is broad-based, you may give some names, space, and time, but a lot of them remained unnamed, and you will leave it at a general level. (F. Tony, personal communication, September 13, 2018)

Progressive Christian faith affected Tony's perceptions of Jesus Christ. He began to view Jesus Christ as a human role model for him to pursue social justice. He shifted from a God-centred approach to a person-centred one, and his understanding of spirituality broadened. It seems that the transformation from conservative Christian beliefs to progressive Christian beliefs allowed Tony to integrate a social work perspective of person-centredness, which broadened his view of spirituality and strengthened cultural respectfulness in practice.

The integration of cultural respectfulness into one's construction of meaning and purpose is significant in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand because Aotearoa New Zealand is a multi-cultural country deeply rooted in bicultural understandings based on a partnership document between its indigenous people, the Māori, and the British colonisers. Cultural competence is an essential requirement to practise social work in such a social context. Social work practitioners would need to acknowledge spirituality as an important factor in the lives of the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The following quote explains how Tony defines his social-constructivist view of spirituality.

I would say recognising the world of the spirit in other people and the world, including in the physical world, and I also have a view of us as people seeing me as a person active in producing or being part of that spiritual world. There is a sense of co-creating that, I guess, which partly may be the sociological influence of constructing things, the social construction of reality. I am interested in that this is where we are at this moment, that there is a sense of spirituality which certainly connects us, a sense of connectedness is important, a sense of wanting to nurture and look after life and life on our planet, and values of love, connectedness with people are very important, and also at the end coming back to my view of theology, doing something very important to us. (F. Tony, personal communication, September 13, 218)

Tony viewed spirituality as a sense of building connections with others. It confirms that a social constructivist learning mode is added to his teaching. "Connecting with people on a spiritual level" indicates Tony's social constructivist understanding of spirituality. The

following quote illustrates how Tony's social-constructivist view of theology influenced him to be culturally and spiritually open to the people.

I am less concerned about a realist view of God; I am much more interested in a type of spirituality where I do less thinking. I do more by being open to people around the world, developing self-awareness, and trying to reduce my own filling of space. (F. Tony, personal communication, September 13, 2018)

Tony's experience of transforming beliefs increased his confidence in demonstrating cultural openness and respect while teaching students from diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds. The findings suggest that understanding the relevance of spirituality within the social work practice context and feeling a sense of connectedness with people can encourage teachers to think critically about the impact of faith on teaching social work. Therefore, it appears that transforming beliefs can help social work teachers and practitioners purposefully unlearn religious beliefs they feel are conflicting and adopt new beliefs and practices that harmonise with social work values.

### ***Social Work***

Some social work teachers realized that doing social work was the meaning and purpose of their lives. Christian faith can often motivate social work teachers to view teaching social work as part of fulfilling that meaning and purpose. Amelia and Kelsey believe that God created human beings as unique and supposed to achieve different purposes. Their construction of meaning and purpose included their social work practice. Amelia posits that she selected the social work profession because of her authentic desire to help people, which aligns well with her belief in God. The following quote describes Amelia's response to what gives her life a sense of meaning and purpose:

I am a person I do believe in God. So, I do believe that if you are born in this world, you do have some responsibility, or your life has got some purpose. I started to think about the meaning of life when I was around eighteen or nineteen, and that is where I began to search for what I would like to do with my life. There were many questions, and I started to research. I could see I used to read some books, and I found I needed to utilize my life in more meaningfully. So, do something good for others. You have only one life. So, that is one of the reasons why I have taken social work, even though I had options to do another job. (S. Amelia, personal communication, September 29, 2018)

Amelia found doing social work a meaningful way of utilizing life. Amelia used prayer to maintain a better relationship with the numinous, revealing that devotion is an essential source of strength.

If I am down and I pray or reflect on the situation, I may get an inner feeling, or strength or someone is talking inside, like telling me, do not worry, Amelia. I consider this as God's voice. I always get it, even though it is sometimes in the same voice as me. (S. Amelia, personal communication, September 29, 2018)

Amelia feels that involvement in spiritual practices such as prayer can strengthen her in overcoming difficult situations, which resonates with Catherin's experience of getting strength out of faith-based practices such as prayers. In comparison, Kelsey said being a social worker and a spiritual person provided meaning and purpose to her life. The following quote describes Kelsey's answer to the question of what gives a sense of meaning and purpose to her life:

That is not an easy question to answer. Meaning and purpose. What makes my life purposeful is having goals, knowing that I am moving in a specific direction, having a vision, and believing that every person is different. Every person will find his or her unique purpose in this world. As social workers, we all desire to change the world to make it a better place. But that also as not only as a social worker adds meaning, but also to make me as a spiritual person, I think that connects well with that kind of dream or philosophy of wanting to make the world a better place, not only as a social worker but also as a spiritual person. In my personal life, I want to see good expands, wish to have the best outcome for people, and want to influence so that they can change. (T. Kelsey, personal communication, October 2, 2018)

Kelsey's rationale for being a social worker, "to change the world to be a better place for human beings to live", resonates with Amelia's rationale of doing social work to help people. Kelsey interpreted doing social work as the process of assisting people in finding meaning and purpose in their lives and developing specific outcomes that are coherent with their vision. She posits that bringing spirituality into social work practice is crucial for her to become an effective social worker and experience meaning and purpose to a fuller extent.

Participants viewed social work as a meaningful profession as it can provide them with various opportunities to help people. They understood social work as a profession where they can use intrinsic sources of motivation and religious and spiritual beliefs to create better contexts for people.

### ***Family***

Some participants expressed that family provides them with a sense of meaning and purpose. For example, Mathew's father died when he was ten years old. Since then, he has

considered protecting his family members and enhancing their well-being as an essential part of his role and responsibility during childhood and adulthood. Therefore, he perceives that the purpose of his life is to take care of his family.

My personal belief is that I always believe in the family first. So that is the purpose of my life, looking after my family and keeping the attachment with the family. I am very family-centered and believe that family well-being is important.

(G. Mathew, personal communication, October 2, 2018)

Mathew differs from many social work teachers who perceive the Christian faith as the source of the meaning and purpose in their lives. Even though he used to go to church every Sunday, he did not consider himself religious and mentioned that he got religious identity and beliefs as part of his culture. Mathew did not experience any deeper personal relationship with God daily, even though he acknowledged Jesus Christ as God. The following quote illustrates this.

I think the connection with God depends on my interpretation of the situation.

Yes, to be honest, as a human being, I believe every human being is a selfish one.

So, if my life is okay, I do not think about that kind of connection with my God and myself because my life is good. But I may try to find that connection between God and myself I have trouble or hardship. That is my belief, and, I do not have a specific experience of connection with God. What I believe is that no matter what happens to me, I will go to my Jesus. So, I believe in Jesus, even though I have no specific experience with him. If something happens to me, maybe he will help me to overcome the trouble. (G. Mathew, personal communication, October 4, 2018)

One might read Mathew's quote above as opposing those who reported experiencing meaning and purpose in their lives by maintaining an everyday connection with God and self through the Christian faith. Even though Mathew indicated himself as not religious, it does not mean he has no belief in God, or he did not ask God for help. Embedded here is almost experiencing a sense of freedom in connecting with God, as Mathew's perceptions did not involve the idea of being judged or rejected by God if he did not maintain daily connections with God.

While Mathew shaped the sense of meaning and purpose in life using his desire to protect the family, Moana identified that the meaning and purpose of her life is to build a legacy for her grandchildren.

I guess, this question, it is around future generations for me. So, I have four grandchildren or mokopuna, and they are my guiding light in terms of how I want to leave a legacy for them to carry on. (P. Moana, personal communication, October 14, 2018)

The following quote describes Moana's response to how her sense of meaning and purpose, "building a legacy for her grandchildren", guided her life.

Everything that I have done in terms of my work, how I present myself in public, my own personal values at home, and how I interact are all role modelling. Role modelling for my mokopuna, my grandchildren, role modelling for my son, and yeah, looking towards what it is they can see that I am doing that they can also take into their lives. (P. Moana, personal communication, personal communication October 14, 2018)

Meaning and purpose guided Moana to become a role model for her family. Grandparents and parents can be powerful role models in a person's life. She can effectively enhance her grandchildren's social and emotional well-being by being a social work teacher and a role model for her family, including children and grandchildren. Mathew and Moana differ as they have different stories about how they find meaning and purpose in their lives. Their cases indicate the uniqueness of individuals within similar sub-categories.

### *Nature and a Wider Sense of Belonging*

Connection with nature and a wider sense of belonging gave Julia a sense of meaning and purpose in her life. She lives with her family in a wooden dwelling and has a spacious garden covered by big trees that produce fruits and nuts.

I think daily what gives me a sense of meaning and purpose is the connection to the family. Of course, they are all around me, past, present, and hopefully future, and nature. I wake up every morning and look at my pear tree and avocado tree through my window. Listening to the birds, the buzz of people waking up, and stuff that helps me get out of bed and connects me to my social work practice which is about making connections. (M. Julia, personal communication, October 10, 2018)

Cultivating relationships with family and nature motivated Julia to relate it to social work practice. "Connections with nature and family affects the expectations and the gratitude that I have for being. So, it affects my mood, my attitude, and my expectations" (Julia, social work teacher). It seems that connection with nature and family helped her connect with herself and strengthen her relationships with others by bringing an attitude of gratitude into her social worker role.

Julia's interpretation of the meaning and purpose meant that nature and family could significantly motivate social work practitioners to reconnect with their roles. The experience of belonging to family and nature is essential for this participant to make herself feel connected with social work as this can provide creativity and happiness to teach social work. The following section focuses on how social work teachers' beliefs influenced them in teaching social work.

### **Influence of Beliefs on Social Work Teaching**

Social work teachers' beliefs shaped their everyday lives and social work teachings. They differed in beliefs and personal values and how they connected them with social work. Their teaching philosophies varied and were coherent with their values and beliefs. Some social work teachers examined and modified their values to align themselves with social work values and principles, while a few social work teachers taught under unexamined beliefs and unmodified values. In this section, the storylines describe how teachers' faith manifests in the classroom. The storylines are presented under two main categories, examined beliefs and unexamined beliefs.

#### **Examined Beliefs**

##### **Personal Connection with the Numinous**

Many social work teachers experienced personal connections with God. They used various religious beliefs and practices to connect them with their daily experience of spirituality and social work teaching. Their examination of how meaning and purpose influenced their wellbeing affected their views about integrating spirituality into teaching and social work practice with clients, which determined their teaching philosophies. The following section

describes how the personal connections with numinous influences social work teachers' teachings, emphasizing their self-awareness.

### *Being Spiritual in the Teaching Context*

Belief in God influenced some social work teachers to understand themselves as spiritual beings, which affected how they relate to students in the teaching and learning context. Two social work teachers, Kelsey, and Catherin perceived themselves as spiritual beings. Kelsey expressed that being a spiritual person is one of the main aspects of what gives her a sense of meaning and purpose in life and linked it with building connections with students through social work teaching through her sense of being a spiritual being. Catherin elucidated the Christian faith as the source of meaning and purpose in life and merged that with teaching spirituality by being spiritual in the teaching and learning context. While Kelsey applied spirituality as a being, Catherin applied it as a saying, that is implicit versus explicit. Even though personal connections with numinous are a vital part of their understanding of themselves as being spiritual in the teaching and learning context, they differ in terms of how being spiritual manifests in the teaching. This storyline describes Kelsey's and Catherin's understandings of themselves as being spiritual and how that awareness shaped their teaching philosophies.

Kelsey believes God dwells in her heart and that his presence is always with her, which shaped her understanding of who she is and her teaching philosophy. The following excerpt describes how Kelsey's belief that God dwells within her heart influenced her in teaching social work.

I believe I carry light, joy, kindness, peace, love, and compassion. In doing that, that is where I see how Jesus lived. So, I go into my classroom to connect with people, make the environment friendly for them, and be uplifting. The intention

of my heart is not necessarily to say things like, hi guys, Jesus loves you. I am not going to do that. That is not me. I am not into religious activities. I am into being present, being who I am, and just carrying whatever God is in me. I apply that. It is not a saying. It is more like a being. (T. Kelsey, personal communication, October 2, 2018)

Experiencing God's presence in her heart made Kelsey perceive herself as a spiritual being, which meant she owns personal values, including the lightness of being, love, joy, kindness, peace, and compassion. Being a spiritual person influenced her to build connections with people and be present in the teaching and learning environment. Being spiritual is an implicit practice, which connected Kelsey back with her knowledge of how Jesus Christ lived. Kelsey aligned her spiritual values implicitly with the social work value of giving importance to human relationships. It is noticeable that when Kelsey identifies herself as a spiritual person, she does not show openness to state her religious beliefs in front of students explicitly. Kelsey knows that discussing the influence of religion on her teaching is tricky while teaching students practical ways to build relationships with clients. Kelsey thought students might misinterpret that she was imposing dogma on them. Catherin had a different view saying that discussing religious beliefs is not an example of imposing dogma on students as long as the teacher acknowledges her views and asks students' permission to talk about spirituality.

Catherin interpreted her understanding of 'being spiritual' as having a personal relationship with God and being religious. Being spiritual influenced Catherin to talk about faith while teaching assessment processes in the classroom. Catherin believes that personal faith is influential in seeking the permission of students to talk about her experience of having a relationship with God, which made her spiritual in the classroom context. In the following

quote, Catherin linked faith and social work teaching when she was asked to explain how the Christian faith affected her in teaching students from different religious backgrounds:

I think faith gives some permission to be spiritual. Because I have faith and the way I teach them, ask them, how is that for you and provide some examples of spirituality and faith. It gives some permission to be open. It was a 'no no' when I was in social work. You did not talk about faith or religion; it was not right. So, a whole area of people's lives was never revealed. Possibly, because I thought it would cause problems and disagreements. But I believe that we live in such a diverse society that to understand people, you have to understand their belief in God. We tend to think in a tiny western bubble, humanistic or whatever. If you look at the whole world, more people may not believe in God. So, it gives people permission to be spiritual and understand that their clients' needs will be spiritual. If you cannot consider yourself as spiritual, you cannot get what is important in other people's lives. (L. Catherin, personal communication, August 18, 2018)

Being spiritual provided Catherin the personal perspective to encourage students to examine their spiritual experiences and to explore their clients' spirituality. It seems that Catherin expects her students would explore their clients' belief in God when they become social work practitioners, and they will also learn how to accept people who have no belief in God if they were provided with the opportunity to reflect on their faith in the classroom. Thus, being spiritual influenced her perceptions in two ways. Firstly, she found herself competent to listen to her students' experiences of spirituality and faith. Secondly, by being spiritual, Catherin transfers her open-mindedness to students to address their clients' faith and belief in God. Students can learn how Catherin uses her faith to seek their permission to talk about spirituality, reflect on and share her story, and show openness and respect while

listening to them. “By teaching spirituality stuff, I am hopeful that I have made way for clients to talk about spirituality by encouraging a whole bunch of students to ask faith-related questions” (L. Catherin, personal communication, August 18, 2018)

Kelsey and Catherin have in common the belief that God is an essential source of love for them and found love as a personal value. While Catherin aligned love with the social work value of unconditional positive regard, Kelsey indicated she aligned it with the value of human relationships. Acceptance and the value of human relationships manifested differently in building effective relationships with students. The following storyline describes how Kelsey’s understanding of herself as spiritual influenced her to modify personal values to construct a teaching philosophy to address cultural diversity and spirituality.

### ***Modifying Personal Value System***

Belief in God and being a spiritual person influenced Kelsey to modify her value system to relate to students’ faith. As Kelsey’s sense of meaning and purpose also involved viewing herself as being a social worker, she critically analysed what is important in the social work practice context of Aotearoa New Zealand when addressing students’ faith. She found that cultural diversity and people’s right to self-determination are essential in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. As part of her role as a social work teacher, Kelsey added two principles into her spiritual value system to avoid the danger of imposing dogma on her students. They are “linking people’s faith with social work” and “knowing that herself was not going to force what she believes on anybody”. These principles helped Kelsey align her values with the social worker’s values, dignity and worth of the person.

I am a Christian. Sometimes, it just adds to me in words. In the New Zealand context, many people may not identify with Christianity, but, for me, Christianity is not a religion. It is a lifestyle. For many people, it is like a structure. For me,

Christianity is that I have a relationship with God and connect to the holy spirit. I go to God for wisdom and strength for everything that I do, which guides my value system. It does not mean that I am a perfect person and not making mistakes. But that I aspire to continue to grow and develop in that way. As part of the value system, I also recognise that there are a variety of views about other religions. Still, in my life, known many people from various religious backgrounds and realising that everybody has something precious to them in their beliefs. I am linking that with social work to bring into my value system. Together with that, knowing that I am not going to force what I believe on anybody, as a social worker, I respect every person's right to believe what they want to believe and work with that. (T. Kelsey, personal communication, October 2, 2018)

Kelsey understood that different students might follow different religious and spiritual beliefs to pursue self-development. Therefore, she must create a classroom environment where students feel their diverse views are valued. It is clear from the above quote that by linking people's faith with social work, Kelsey intends to acknowledge cultural diversity and people's right to self-determination. Even though Kelsey implicitly applied faith and personal spiritual values to build connections with students, she was more cautious about preventing students from perceiving herself as a religious person.

A social worker's primary commitment is to their clients. Hence, as a social work teacher, she would need to teach students to prioritize valuing their clients' religious and spiritual beliefs over their beliefs. Hence, the inclusion of the principle, being aware of herself not imposing religious and spiritual beliefs onto students, into her value system is intended to prevent the teacher-student contradiction on a sensitive topic such as spirituality and religion. Kelsey used her social work experience to increase her knowledge of different cultures to

broaden her understanding of spirituality. “Spirituality has very much to do with your experience, who you are as a person and what you carry, and how you present yourself to people” (Kelsey, social work teacher). It is clear from this quote that Kelsey’s broadened understanding of spirituality included self-reflection on different ways of applying self-awareness, values, and experiences to social work to establish a connection with people in a social worker context. Her original understanding of spirituality was based on her relationship with God and religious teachings.

Kelsey’s way of addressing cultural diversity involved a thorough analysis of personal values and beliefs. As personal values and beliefs can be underlying causes of conflict, which can block building authentic relationships with students, it seems crucial for social work teachers to look at how they avoid explicitly or implicitly imposing their values and beliefs on their students. Kelsey’s quote provides insight into a newer way of expanding the personal value system through integrating ethical principles, which can help address the religious and spiritual diversity and student’s and clients’ right to self-determination. The following storyline examines how being a spiritual person shaped Kelsey’s teaching philosophy.

### **Influence of Being Spiritual on Teaching Philosophy**

Social work teachers’ understandings of themselves as spiritual beings influenced them to help students integrate spirituality into social work practice by enhancing students’ reflexivity. They used different teaching methods to connect students’ sense of meaning and purpose of their lives and values with social work. Kelsey encouraged students to reflect on their spiritual beliefs and motivated students to integrate a spiritual perspective into their social work practice. She linked that with showing empathy and respect to diverse beliefs and values. While teaching students about social work models and theories, she taught them the importance of assessing clients’ spirituality. By allowing students to be reflexive, Kelsey

helps students from multiple cultural identities explore who they are and develop valuable connections with themselves involved in the social work profession and educates them on how to step into their client's worlds by showing them deep empathy and respect.

In New Zealand, the bicultural practice and the indigenous theories allow us to incorporate a spiritual perspective. So, when we are teaching the theories. I will go into that as well. Talking about spirituality, when you are assessing a patient or a client and teaching the students that, you need to go into this area as well. Even if you are not a believer, you can still have empathy or respect, and you need to go into that area. Because it might not be meaningful to you, but to that person, it is very important. You need to step into that world because that is important to them. So that is what I would convey in a teaching environment. (T. Kelsey, personal communication, October 2, 2018).

Kelsey's use of spiritual beliefs to connect herself with building relationships with students affected her teaching philosophy. She has given students assignments on reflecting on their spiritual experiences in real life by telling them in advance that the purpose of the exercise was to explore who they are and how they can make connections between themselves and clients. The following quote explains how Kelsey integrated her priority of "linking people's faith with social work" into teaching while giving students feedback on their assignments related to reflecting on spirituality.

Coming across the assignments of students, what I have seen in their feedback was that when they reflect on spirituality, it is not only about religion, not many of them are Christians or believing in anything, [but] everybody believes in something, even if it is a value system, so that is the kind of things they connect to or make it relevant to whatever they are working with. It encourages them to

find that point to connect, whatever they have, they can find that connecting point with the other person. Because it is about connections, whakawhanaungatanga with the other person in front of them. Teaching about themselves, trying to expand what they are thinking and reflecting on to help them broaden their understanding. (T. Kelsey, social work teacher, personal communication, October 2, 2018)

It is clear from this quote that Kelsey provides students space for self-determination, which is one of the essential social work values. She showed openness in helping students integrate diverse religious as well as non-religious spiritual beliefs and value systems. Therefore, it seems that how Kelsey acts in practice is coherent with her beliefs and values.

Kelsey's sense of meaning and purpose by being a spiritual person and a social worker helped her identify values and beliefs separately within the personal spiritual and professional social work dimensions. Kelsey's understanding of spirituality as the process of identifying and presenting self to different people aligns with her action in the teaching context, encouraging students to explore how they connect to the other person and how she relates herself in integrating whakawhanaungatanga or building relationships. In Catherin's social work teaching, her sense of meaning and purpose, understanding Christian faith as the source of guidance, hope, and strength influenced her to address faith as the source of creativity, wisdom, and well-being. The following section describes how Catherin addressed spirituality in her social work teaching.

### ***Faith as the Source of Creativity and Self-Care***

Social work teachers' examination of faith as an effective strategy to expand their creativity and enthusiasm affected their teaching philosophy. For example, Catherin's understanding of God as the creator influenced her implicitly in preparing teaching materials.

The following quote presents how Catherin felt her spiritual practice, the prayer, increased her creativity and well-being in teaching social work.

For me, probably that I pray a lot about preparing materials. I am not just talking about spiritual materials. I am talking about how to communicate concepts in a way that tries to get close to people and practicum. So practical, ethical stuff, practice skills, looking for inspiration, how do I rather deliver something with more interest. Therefore, I guess it affects me because I am constantly asking for the wisdom of creativity, and I believe God is the creator, and the important aspect is the creator force. Therefore, it makes sense that he would help me with this. It is interesting. I think God is interested in me. He is interested in everybody. However, I have that powerful sense of a personal relationship. (L. Catherin, personal communication, August 18, 2018)

As she applied prayer as an effective method to seek wisdom and guidance while engaging in complex topic preparation tasks, it is apparent that faith is an intrinsic source of motivation and hope for her to be creative and enthusiastic in teaching social work. It seems to be coherent with Catherin's sense of meaning and purpose, which can be permeated through professional roles and responsibilities. The following quote presents how Catherin responded to whether having a belief in God influenced her way of teaching social work.

Yes, it does. I cannot divorce my faith and beliefs from who I am as it is absorbed in me and how I teach is how I am, and I hope it is consistent. So, it is consistent with how I am as a social worker, how I am as a mother, how I am as a daughter, and how I am as a sister. You know I am not different just because I am teaching or just because I am doing social work. I hope I can be the same love and

acceptance to people that I do, wherever I am. So, that way, it influences how I am. (L. Catherin, personal communication, August 18, 2018)

Catherin acknowledged that she has different roles, such as mother, daughter, sister, and social work educator. She viewed faith as an essential source of her well-being across different roles involving mother, sister, daughter, and social work educator. Faith influenced Catherin to view personal experience and beliefs as meaningful in expressing love and acceptance to her social work students. Catherin's experience of God as a source of love and that the wisdom of God guides her seemed to be consistent in expressing love and acceptance across all the different roles she holds. The following quote presents Catherin's answer to how love and acceptance impacted her social work teaching.

I am making time for people, and I am approachable. I am trying to pick up on people that I know. I can see if something is wrong going on in their lives. I have a pastoral heart, and I am interested in their lives and care about them. We are doing a lot of interviewing for placements, and there are often hard conversations. I encourage some people to take some time off because they are going through such challenging times and would not cope with placement. They looked at the more challenging parts of the conversation, they will come back a year later much stronger, and they can cope with what they are going through. That has been very satisfactory. I guess I am trying to be consistent with what I believe about who I am and how I am with them, I mean, with anybody, does not matter students/clients/ someone running into the outside. (L. Catherin, personal communication, August 18, 2018)

It is clear from this quote that Catherin's love and caring impacted her teaching. She accepts her students as whole beings and integrates strategies for maintaining their well-

being. “Making time for students and being approachable”, “keeping a pastoral heart”, “care about students”, “listening to students’ problems”, and “allowing students to take time off before starting social work placements” were some of the strategies Catherin employed to ensure their well-being in the teaching context. Catherin’s act of listening to students’ problems and allowing them to take a break from their studies would teach students how to show empathy and compassion towards their clients through social work practice. Catherin indicated that she experienced satisfaction when students effectively used the break time to resolve the issues related to personal roles and do their placements much better after taking a break.

Social work teachers encouraged students to create professional selves as social workers differently. Constructing professional selves requires students to be aware of how their way of being affects professional relationships and self-care. Catherin’s teaching method included instructing students to design a self-care plan as an essential part of their learning contract for placement, and they were asked to explore their values, assumptions, beliefs, and self-care strategies. The self-care plan is partly drawn from the indigenous Māori model of health and well-being, the Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1998). Catherin’s students would need to look at four aspects of their health: physical, spiritual, family, and mental health. According to Catherin, preparing a self-care plan during placements motivates students to look at themselves as whole beings, stay connected to family and build resilience in their social work roles.

Social work teachers’ experience of faith as the source of creativity and wisdom may influence them to address spirituality as a self-care strategy for students. The interpretation of findings derived from Catherin’s data highlighted that faith is an intrinsic motivator, which could influence social work teachers to express love, acceptance and caring to students in the teaching and learning context and assist students with developing self-care strategies. The

following section describes how faith influenced social work teachers' perceptions about setting boundaries.

### **Setting Boundaries**

Christian faith inspired some social work teachers to perceive God as the decisive authority they can trust, pray to, and get advice when encountering various problems. They were involved in faith-based youth mentoring programs, which gave them the courage to get into the social work profession. However, participants developed different personal values from faith-based knowledge and related to social work values differently. While some participants aligned personal values with the social work value of respecting the dignity and worth of individuals to build effective boundaries, others aligned personal values with social justice. The following storylines describe how social work teachers' examination of faith influenced them to align themselves with social work and view setting boundaries as a vital part of their teaching philosophy.

#### ***Respecting the Value of the Dignity of Students***

Some social work teachers believe their primary responsibility is to be open to learning social work students' values and accept them as strengths rather than focusing on themselves, highlighting their values and strengths. As they came into social work being inspired by the Christian faith, they viewed personalization of faith and setting boundaries as essential in a teaching and learning context. The following quote describes Amelia's response to how faith influenced her to get into social work.

When I became a youth, I got stronger because I was part of Jesus Youth. That is where I picked up my training, encouraging young people. So, that is where I identified I could talk to or motivate people. Once I moved on to my Master of

Social Work degree, I realized that is one of my strengths and personal mentoring, which I got from religion. I would say religion influenced me to become a social worker. However, once I became a professional social worker, I learned that I should not talk about my religious values and strengths. Because you have your values, you should have a boundary because that is yours. However, when it comes to a profession, you need to be open to exploring other people's beliefs and values. So, I would say it is like a bottom up and top-down way of learning. (J. Amelia, personal communication, October 8, 2018)

It is apparent from this quote that even though Amelia is self-aware that faith was the source of intrinsic motivation for her to do a Master of Social Work, she examined how studying social work influenced her perception of understanding faith as the source of motivation. She learned from social work education that working with youth in the context of religious groups differs from practising professional social work. While working in a religious context, faith-based organizations expected her to speak about how her religious beliefs and values strengthened her. She can use her religious beliefs, values, and faith-based experiences to empower young people while working in a religious context. In a social work context, she perceives her students may not expect her to speak about religious beliefs, values, and motivational stories, which may be triggering or interpreted as an imposition. Being a social work educator influenced Amelia to differentiate her values from students' and to set clear boundaries to ensure that her values and beliefs are not imposed on students.

Amelia understood love as a personal value and compassion as a professional social worker value. Amelia used the concept of commitment to link herself with expressing personal values, including love, caring and truthfulness, and to connect herself with social work teaching. She considered expressing values to demonstrate a commitment to students,

which helped her bring more creativity into her teaching. Amelia explained how she developed commitment from religion.

Commitment, I like the concept of sacrifice. I think that I have got it from my religion. I am a person who find happiness if I sacrifice something for others or share things with others. I get a lot of happiness, and this happiness is different to different people. Some people do not feel happy if they share. I wanted to make others happy, you know sometimes, I forget my things, but if I do something for others, I feel so happy. (J. Amelia, personal communication, October 8, 2018)

Amelia used the knowledge of faith to expand personal creativity, which resonates with many participants' views. The above quote shows that Amelia's sense of sacrifice included giving up time for students and sharing knowledge, experience, and space. By linking the religious concept of sacrifice with commitment, she implicitly experiences happiness through sharing knowledge and experiences with students. Thus, faith can be a source of well-being and longevity, which motivated her to align personal values, love, caring, and truthfulness with compassion. The following quote reflects Amelia's response to how she relates commitment to compassion.

Social work needs much compassion. It is not just helping others; it is the primary thing. It empowers people. It is not giving things. It is trying to identify what is troubling them or strengthening them. I can align that concept of personal value with social work. Ok, the person is struggling, probably, I can share my experience with them, they can take some lessons from there, and that will be helpful for the person to make wise choices. You may not have the same experience as the person. It is not telling the person that I have been through the circumstances. It is like I can tell him the mistakes that I have made so that he can

avoid them. Empathy is very important. (J. Amelia, personal communication, October 8, 2018)

Amelia interpreted compassion as a core professional social worker value, and she aligned commitment with compassion. The interface between faith and her social work practice is clear because the value of compassion is central to both social work and faith. Amelia applied compassion and empathy, which helped Amelia reflect on her personal experiences to help others overcome their problems. In the above quote, it is evident that compassion provided Amelia with the curiosity to explore the lives of others. The following quote describes how Amelia responded to the question about how a personal conversation with God impacted her everyday life.

I think spirituality is sometimes very complicated. If you do not experience, you cannot share, or make other people understand. So, for example, if I am down, I would reflect on why I may feel I have an inner strength, like someone is talking inside telling me that do not worry Amelia. I consider it as God's voice. I get that positive attitude. I always get it. People who have not experienced it may interpret it as a mental health issue, but probably not. So, I get a kind of strength.

(J. Amelia, personal communication, October 8, 2018)

Even though Amelia felt herself hearing the voice of God during stressful situations and she stopped worrying, sharing personal spiritual experiences is a complicated task as she believes it is harder for students to accept it if they have not experienced it themselves. The following quote presents how Amelia responded to sharing spiritual experiences with students.

No, that is unique, and that is again coming to my professionalism and code of ethics in social work. Because as a teacher, I did practice as a social worker, so I do have that combination of both experiences. That is very personal. I start my day with prayer, and I do start my class with a prayer internally. But never ever, you know, showed it in front. But working in this institute, I can very well align with that because we start with the karakia. Because we follow Mātauranga Māori social work practice in this institute. So, I do encourage, I do have a prayer song, and I do have a karakia. I am teaching Mātauranga Māori, and I am trying to imbibe the value of tangata whenua, which aligns with my spirituality. (J. Amelia, personal communication, October 8, 2018)

Amelia implicitly integrated her spiritual beliefs into social work teaching. Amelia noticed that prayer is central to her experience of spirituality, which helped her relate to Māori culture. Amelia perceived that sharing her spiritual experiences can be an imposition of beliefs and values on students, while Catherin and Kelsey remained intentional in exploring students' spirituality in the classroom. As a non-Māori social work educator embedding Mātauranga Māori into her social work teaching, it appears that her critical reflection on the influence of her spiritual beliefs would not contradict the social worker code of ethics. When Amelia indicated she started her class with karakia, Māori incantation, invocation, and prayer, it appeared that she respected the language and spiritual beliefs of Indigenous people. Kelsey also encouraged incorporating karakia into the social work context and is open to various expressions of the numinous and not limited to her Christian lens. Moreover, the above quote indicates that spirituality implicitly affected Amelia's cross-cultural competence.

Amelia perceives cultural differences as barriers for herself to integrate spirituality into social work teaching, while Kelsey identified it as a barrier for students to integrate

spirituality into a social worker's perspective. This perception affected Amelia to view spirituality as a complex topic to teach.

It is not very easy to do and even being in a Western world. I am from an Eastern world with a collectivistic approach, and here we have an individualistic approach. Individualism, you must give more emphasis to it. You cannot impose your beliefs on your students. (J. Amelia, personal communication, October 8, 2018)

Amelia felt that explicitly stating the influence of spirituality in front of students can contradict respecting their dignity while teaching in a multi-cultural context. She believes that initiating a discussion on spirituality is not ethical in the context of social work teaching if students do not indicate their interest in having that conversation first. It contrasts with the teaching philosophy of Kelsey and Catherin, who included spirituality in their pedagogy.

To conclude, the examination of faith influenced Amelia to set effective boundaries to prevent herself from imposing beliefs and values on students. Amelia's faith implicitly influenced her in teaching social work in a multicultural context. Social work teachers' reflection on faith and how they apply it to their social work practice under their boundaries is essential learning for their students. Therefore, it appears that constructing a language that can help Amelia communicate about the influence of spirituality can significantly benefit students. The findings from the analysis of Amelia's data present some social work teachers' reluctance to use spirituality in conversations with students. Viewing spirituality only as a personal experience and not as an aspect of cross-cultural communication is a potential block to addressing spirituality. Therefore, developing a broadened understanding of spirituality is essential to address spirituality in teaching without the fear of boundary violations or impositions.

### *Social Justice*

Daniel linked his sense of meaning and purpose in his life, ensuring equity and diversity for clients, with social justice. Christian faith influenced Daniel to perceive that as a social work teacher, his primary responsibility is to develop students' conscience to uphold social justice by treating them with fairness and equitability. Daniel understood that the Christian faith influenced his thinking, behaviour, and interactions with people, and in a multi-cultural social work teaching context, he viewed setting boundaries as essential to make himself free from imposing beliefs and values on students. Daniel viewed cultural humility as an important way of sustaining social justice, which shaped his teaching philosophy. The following quote describes Daniel's response to how the Christian faith influenced his teaching.

I am always thinking about keeping boundaries, and that is important. Because I do not want to impose my value system and my beliefs. However, it is there. It is a paradigm that I teach. It is quite settled when I teach. It might be there if I am teaching around things to do with anti-discrimination, or anti-oppression or anti-marginalization. There is a little wave around treating everybody the same and that comes from my Christian background, and that is also part of my social work philosophy, in other words, social justice. Social justice and Christian philosophy are quite aligned together. So, in my delivery of it, I am quite clear that I am not there to save or convert students, I am there to teach them about, for example, how to build relationships with people, foster, cultivate, monitor, and maintain those relationships and see people equally, not exclusively and serve them equitably. (A. Daniel, personal communication, January 12, 2019)

It is clear from this quote that personal beliefs and professional values motivated Daniel to adopt a social justice-oriented approach to teaching, where the anti-oppressive practice is central. Setting boundaries prevented him from unconsciously intervening to save his students from the punishment of God. This meant that, in a social work teaching context, he viewed his social worker role as part of being an agent of advocating for social justice and social change. Daniel clearly stated that his teaching practice intends to enhance social work students' capacity to develop meaningful relationships with clients and integrated classroom exercises to develop students' cultural humility. Daniel's view of teaching students the concepts of equity and equality is coherent with his sense of meaning and purpose. The following section describes examples from his teaching practice.

Daniel indicated he integrated examples from social practice rather than adopting examples from his experience of faith-based activities to teach social justice. Christian faith influenced him to adopt an interactive teaching style that allows students to learn from each other rather than him giving traditional lectures. His interest in putting students into smaller groups, giving them activities, and encouraging them to present back to the class was inspired by his involvement in church-based group activities. Daniel felt the interactive teaching style of religious discussions within the church can be an effective strategy to help students raise their voices to be heard in the classroom. Daniel believed that he would need to set out effective boundaries to ensure that his Christian faith was not imposed on students. Faith influenced Daniel's cultural humility. The following section describes an example from Daniel's teaching practice where he set out effective boundaries for his Christian faith to teach students to practice cultural humility to advocate for social justice.

When Daniel was teaching students about promoting sexual health, he would need to inform students about the importance of safe sex and contraception. He thought bringing his Christian background and beliefs into that might prevent him from promoting contraception.

Daniel predicted his students from the Christian faith would struggle if they did not separate beliefs from social work practice. He divided students into smaller groups and assigned the groups the responsibility of discussing topics related to sexual health, such as theories of sexuality, theories of health, and social and cultural factors affecting sexual health. When one group member from the Christian faith disagreed with contraception, another student agreed. He felt his responsibility was to ensure safe sex and sexual health because he engaged with multiple sexual partners. Daniel got involved in the discussion and encouraged students to keep an open mind to what other people think and feel rather than looking at different perspectives with a conflictual point of view. Thus, it seems that his faith did not entitle him to a supremacy role, and that allowed him to be more focused on students, allow for a fruitful discussion to emerge and enable students to learn about respecting differences and being mindful of safety and consequences. He taught students that every person carries rights and values, which need to be respected by social workers, and they need to accept clients' perspectives and integrate their opinions into their social work practice than assuming themselves as experts who hold power and privilege over clients. He utilized a potential classroom conflict as an opportunity for learning and his values were practised by addressing it but not imposed.

Daniel perceived that addressing spirituality in social work education is an effective strategy to teach students to respect the dignity and worth of their clients and their right to self-determination.

I think spirituality enables students to learn the importance of not universalizing, not homogenizing people, and not putting them all under the same category. But at the same time, build relationships, understand that each one should be treated differently and communicate with respect and politely. Some students used to be aggressive. May be that is because of the way they were brought up. However, in

a social work practice context, for example, when they work with elderly clients, aggressiveness will not help them build meaningful relationships. Spirituality would help them become humble. Spirituality can also prevent the students from seeing one client as same as all the clients. It enables them to see that each client is different. (A. Daniel, personal communication, January 12, 2019)

It is apparent from this quote that Daniel perceives spirituality can make students better communicators and culturally humble in their ways of being. As expressed above, if students are aware of their spirituality, they will more likely be able to explore their clients' perspectives. There is an underlying concern that universalisation of human rights and homogenization of people can prevent social work students from developing the ability to critically analyse human rights from a cultural relativist point of view, which aligns with Daniel's indication of addressing equity within the concept of equality. Therefore, one of the rationales for Daniel to bring students' spirituality into social work teaching is to make students capable of treating their clients equitably and address cultural relativism. The following quote presents how Daniel described his values.

One of my personal values is that even though people are different, we should not worry about what makes them different or even approach them differently but treat them the same. A client in my social practice, who maybe the same age as my mum, may be the kind of same socio-economic background as my mum, she is not related to me, she is not my mum. But I would still transfer how I approach my mum and communicate with my mum or dad with the social work client. I guess, a student in the classroom who is older than me, I would perceive them as wiser, and more knowledgeable than me. So, I would treat them with a lot of respect. But I would treat all the other students also same as well regardless of

their backgrounds. My value system is pretty much described in that way, and I am connected. (A. Daniel, personal communication, January 12, 2019)

Daniel connected his value of respect with the social work value of social justice, promoting equal access for people to get fair treatment and respect. This quote demonstrates that social equality gives him a different way of thinking about incorporating humility into his social work approaches to connect with social justice. However, it seems that he makes no difference between equality and equity, which is essential for the examination of social justice and human rights. When Daniel mentioned that he is open to treating older students and their knowledge with more respect, it is apparent that he is conscious of the power differential between himself and his students. Despite this, it is also evident that Daniel's value system is not framed to oppress students or clients because of their socio-economic background or cultural differences. He believes he would need to help students build relationships and behave in non-aggressively with clients different from them regarding age, culture, ethnicity, and beliefs.

Daniel perceives that developing students' cultural humility is an essential aspect of preparing students to approach social justice from a human rights point of view. Daniel viewed enhancing cultural humility as integrating spirituality into his social work teaching. Daniel integrated a learning strategy to develop students' self-awareness and ability to reflect and make them comfortable building relationships with clients from diverse cultures. Daniel believes that if students are comfortable with themselves, they will develop more authentic and sincere relationships with their clients who may come from multiple cultural identities, empathise, and advise those with different lived experiences.

Make sure you know who you are, and that you are comfortable with who you are. If you do not know how to change your life, attitude, behaviour, and ideas

about people, then you cannot go into social work to do it to others. You can pretend. But you will be easily exposed because the clients can see whether you are authentic, genuine, or just fake, and you are just doing this to get paid, or you are ticking the box. You do not really care about them, and there is no empathy within you. (A. Daniel, personal communication, January 12, 2019)

Daniel's teaching incorporated ways to strengthen students' self-awareness. Students were asked to prepare inventories delineating their cultural identity, values, assumptions, and religious or spiritual beliefs.

I always ask my students to look at themselves, look inward, and reflect on what your mum and dad told them about who they are, who the other people that told them about, and, more importantly, what they discovered who they are. What do they like and what do they dislike, prepare an inventory about themselves. (A. Daniel, personal communication, January 12, 2019)

Daniel's students presented inventories that indicated who they are, including their country of origin, ethnicity, culture, spirituality, the significance of their name, family norms, the food they eat, and the groups they belong to. This classroom activity helped students get familiarised with different cultural groups, and this can be a good starting point for understanding how they differ in terms of culture, food preferences, language, norms, and values. Students can transfer their learning outcomes into their social work practice, which will help them engage in multi-cultural dialogues with their clients.

Philip's examination of his sense of meaning and purpose, being created in the image of God and his desire to love people is challenged by his social work practice. Philip considered doing social work as a spiritual calling which aligns with his beliefs and values. Philip recognised personal values, including kindness, compassion, respecting other people, and the

well-being of other people, aligned with social work values such as social justice, integrity, and the importance of human relationships. The following quote describes Philip's response to how faith influenced him in his everyday life.

I guess, over the years of going through significant questioning of what I believe and what I question. I am no longer particularly driven by the conservative or fundamental type of Christian spirituality. I am following a more inclusive style of Christian spirituality. So, I think, in terms of daily life, I would be motivated by the desire to pursue social justice, care for people, live with the integrity of who I am, be honest in relationships, and express love and care for people. (M. Philip, personal communication, August 25, 2018)

This quote reflects that Philip encountered a denominational transition of his Christian faith from a conservative Christian to a progressive Christian, similar to Tony, who underwent such a transition. Progressive Christianity is understood as a movement within Christianity which encourages individuals to develop respect and inclusivity towards diverse religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. Progressive Christians emphasises the importance of questioning beliefs, embracing diversity, promoting social justice, and expressing love and caring towards marginalised people. Philip adopted progressive Christianity to restore the concept of social justice into his social work practice with students. Progressive Christian faith influenced Philip to integrate diversity and inclusion into social work teaching. The following quote explains how Philip guards against imposing the Christian faith onto students.

I do not think social work education is a place for preaching. When I teach students about social work, I mention that there were Christian influences in the development of the profession, but I would not want to take it further to say that

you will be an effective social worker if you are a Christian. I will not say God made me become a social work educator. Faith motivates me, but I am very inclusive and respectful towards other religious and spiritual traditions as well.

(M. Philip, personal communication, August 25, 2018)

Philip reflects that he did not intend to teach students the Christian faith, even though his motivation for getting into social work came from religion. Accepting and respecting diverse religious and spiritual views is vital to prevent discrimination against students based on beliefs. Self-reflection has seemed to be critical as he can make students experience a culture of collaboration in the classroom.

Philip viewed meeting students' pastoral and personal needs to a certain extent as an important part of his teaching. Philip helped students who were homeless, refugees, and marginalised to resolve their problems. When some students from ethnic minority groups (particularly Māori and Pasifika) faced academic challenges, he made himself available to students and discussed their issues. Philip realised that those students were struggling to meet their families' expectations and that they felt it hard to manage the stress of their studies. He focused on mobilising family support for those students to perform well in their studies. While some social work teachers specified that helping students solve their problems is essential to addressing spirituality in their social work teaching, Philip did not bring it as a way of addressing spirituality.

Daniel's sense of meaning and purpose implicitly influenced him in applying different classroom interventions to develop students' cultural humility. He integrated cultural humility as an effective strategy to prepare students to address social justice and viewed it as a way of incorporating spirituality. Daniel's sense of meaning and purpose, and values affected his perceptions about integrating spirituality into social work teaching. Philip differs from Daniel in that he shifted from his conservative faith to progressive faith to pursue social justice. I

have to note here that there is an interesting gender distinction that appeared in my data analysis. It seems that male social work teachers linked faith with social justice, while female social work teachers linked faith with respect and mutual dignity.

### **Unexamined Beliefs**

Some beliefs that provided meaning and purpose to social work teachers' lives seemed to be unexamined in their implications for their social work practice and influenced their everyday life and social work teaching differently. An example of such an unexamined belief is Charlie's belief in the second coming of Jesus Christ and viewing life as an integral part of the kingdom of God. Charlie feels he holds the role of an ambassador of God, and it seems that provides him with a sense of spiritual superiority over other human beings, including students, colleagues, and family members. The following quote explains how Charlie responded to how his beliefs influence his everyday life.

I believe I am an ambassador for the kingdom of heaven. So, I think, what are the qualities of the kingdom of God, which is immense. Love, joy, peace, kindness, and compassion are all those qualities. I see them displayed in the life of God. So, I am thinking everything I do, every word I speak hopefully, every situation with students, colleagues, whomever it might be, I am representing the kingdom. I wanted to display to everybody I met the qualities of that kingdom. So, for example, if I lose the plot and get angry, I always get angry at certain things, but if I start using discursive language, that is not the quality of the kingdom. So, how does that guide me? It guides me very explicitly because of thinking I am going to represent the kingdom in my day-to-day life. (L. Charlie, personal communication, August 18, 2018)

Charlie understood God as the man who expressed qualities such as love, joy, peace, and kindness in his life and the assumption of himself as an ambassador of God connected him with expressing those qualities as a way of relating himself to God. As Charlie understood God could be a punishment giver if he did not express the qualities of the kingdom of God, it seems that there is a sense of fear behind relating him to God and assuming a sense of spiritual superiority. These beliefs influenced Charlie to perceive personal values as bi-dimensional.

The first dimension of Charlie's values, "the gifts", included the awareness of self that he holds spiritual values such as love, kindness, peace, joy, and compassion. The second dimension, "mediator", focuses on expressing the values. The following quote presents how Charlie described his values.

I think our lives are made up of two dimensions. The gifts, the unique abilities we have got, nobody else duplicates the individual gifts of another person. We bring unique abilities because of who we are and how we were made. Then mediating the gifts by expressing the qualities which I got, love, joy, peace, and kindness. When you say my values, my values are twofold. To express the gifts that I got, which are very important to me because they help people know about God's kingdom and my ability to contribute and to filtrate the good things that I have been talking about. Sometimes, it can be quite challenging. (F. Charlie, personal communication, August 9, 2018)

Charlie's beliefs and how he framed his values may affect his thoughts. For example, when he spoke about expressing the gifts or his spiritual strengths, it seemed that he thought of informing people about God. This contrasts with Kelsey, who incorporated the principle of linking people's faith with social work into her value system to avoid connecting students

with her belief in God. While Kelsey's modification of personal values influenced her teaching practice in that it helped her protect students' right to express their beliefs without any obtrusions, Charlie's beliefs and values did not undergo any revisions.

### ***Espoused Philosophy of Teaching***

Charlie's beliefs affected his perceptions about integrating spirituality into social work teaching. He identified helping students explore their sense of meaning and purpose and connecting them with social work practice as an effective way of integrating spirituality into social work teaching.

I see spirituality as life that has got meaning and purpose beyond the day today activities. I want people I relate to in the university context to think about why they are doing what they are doing, their motive, and the meaning and purpose of their activities as students and later in real social work practice. It has got more than just typing notes on a computer. It is much more powerful than that. It is giving you, as a practitioner, one day and the people you were working with, this client getting them a sense of meaning and purpose for their whole life. I think that is the way I would treat spirituality. (F. Charlie, personal communication, August 9, 2018)

It is clear from this quote that Charlie views addressing spirituality as the meaning and purpose of life as a transferable experience. He believes that if he connected his students with their sense of meaning and purpose and social work, they would transfer that experience into their social work practice. When his students become social work practitioners, they can address clients' spirituality in their social work practice by exploring the meaning and purpose of clients' lives. Charlie's perceptions about integrating spirituality in social work teaching did not reflect any substantial interest in the possibility of imposing his religious

beliefs on students. It contrasted with his teaching philosophy. The following quote describes how Charlie spoke about the influence of faith on social work teaching.

In teaching, I want the students to have the following experience. I want them to discover what motivates them to function as excellent social workers. So, I am there not to tell them what to do. I have a constructivist teaching philosophy. I want to mention a triangle. The triangle is this, the students, the materials they got to read, and me. I am there to facilitate their connection with the materials, articles, and books they need, and with each other and with me not to tell them what to do, and say, but to facilitate their exploration by asking questions. I can connect that with my worldview because dialogue and discourse are very powerful tools. (F. Charlie, personal communication, August 9, 2018)

Faith influenced Charlie to construct an espoused teaching philosophy, which is reflected in Charlie's desire to connect students with himself and his beliefs. Even though Charlie interpreted his epistemology as a constructivist, asserting that he facilitates students' connection with peers, study materials, and himself, it appears that Charlie's beliefs prevent him from allowing students to express their beliefs and values without being criticised. Charlie used rhetorical questions to persuade students to adopt his Christian beliefs. For example, while applying the constructivist teaching philosophy to connect students with his beliefs, he mentioned providing statements on human rights. An example statement by Charlie is as follows: children, by their vulnerability, deserve a fundamental right to be protected before and after birth. He asked his students, "have you thought about the statement of protection before birth, what do you think it means?" I imagined that if I were his student, I would think about the termination of pregnancy and link it with religious beliefs. While he said students indicated the same, and he remained silent, it seems that Charlie did not

challenge students' beliefs or allow them to reflect on their values or assumptions. He did not give students a reference to human rights that seemed to fit with his beliefs or challenge students to present their beliefs and values. The following quote explains how Charlie responded to the question of how his values aligned with the social work profession.

The key informing values of social work are human rights and social justice. In human rights, I constantly look at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is a seminal critical document in human rights. Part of that is a precious point I found: the freedom of speech, the ability to say what they believe within their belief systems. So, I see human rights as having the capacity to be free to participate in society without the fear of being judged or squashed, criticised, or cut down, and I am for that. It comes to social justice, and I read the Bible. Of course, the Bible is full of social justice. (F. Charlie, personal communication, August 9, 2018)

This quote shows that Charlie adhered to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Charlie's understanding of human rights as having a universal justifiability contradicts the relativist ideology implicit in social work. When Charlie spoke about human rights and social justice, as a social work researcher from an Asian background, I felt a sense of cultural hegemony related to his attempt to universalize human rights. As Charlie indicated, he remained silent while students mentioned abortion. When he asked them about protecting life from the moment of conception, it appeared that he may experience an internal conflict between his Christian beliefs and social work teaching. This could be a potential barrier for Charlie to engage in a cross-cultural dialogue with students. It seems that Charlie's beliefs about human rights could challenge addressing cultural relativism in his social work teaching. Therefore, Charlie would need to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue between himself and

students about human rights. Furthermore, thinking of social justice solely from a Bible-based perspective can conflict with allowing people to make informed choices in certain circumstances, such as divorce, abortion, contraception, and homosexual relationships.

Another example from Charlie's teaching practice, which reflected the misuse of power, is conducting prayer in the classroom without asking students' permission or allowing for a diversity of expression. Charlie's understanding of prayer as an effective stress-relieving strategy influenced him to conduct prayer in the classroom. Charlie described a situation in his class where he felt very much affected. He became shocked and felt unable to teach students that day. Without asking colleague's or students' permission, he prayed in the classroom.

I could connect with the students during an absolute tragedy, so I told the class that I cannot teach as I am very stressed. So, I said I am not going to lecture. We are going to pray for blessings upon my colleague and her family. I did that, and the students appreciated it. That is how I connect; my belief systems connect. (F. Charlie, personal communication, August 9, 2018)

This quote is evidence that prayer is conducted for the sake of Charlie to cope with his grief which may be interpreted as conflicting with his role as a social work teacher. Charlie's intention of prayer was directed toward connecting students with his beliefs. It seemed to be coherent with his espoused philosophy of teaching. Charlie's actions in the teaching context represent the imposition of personal interests on students. He could not use prayer to give him the strength to deliver the lecture, as there was no lecture.

Some participants used prayer, but they differed from Charlie regarding their intention and when and how they conducted it. For example, Daniel pointed out that he used to pray multiple times, including morning, evening, and night and found it a source of inspiration.

Daniel's intention of prayer is coded as "giving thanks to God for protection", and "seeking inspiration". Two social work teachers did not emphasize the importance of personal prayer but integrated *karakia* as an effective strategy to incorporate spirituality into social work.

It seems that social work teachers who have thoroughly examined their beliefs have taken an appreciative stance towards students' diverse religious and spiritual beliefs, whereas unexamined beliefs seem to be potentially imposed in the classroom context. Conducting spirituality-based interventions such as prayer by social work teachers without students' permission can be perceived as an imposition of power. Therefore, social work teachers' examination of their own beliefs and values becomes essential for effectively addressing spirituality in the classroom.

### **Believing in the Universe**

Julia believes that the universe has a higher power in the form of energy and that energy is distributed to every human being. Even though her parents were religious people who believed in God, she did not perceive God as the higher power. Julia identified herself as a higher energy receiver of the universe operating from a higher energy level daily, which influenced how she connected with students and made herself purposeful in teaching social work. The following quote describes Julia's response about how she experiences personal connections with the universe.

I have had moments where I believed that I was operating at a much higher level and connected somehow to higher energy. They have been odd occasions when my mind and body were literally above the Earth. One was in an aeroplane. I was flying in an airplane, and I had a moment of huge connection and clarity with a much wider power in the universe, which is incredibly motivating. I dreamt I had been floating in other spheres and that I believe I received higher energy. Then I

operate from a higher level on a daily basis. (M. Julia, personal communication, October 10, 2018)

Personal connections with the universe influenced Julia to achieve higher consciousness. Julia trusted her spiritual intelligence, which she received in the form of higher energy. Higher energy levels can boost Julia's performance, and therefore belief in the universe can be her source of personal creativity and strength. The following quote explains how Julia explained her way of identifying herself as connected to the universe impacts teaching social work.

I sense people's potential, I sense their eagerness to learn, and I tap into that kind of energy, I read students slightly differently, and I often connect with their energy very quickly. Even if I did not have the experience or beliefs they hold, I am very motivated by helping others in their sense, not my sense, their own sense and to use it purposefully for their good. (M. Julia, personal communication, October 10, 2018)

Julia perceived herself as the owner of higher spiritual intelligence, which gave her the courage to connect with students differently. As energy is consciousness, Julia believes that students may stand at different levels of consciousness and curiosity to learn new knowledge. She can purposefully apply her higher spiritual intelligence to help students develop authentic connections with themselves. It is noticeable that Julia intends to make students rely on their own power. Students' personal power may differ from her and peers in that they may experience connections with their spirituality differently. Julia transferred her energy to students in the form of trust and encouragement to help them explore the use of self.

According to Julia, encouragement is the most effective form of energy transfer between Julia and students when they develop an awareness of self. The following quote reflects Julia's perception about developing students' competence to become effective social workers.

Students' sense meant getting to know themselves and use of self. It is a discovery students must go on, but students need encouraging and trusting people who can say, yes, it is all right for you to do it. We will support you in figuring out the things, and yes, it is a safe environment as a student to be doing this. Please do it before you go out to practice. Through your own lived experiences, you can hold other people's pain and grief, which is mainly what we practice. (M. Julia, personal communication, October 10, 2018)

Julia views her classroom as a safe place for students to discuss their spiritual and religious beliefs and practices with others. As she built trust with her students and conducted classroom discussions on spiritual issues related to social work, it seems that she intends to bring students' spiritual experiences into their social work practice so that they can relate them to their clients' experiences.

Julia believes that addressing spirituality is a practical approach to preserving students' longevity in the social work profession. She believes that spirituality as a self-care strategy can help students rejuvenate their sense of motivation and connectedness with the social work profession.

Your spirituality renews the sense of beliefs, motivation, and caring and stops you from going into compassion fatigue. Spirituality is absolutely intertwined with self-care. You cannot separate it from self-care, and it is a way to care for ourselves, whether we name it a religion or call it a ritual. All of us have ways of self-caring and self-soothing. In my opinion, the ones that are helpful to us come

under the roof of spirituality. The unhelpful and harmful ones to us can be helped and addressed by using the aspects of spirituality to help and balance that. (M. Julia, personal communication, October 10, 2018)

Julia aimed to increase students' capacity to survive and excel in the social work profession through integrating effective self-care and self-soothing methods. All forms of religious and spiritual practices might not be self-caring or self-soothing. She believes that she would need to help students eliminate harmful spiritual and religious practices and encourage them to bring beneficial aspects of themselves into social work practice. Julia perceived developing students' self-awareness as an important teaching task to help them connect with spirituality.

Julia critically integrated spiritual practices from her everyday experiences of spirituality. She engages in mindful meditation every day, making her open and connective in her teaching and learning relationships with students.

I do a mindfulness meditation every day. It influences me by being a more connective and open person. So, I am not as hurried and distracted. I am aware of the things that I must do, and I manage my time better. Not always, but I try better. But I can switch from having a conversation with somebody to giving a lecture to doing some coaching and mentoring to doing the marking. I think it allows me to be more flexible and more present in the moment to what I am paying attention to. (M. Julia, personal communication, October 10, 2018)

One example that indicates Julia's use of self in her teaching is mindfulness, which is her everyday spiritual practice. She applied mindfulness to support students in connecting with their authentic selves. This provided her with some of the goals to be purposeful in connecting students with their authentic selves, including developing students' awareness of

self, openness towards exploration, reflective skills, and their presence of mind in social work practice, which are essential to address clients' spirituality. Julia noticed that if students developed authentic connections with themselves and their spirituality, they could apply their humanity in their social work practice by expressing love, care, and empathy.

Julia also found that students can better connect to themselves by being genuinely interested in others. Julia formed smaller groups of students and encouraged them to talk about their culture, family, and beliefs to connect students with themselves and others. She believes that students can explore their values and beliefs faster by finding the values and beliefs of their peers. She intends to make students understand how they differ from their peers in terms of culture, values, beliefs, family norms, and rituals by allowing them to have authentic conversations with each other. Julia asked students to explain their understandings of spirituality and how they differentiate religion from spirituality.

According to data collected from Julia, she opened the space for frank discussions without imposing her personal views, yet Julia's belief in the universe shaped her teaching philosophy. Julia supported the integration of spirituality into teaching social work and felt comfortable having conversations about spiritual issues in the classroom context. She integrated mindfulness and meditation experiences from her own spiritual life to connect students with themselves, their beliefs, and values in which students may or may not participate.

Julia's integration of mindfulness into teaching can differ from Charlie's intervention of conducting prayer in the classroom. Prayer can discourage some students from connecting themselves with their spiritual beliefs and classroom practices. Students who do not believe in God may understand a social work teachers' act of conducting prayer in the classroom for his grief as an imposition strategy. In these circumstances, it is worth noting that Julia allowed for a diversity of spiritual expressions to be heard in the classroom by applying

encouragement as a powerful teaching tool to make students reflect on their spiritual beliefs explored through her mindfulness-based classroom intervention.

Reflection can help students cultivate awareness and deepen an understanding of their peers' diverse spiritual beliefs and practices. I appreciate her approach as she integrated mindfulness in a non-imposing student-centred way. Julia's approach to spirituality tended to be universal versus religious, and she did not perceive God as more powerful than the universe, which is different to Charlie's approach. This impacted Julia's teaching so that she did not mention the word God in her teaching to prompt reflections on religious beliefs.

### **Integrating Indigenous Wisdom**

Moana believes in multiple Gods such as Papatūānuku (Earth mother), Ranginui (sky father), Tangaroa (God of the sea), and Tāwhirimātea (God of wind). Moana indicated that she felt Gods' presence through sight, smell, and touch. She experienced the presence of ancestors and mentioned marae (the Māori meeting place) as a spiritual place. Moana's values are derived from Te Ao Māori (Māori worldview) are tino rangatiratanga (the right to be who I am), manaakitanga (expressing kindness and respect), and whanaungatanga (building connections with people).

Māori beliefs influenced Moana's teaching. Moana believed that she would need to help students explore their cultural positioning before teaching them who Māori are. She developed transformative learning activities for the students by applying the concept of whanaungatanga. She had taken her students to noho marae, a specific learning process where students stay overnight on the marae (the Māori meeting place) and learn in the cultural context about themselves, Māori culture, and their future social work practice. She encouraged students to be in touch with themselves through their senses. They can learn to identify how they see, smell, hear and feel things. One of the teaching strategies she used to

connect students with themselves was singing and asking them to lay down and relax. Then she asked students to sing with her and asked them to share their feelings physically and physiologically. The teaching in the marae went overnight and students had a chance to experience what whakawhanaungatanga is.

My focus in the noho is to connect the students with themselves through our Māori concepts and principles. They need to connect what they have learned with themselves to the clients, so transferrable thing, so having meaning when students are sitting with the clients and having that relationship with the client, face to face, expressing self on a personal level with the client and making those connections through whakawhanaungatanga. (P. Moana, personal communication, October 14, 2018)

This quote supports Moana's belief that the teaching space, the marae, can impact her students' social work practice. The principle and process of whakawhanaungatanga impacted Moana's teaching to allow students the opportunity to interact with each other and build meaningful relations within the classroom context. Moana believes that students would be able to connect with their clients' beliefs and values if they were provided with the opportunity to connect with themselves and their peers in the classroom, which seems similar to many of the social work teachers' views.

This chapter described social work teachers' different ways of making meaning and purpose in their lives and how their personal understanding of spirituality influences it. Many social work teachers understood that Christian faith-based teachings were an important source of building connections with the social work profession and their students. Findings indicated that social work teachers' examination of faith in their teaching practice could influence them differently. They transformed their spiritual beliefs and values to align

themselves with social work values such as social justice, the importance of human relationships, and the dignity and worth of the person. Social work teachers' beliefs about the universe and indigenous beliefs were also significant in shaping their teaching philosophies.

## **Chapter Five: Findings - Spirituality and Social Work Practice**

This chapter begins by presenting beliefs that provided social work practitioners with a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives, and it continues by describing the influence of beliefs on social work practice. Many respondents experienced close relationships with God. Aotearoa New Zealand is a secular country, and many social work practitioners may not practice a particular religion. However, they may be motivated by Christian values such as service, social justice, empathy, compassion, and respecting the dignity and worth of the individual. Under the category “meaning and purpose”, I present social work practitioners’ personal experiences of numinous through religious beliefs and a sense of belongingness to culture. Their companionship with God, faith-based motivations, and values influenced their social work practice differently. They viewed faith as their source of divine direction from God and have found it helpful in their social work practice. In the second section, I present how social work practitioners’ experience of the numinous helps them create hope and a non-judgemental attitude. This is followed by presenting how social work practitioners’ various self-care strategies are shaped by faith. The chapter ends by presenting social workers’ perceptions about integrating spirituality into social work practice. Meaning and Purpose

Social work practitioners’ experiences of meaning and purpose in their lives are detailed under two sub-categories: Experiences of the numinous and cultural identity.

### ***Experiences of the Numinous***

Social work practitioners’ experience of the numinous through religious beliefs influenced them in constructing meaning and purpose for their lives. Four of the participants were Christians, and one of the participants held the Muslim faith, and they all believed in the existence of one God. While Christian social work practitioners named Jesus Christ as God and the son of God, Muslim participant used the phrase Allah to name God. A common belief among these social work practitioners was that God is the supreme power who created the

whole universe and living and non-living entities on Earth. Maia's understanding of God differs from others because she believes in multiple Gods, in line with her indigenous beliefs. According to Maia, the world was created by many Gods. The following section presents how social work practitioners used their belief in God and their experiences of numinous to construct meaning and purpose in their lives.

### *Faithfulness to God*

Vance felt that being faithful to God provided him with an experience of having a sense of meaning and purpose in his life. "I think spirituality is what gives me a sense of meaning and purpose. Knowing the creator, understanding what his plans are, and having a personal relationship with him are most important" (G. Vance, personal communication, October 16, 2018). Vance's understanding of faithfulness to God embraced the assumption that God has a pre-determined purpose for his life and that he linked it with his understanding of spirituality as exploring the meaning and purpose of his life. Christianity taught him that one of the primary purposes of his life is to be faithful to Jesus Christ and that he highlighted the importance of keeping relationships with Jesus while stating meaning and purpose. The following quote explains Vance's reply to how his sense of meaning and purpose, and faithfulness to God, influenced his everyday life.

When I came to understand Jesus, I started experiencing miracles in my life, and I could not provide any logical explanations for that. For example, I had a car which I bought when I was studying in New Zealand. I had no residency, and I had casual work at that time. I had an impression in my heart that God told me to give my first car to a person who had no car and struggling. I gave my first car to him without telling him that God told me to give the car to him without accepting money. He might be afraid if I told him. I had no car when I attended my driver's

license test in New Zealand. God sends a person with a car to help me attend the test. If you are not following God's words, it means that you believe that God is not willing to help or is not able. (G. Vance, personal communication, October 16, 2018)

It is evident from this quote that being faithful to God influenced Vance to experience miracles in his life. He did not view his miraculous experiences as a simple reward for his previous good deed. For example, in the above quote, belief in God affected Vance's thoughts in that he interpreted successes as miracles shown by God. When Vance provided examples of some events that occurred in the past, such as passing a driver's license examination, it seems that he recalls God's favours to strengthen his faith. At the same time, the above quote highlights Vance's belief that obeying God's words is essential to being faithful to God in his everyday life. When Vance indicated he acted upon God's calling without any logical explanations in his personal life, it seems that belief in the power and love of God motivated him to act without critical thinking in his personal life. The following quote explains how Vance connected faithfulness to God with his social work practice.

People have different backgrounds or social circumstances. I need to understand where they are coming from and what caused problems in their lives. They may not have the same faith as I do. But they have the right not to have such faith. You cannot impose your beliefs on people. God has given them the right to deny God. That may have consequences, but that is between him and them. My job is to love or care for them the way they are based on what they need and want. My responsibility is to provide them with good care or good service regardless of everything else. I can mobilize resources to address their issues and help them

manage things they are suffering from if there is no cure. (G. Vance, personal communication, October 16, 2018)

This quote evidences Vance's belief in free will. According to Vance, God knew the instances in human beings' futures. It does not mean that human beings are not allowed to make decisions by themselves. They have the freedom to make choices. It is noticeable that even though Vance acknowledged that human beings have the right to follow their religious or spiritual beliefs, denying God has consequences. From a personal faith-based perspective, belief in free will prevent Vance from imposing beliefs on clients. As a social work practitioner, he understood he could not view his clients as wrong if they disobeyed the rules of the Christian faith. Vance set clear boundaries for him to eliminate personal biases, and he connected being faithful to God with his free will and respecting people when their beliefs differ from his beliefs. Vance linked faithfulness with helping people by believing that expressing love and justice is a social worker's responsibility.

### ***Having a Relationship with God***

Consistent with Vance, Diana also believed her responsibility was to find God's purpose for her life and live her life accordingly. Diana viewed cultivating and maintaining relationships with God made her life meaningful.

My relationship with the Lord provides me with a sense of meaning and purpose. Because he basically defines the purpose of my life. Then I go from there into my family, work, and my extended family and friends. (C. Diana, personal communication, January 4, 2019)

It is evident from this quote that Diana's sense of building a personal connection with God influenced every aspect of her life, including family relationships, social work practice, and

friendships. The following quote explains Diana's response to how building a relationship with God influences her everyday life.

Having a personal relationship with God is the foundation of my life. So, it is into every aspect of things, whether waking up in the morning and praying together as a couple, and we pray together in the evening with our daughter as a family, and during the day, that is where our strengths come from. So, it is a driving force for me personally. (C. Diana, personal communication, January 4, 2019)

Building a relationship with God influences Diana to perceive people as brought by God into her life and that she feels it is her responsibility to strengthen them through her life. Diana perceived prayer as her source of strength in doing everyday tasks. She viewed that experiencing closeness between herself and God through prayer can make her active in establishing and maintaining meaningful interpersonal relationships with other people, including family members and social work clients. Here, Diana viewed faith as the source of personal creativity to relate to people. Diana also viewed personal values as Bible-based. Courage, love, respect, and forgiveness are her Bible-based values linked with social work practice. The following quote explains how Diana linked her belief in God with social work.

Personal values are basically based on Bible-based values. Bible-based values are basically about having a relationship with God, which is what social work is about. You are having a relationship with people constantly. When you are in a relationship with somebody, you will care. You will want to find out what is going on in their lives. Regarding social work, you have to look at empathy, you have to look at confidentiality, individualization of your plans, and care plans that needs to be individualized. That is not one rule that is same for all. With regards to that, the Bible-based values give me the strength to be empathetic, have a

relationship with family members that we come across, and provide them the right kind of liaison opportunities required from the community. (C. Diana, personal communication, January 4, 2019)

Diana linked belief in God with social work through understanding Bible-based personal values as the pillar of her strengths, such as empathy, communication, and advocacy. While Diana and Vance indicated that having a relationship with God connected them with doing social work, some social work practitioners have gone through challenging domestic violence and child abuse situations in their personal lives. They felt connected with social work through experiences of suffering and recovery through faith.

### ***God's Unconditional Love and Acceptance***

Oceana and Nancy experienced God's presence as unconditional love and acceptance during difficult situations in their lives, providing them meaning and purpose. Oceana struggled with abuse from her father, and her mother taught her to believe in God and forgive him. Her experience of God's love and acceptance increased her self-esteem. The experiences of growing up in an abusive environment motivated her to do social work. The following quote presents Oceana's response to what gives her a sense of meaning and purpose.

For me, it is having a relationship with God. I am a born-again Christian. I have learned a lot about the acceptance and being loved by a God who created everything in the world. For many years, I grew up in situations where I lacked that understanding or felt that unconditional love. For me finding that helped me a lot to identify myself personally. (K. Oceana, personal communication, January 7, 2019)

Nancy was the victim of domestic violence and found the services of a Christian women's refuge influential and valuable in finding the meaning and purpose of her life. Nancy acquired the courage to become a divorced woman with the help of the women's refuge, and she said:

I started to explore the meaning and purpose of my life when I went to a women's refuge. I knew God. My grandfather was a missionary, and my father was a church leader. So, I always knew the Lord. When growing up, I used to go to church. I had issues in my marriage for a long time. But having the courage to do the hardest thing is to leave the marriage because I have four children. Being a Christian and knowing the value of marriage, divorce was hard for me. We were able to go to a Christian women's refuge, and I think that is from where my real journey started with the Lord, knowing him on a deeper level. (V. Nancy, personal communication, January 9, 2019)

Nancy considered divorce a sin and felt afraid of breaking the promise between herself, her spouse, and God. Even though a commitment to religious values and beliefs influenced her to stay in the abusive relationship for an extended period, she felt it harder to live a peaceful and meaningful life when the children also became vulnerable. Christian Women's Refuge impacted her thoughts as she constructed a new mindset that provided preference to utilize human rights to have freedom of choice and the right to be free from abusive relationships over religious norms. Her mindset shifted from viewing divorce as a sin to a necessity in certain circumstances to protect women from harm and that God did not judge people wrong if the purpose of getting divorced was genuine. She perceives God as the source of unconditional love and acceptance, which removes fear, guilt, despair, and enhanced emotional coping.

Nancy's experience of suffering also motivated her to become a family support social worker within a faith-based social service organization. It is noticeable that Oceana's experience of vulnerability during her teenage years influenced her to relate to her clients who experienced child abuse on a much deeper level. Therefore, it seems that along with faith, social work practitioners' past experiences of vulnerability can also help them connect with their clients.

Ameena is a Muslim social work practitioner who perceived her life as meaningful through being connected to one God and explained the rationale that God would never die, and hence she felt God as the supernatural power that she could rely on from the time she was born till the day of death.

I believe in a higher power. Being connected to God gives me a lot of purpose and value in life. Because people will always come and go. Nobody always stays, but God is always there that we can hang onto. (B. Ameena, personal communication, January 27, 2019)

Ameena's Muslim faith also assumed that there is one God and that having a connection with that God is essential, which seemed to be like the Christian social work practitioners who viewed personal connection with God as necessary. The following quote presents Ameena's response to how meaning and purpose influenced her everyday life.

My job is an act of worship. If I am doing it according to how it is prescribed in my religion, I feel satisfied by supporting my clients in a meaningful way with positive re-affirmations, just giving them the motivation every day, little by little to achieve their goals. (B. Ameena, personal communication, January 27, 2019)

Belief in God influenced Ameena to perceive doing social work as an act of worship, which provided her with satisfaction. This satisfaction is derived from the Islamic concept of shukr (gratitude). Islam viewed shukr as a fundamental emotional value needed for a Muslim to live a meaningful life. Applying shukr in Ameena's life meant that she would need to love her God, Allah to be grateful for all the blessings she got from Allah. Ameena's view of doing social work to express gratitude to Allah led her to experience well-being and happiness. The belief associated with shukr is that if she remained grateful to Allah, Allah would give her prosperity and be merciful to her in every aspect of her life. From an Islamic point of view, mercy indicated that she would be looked after by Allah when she felt it harder to look after herself.

The following section describes how indigenous cultural beliefs provided meaning and purpose to a social work practitioner.

### ***Indigenous Beliefs***

Maintaining a sense of belonging to culture provided Maia with a sense of meaning and purpose for her life. Therefore, Maia acknowledged that she followed the basic principle of her culture, whakapapa, which meant that she was responsible for acknowledging her land, culture, beliefs, and family members' strengths including her ancestors. While some social work practitioners and teachers who hold the Christian faith viewed the Bible as a living document that enclosed what is right and wrong, Maia viewed subscribing to customary laws as an important aspect of determining right and wrong.

My purpose is never to forget where I came from, know who I am, and my sense of belonging. So, for me, whakapapa is very important. Understanding not just in terms of genealogy and the bloodlines of where I come from but also giftings, all the traits within the family lines. So, it is more than just names, it is history, what

their journeys were, their giftings in terms of healings, yeah, all that kind of stuff. Whanaungatanga, tikanga for Māori, how do we do things, manaakitanga, how we do hospitality, wairuatanga, our spirituality, and of course the commonly known tika pono aroha, being honest, being truthful and doing all things with love are important to me. (S. Maia, personal communication, February 2, 2019)

It is evident from this quote that culture shaped Maia's values. She perceives culture as a vehicle to connect herself with the purpose of life. While Maia indicated she learned manaakitanga (expressing hospitality), whakawahanaungatanga (Keeping connections), and wairuatanga (spirituality), and being honest and having integrity from her culture, it seems that social work practitioners' culture can be valuable in terms of living meaningful lives. Maia seemed to be different from all the other social work practitioners as she believes in multiple Gods, such as the God of the sea, and God of the forest, while other participants believe there exists one true God. Culture taught her that everything in the universe is interconnected and is permeated with mauri (life force).

Religion and culture provide social work practitioners with different learnings to construct the meaning and purpose of their lives and spirituality. Their beliefs about the existence of a higher power as God in the universe often led them to experience unconditional love, acceptance, and obedience to God. Social work practitioners' perceptions about the influence of beliefs in their lives vary. The following section will describe how social work practitioners' understandings of the meaning and purpose of their lives influenced their social work practice.

## **Influence of Beliefs on Social Work Practice**

### ***Experiencing Hope through Spiritual Imagination***

Spiritual imagination is a powerful spiritual practice human beings can develop by integrating beliefs about spirituality and combining the imagination skill of the mind to give meaning to future or past events. This spiritual practice can be applied in difficult life circumstances to create inspiration to set goals and design practical strategies to achieve success. Spiritual imagination can transform our lives by giving our minds the space and beliefs to visualize what we want to achieve in the future and facilitate us getting mental clarity of what is happening in our lives. I had a sense of spiritual imagination since childhood, which involved feeling the presence of God in situations where I experienced fear and hopelessness. Family played a significant role in developing such an image through spiritual imagination to make me believe that God is more powerful than us. When social work practitioners shared similar experiences with me, I perceived them as experiences related to spiritual imagination and used the term spiritual imagination to give rise to a language that helped interpret participants' experiences with the numinous.

Some social work practitioners perceived their belief in God as a significant source of sustaining hope in their everyday lives. For example, Vance's sense of meaning and purpose by being faithful to God and believing in free will, influenced him to connect with the phrase, "God is in control". In his case, the phrase "God is in control" meant the understanding that God is the creator and controller of the entire universe. Therefore, God has the power to resolve human problems. He believes that God knew more about his strengths than him. Therefore, applying the phrase gave him two goals in his everyday life to make his life meaningful. The goals are to strengthen faith through understanding God's presence every day and doing social work as the purpose of life on a personal level, which he also

understood as the predesigned plan of God for his life. The following section will describe how Vance created hope through spiritual imagination in his social work practice.

Vance viewed prayer as his conversation with God, which helped him reinforce the belief, God is in control.

When I talk to God through prayer, it reinforces the fact that he is in control. So, that releases a lot of stress. Because as part of my work, I cannot say to my client if there is a crisis, look, wait, I need to talk to God. That is not how it works.

When you are working, you may get easily distracted by other things, that is where the pressure builds up. But, when I say, I talked to God, it does not mean that I do fall short. It meant when I shift my focus, for example, if I say wrong things to my colleague, that I cannot do some additional work he asked me to do, because I have got enough workload. But I have to do, because I am thinking he would not come to me if God does not give me the capability to address some of the clients' problems. He knows me more than I know myself. God has a way of bringing me back to his knowledge or helping me to change my focus from that situation, do not highlight the problem, and look at the solutions. (G. Vance, personal communication, October 16, 2018)

It is evident from the above quote that the belief, "God is in control" influenced Vance to attach meanings to circumstances. For example, when his colleague asked him to take some of the clients' cases, Vance accommodated. His rationale to accommodate those clients seemed to be due to the inspiration he got from faith. Vance's belief which inspired him in this circumstance, is that God knew his strengths more than he knew about himself, and therefore God has a specific reason to send the client to him. Vance's willingness to undertake new cases was based on beliefs rather than the assessment of already assigned workloads.

Here, it appeared that Vance developed a sense of motivation from trusting God, and that provided him with a can-do attitude.

From a personal faith-based perspective, Vance felt he could solve the problems if he viewed challenges as opportunities to experience God's presence and power, which helped him overcome the fear of failure in delivering high-quality social work services caused by unmanageable caseloads. In this way, faith removed fear from Vance's heart, and he felt hope through faith. The following quote presents Vance's response to how belief in God influences his everyday life.

Even whether it might be my social work practice or whether it is financial or whatever it is, if things are not looking good, I know God is in control and he has a way out. So, I will just wait for his timings. Without any logical explanations, solutions come into my way. It happens almost through out every day. It is that experience and the knowledge that I have, gives me hope. Do not be stressed, do not fight with battles. Because, it is not human effort, you are relying on him. He will do it. These negative situations are coming in your way to show his power, not to put you down. So, that you can grow in faith, and that gives me hope. (G. Vance, personal communication, October 16, 2018)

When Vance mentioned that faith made him resistant to putting himself down in adverse circumstances, it seemed that he desired to develop a courageous mindset that could help him find solutions rather than fear the challenges ahead. Vance experiences unconditional love of God in his everyday life by connecting with the phrase "God is in control", which leads to spiritual imagination. This spiritual imagination created hope in his everyday social work practice. As a result of spiritual imagination, Vance has attributed his finding solutions to God providing those solutions. Thus, in a social work context, Vance's experience of constructing

hope through the process of spiritual imagination made him feel harder to offer logical explanations for his interventions.

In the following quote, Vance explicitly stated his sense of spiritual imagination. God promises him on a personal level that he will help him accomplish his tasks, which aligns with the belief that God is in control and he has a way out. The following quote explains how Vance applied spiritual imagination to attach meaning to specific circumstances in his social work practice to generate hope out of faith.

The first thing that comes to my mind are times when I had agreed to attend urgent crisis situations by my choice as per the request of the different managers that I have worked under. When I had back-to-back appointments booked for the respective days, I believed God would create ways for me to accomplish the tasks at hand as he promised to me on a personal level, and I have had several of the booked appointments cancelled by the clients themselves because of which I was able to attend the crisis situations. (G. Vance, personal communication, October 16, 2018)

It is clear from this quote that Vance's spiritual imagination affected his will to attend to crisis situations. It aligns with the social work value of service as he preferred helping clients in crisis than avoiding them. However, while he is using spiritual imagination to create hope, faith seems to obstruct critical analysis of the caseload and his freedom and right to have manageable caseloads.

Like Vance, Oceana also experiences prayer as a source of guidance and hope for the future. The following quote presents how Oceana describes the influence of meaning and purpose, experiencing God's unconditional love and acceptance, on her everyday life.

I know that I am not alone. I know that I have the holy spirit with in me that can give me guidance when I am feeling unsure or even afraid. I can pull on that, I can just pray, and I know that I can do the best for my clients that with love, kindness, and compassion. (K. Oceana, personal communication, January 7, 2019)

It is evident from this quote that Oceana experiences the presence of God in her life. She constructed hope through the feeling of togetherness with God. It helped her experience peace, endurance, and strength during fearful circumstances. Oceana also expresses that she can make her social work practice effective by integrating values such as love, kindness, and compassion.

Oceana and Vance believe that God can help them in their personal lives and social work practice. Faith also motivated Oceana to involve in spiritual imagination. For example, she imagined daily prayer as the energy channel through which God fill her heart with positive vibes of love, compassion, and kindness. Thus, prayer influenced her to create courage to help people and hope to understand people more effectively. The following quote presents an example from Oceana's personal life where she felt how having a relationship with God influenced her to overcome fear and create hope.

God strengthened me. Once I felt scared to drive my car back to home after visiting one of my friends. The fear came very suddenly. Even though my friend drove my car back, I felt fearful of everything, doing things, and I would just need to understand that God empowers me. He is my protector. Now, I know that if I work in situations that I have never done before, I will just pray and ask him to be with me, and I know that I can do all things through him strengthens me. I pray every day and that he will fill my heart with love, kindness, compassion, and

the understanding of everybody. I think that knowledge and experience give me the courage and hope to be able to do things in a loving way. (K. Oceana, personal communication, January 7, 2019)

Oceana disclosed one of the fearful instances from her everyday life to describe the influence of belief in God on her personal life. It seems that Oceana's spiritual imagination of God as the source of strength and protection played a significant role in empowering herself and overcoming fear in adverse circumstances, which seemed consistent with Vance's experience of faith. Vance differed from Oceana in that spiritual imagination did not give him peace to undertake one task at a time. Peace of mind is important for social workers to think critically and reflect on their ways of managing caseloads. If spiritual imagination prevented him from saying no to the ever-increasing workload, it is important to address the influence of beliefs on performance in his supervision meetings. Because when he agreed to manage multiple tasks based on spiritual imagination, it seems that he is connecting himself with beliefs rather than critiquing himself on how to make a meaningful contribution to the community. Therefore, while integrating faith into social work, social work practitioners need to make sure that their faith motivates them from their heart internally without being forced or being motivated externally by supervisors.

Nancy's faith made her hopeful of creating a peaceful life when she struggled with domestic violence. When Nancy was asked to describe her beliefs about God, she introduced God as a guide who provided her advice and hope in difficult times.

My belief about God, I do not think I would be where I am right now having this conversation if God was not in my life. I was scared to live many times. As I said, one of the reasons why I left my marriage was domestic violence. The person who helped me was God, and I am not sure you understood. I can go to God and

seek advice whenever I make the hardest decision. I could feel him saying it is okay, and I would be with you. (V. Nancy, personal communication, January 9, 2019)

Nancy's perception that she lost her partner's love, and the experience of violence was distressing. Nancy experienced God's love, which guided her in making decisions. It is apparent from this quote that Nancy understood God as the source of unconditional love for herself, which strengthened her trust in God. Thus, it became easy for Nancy to make decisions herself, sensing God's acceptance and love. Later in life, Nancy became a family support social worker, and she indicated faith as the source of motivation to undertake the decision to serve women in broken families. Nancy's experience of transforming her life from being a domestic violence victim to a social worker through the love of God provided her with the hope that she can make changes in the lives of the victims of domestic violence through her love and compassion. Nancy also felt prayer helped her in gaining clarity about people's different life circumstances and shaped her way of expressing empathy and hope.

The prayer humbles me. It puts perspective into my life and the words that I am about to say and just being able to understand and feel how the other person is feeling and hoping that I have the right thing. (V. Nancy, personal communication, January 9, 2019)

Social work practitioners' understanding of God as the powerful source of love, guidance and protection influenced them to be courageous and peaceful through experiencing hope. Faith created hope through spiritual imagination, which made some social work practitioners feel it harder to provide logical explanations for their interventions in their social work practice. While social work practitioners apply faith in the form of imagination to enhance

their creativity in their social work practice, assessing the implications of spiritual imagination and practitioner's meaning-making on clients' lives is crucial.

### ***Being Non-Judgmental***

Some social work practitioners indicated that belief in God influenced them to be non-judgmental. For example, Vance's sense of meaning and purpose, being faithful to God, influenced him to perceive that as a social work practitioner, he must adopt a non-judgmental attitude towards his clients to express love and support social justice. Vance identified being non-judgmental as one of his values and aligned it with his social worker's value of accepting the inherent dignity and worth of the person.

I do not like judging people. Because I cannot consider myself better than other people. I feel that regardless of my weakness, or my strengths, I should not be boasting about my strengths. I should not feel sad about things that I cannot do. What I have needed to do, God has provided me with strength. They can do certain things that I cannot do. God has given people different strengths. Regardless of how they behave, I do not know what they have gone through in their lives. My value would be to realize that I have not gone through what they have gone through. It is only because of God's goodness and grace. I need to show them that grace, mercy, and love. Because if I were in their position, I would do the same thing. (G. Vance, personal communication, October 16, 2018)

It is evident from this quote that being humble is Vance's way of being non-judgmental. He understood humility as significant learning acquired from religion and that his understanding of humility meant that he needed God's love and help to become stronger. This disconnected him from trying to adopt a superior stance over his clients. Vance believes that he holds God's goodness, grace, and mercy. God's goodness indicates Vance's belief that

God will provide protection for himself when he suffers hardships. It is noticeable that Vance perceived grace as an undeserved and uninherited favour he received from God and that he specified he did not need to set out any actions or intentions to earn grace. Mercy that he embraced manifested in the expression of love, kindness, and forgiveness to people rather than judging their actions. When Vance mentioned he needed to show people grace, mercy, and love, it seems that he is thinking he is sharing God's grace, mercy, and love for him with other people. The following quote explains how Vance described his beliefs about God.

My belief about God is that God is a good God. I believe all human beings, including myself, have turned away from God, and we were born into sin. Because my forefather committed a sin. So, those sins must be punished. God is a just God. Because you cannot have a judge saying it is okay, you killed the guy, say sorry. The judge cannot do that. Sins must be punished. God must punish sinners because he is perfect. He cannot allow sinners to live with him in heaven, and that is his punishment to the sinners. But, at the same time, God is also love. God paid the price two thousand years ago; he made a way when there was no way. So, he showed his love for us, and that justice met love. So, he can accept human beings, the imperfect people. (G. Vance, personal communication, October 16, 2018)

Vance understood God as the source of justice and love. He believes God punishes the sins. Vance viewed God as a better judge than human beings because of his ability to love the sinners and punish sin. He felt powerless to judge clients because of his perception of making mistakes as part of human nature, which he learned from the story of Adam, Vance's forefather, who sinned. Vance perceived disobeying God as a sin, which is incompatible with understanding sin in a social work context, and he did not mention the importance of

supervision for social work practitioners who practice social work with a spiritual heart. If personal religious beliefs informed Vance's interpretation of sin, he may misinterpret clients' decisions and beliefs as wrong and impose his beliefs on clients. However, Vance's awareness of himself as the receiver of God's love influenced him to be non-judgmental. Belief in free will also influenced Vance to perceive himself held the freedom to act based on his rationales, and he viewed being non-judgmental as significant in his social work practice. The following quote shows how God's love influenced him to be non-judgmental in his social work practice.

The love that God has for me is undeserved. When I receive a blessing that I do not deserve, I cannot judge someone else. If I judge my clients, that judgement will be based on my moral standards. For example, I may view lying as a small sin and committing murder as a big sin. But, in God's eye, there is a spec, and he looks at heart transformations. When I see people, I can accept them as who they are, even though I cannot accept what they do. It is like God loves the sinners and hates sins simultaneously. The same principles apply to my social work practice. I can accept them without judgement and walk along with them. So, these beliefs help me to accept people and care for them regardless of their backgrounds. We, humans, are imperfect people. We have no right to judge or punish people. When I see a human being, regardless of whether he is a Hindu or Buddhist, I believe God made him. God's creation is good. Otherwise, he would not be here. So, I cannot disrespect God's creation. That is another thing that comes to mind when I think about my non-judgmental attitude. (G. Vance, personal communication, October 16, 2018)

The notion that God loves sinners and hates sins influenced his social work practice. These beliefs motivated him to accept clients regardless of their circumstances and become non-judgmental. However, the influence of the 'love the sinner and hate the sin' attitude can impact Vance's social work practice, as he may struggle with accepting some clients who belong to the LGBTQ community. If Vance felt it hard to respect his clients' homosexual identities, he may judge homosexuality as a sin. Therefore, social work practitioners must critically analyse whether their religious beliefs conflict with accepting clients' identities to address personal biases and become non-judgmental in their social work practice.

While Vance aligned the values of grace, mercy, and love with being non-judgmental, Nancy aligned her values developed from faith, love, and peace with building relationships with people. The following quote presents Nancy's response to personal values.

My values are more around faith, love, and peace and that was instilled in me from the time I was born, I think from my grandmother, my mother and how we treat people. My personal values align with the social work profession in building relationships with people, understanding and trusting them. We all do not have the same beliefs, and that is ok. It does not make things wrong or right, it is okay. God did not give human beings the power to judge people. God wanted human beings to forgive themselves and others. If you forgive yourself, you can easily accept your clients, and you will not be judgmental. (V. Nancy, personal communication, January 9, 2019)

It is apparent from this quote that Nancy's belief in God and her culture shape her way of understanding people and building relationships with them. Nancy's parents and grandparents were religious people, and her way of connecting with people is shaped by culture. She treated people with respect and accepted people who differed from each other and her in

terms of faith. Here, it seems that Nancy viewed people have the freedom and right to follow their own beliefs, and as a social worker, she would need to accept who they are regardless of anything else. To enhance her ability to accept people and treat them with a non-judgmental attitude and respect, she applied faith in the form of forgiveness. Forgiveness is understood to be the power she got from faith, and she understood herself as powerless in judging people. The power of forgiveness gives her peace of mind, leading her to strike judgement, which naturally comes out of her mind while listening to social work clients' problems. Faith linked her with internal forgiveness, allowing her to regain the peace of mind if she intervenes with issues that contradict her moral code and beliefs. Internal forgiveness can guide Nancy to avoid developing prejudices in her heart against clients, and thus it makes her non-judgmental.

Oceana indicated honesty, integrity, compassion, and love as personal values shaped by faith and that she aligned them with social service and social justice.

I consider myself an honest person. I am compassionate. I loved helping people. I do not like injustices to individuals by other people. I do not like bullying. I have a lot of empathy for such situations as a child I was living in that situation. That drives me to become a social worker later in life, and I hope to make a difference. I do love people. My honesty and integrity helped me to become a good practitioner. (K. Oceana, personal communication, January 7, 2019)

The following quote explains Oceana's response to how integrating personal values influenced her social work practice.

I think, it is important for me to be able to incorporate that into my daily work. It is me taking the stance of being kind and compassionate to somebody, not being judgmental. We have people of all sorts of life. We have to accept everybody as

they are and help them. It is my understanding that we are not perfect. We all make mistakes; it gives me the opportunity to work from a non-judgmental point of view. (K. Oceana, personal communication, January 7, 2019)

It is apparent from this quote that Oceana's values influenced her to adopt a non-judgmental stance towards the clients. Oceana admitted that making mistakes is just part of human nature. Therefore, she showed openness to acknowledge and apologize for her mistakes because of her value of integrity. She aligned integrity with accepting people, and that supported her to be non-judgmental. The following quote represents how Ameena describes the influence of the Muslim faith on her social work practices.

I believe that people should not be judged. I can never look down on anyone. I am really scared of it. I never judge people based on how they look or how they appear to us. A lot of people have different personalities and different circumstances. Some people have got very challenging lives. I am looked after by the creator, Allah. I am grateful for the blessings I received from Allah every moment of my life. If I had no such faith, I could not lead a prosperous life. I think, for all human beings, unconditional respect is most important. (B. Ameena, personal communication, January 27, 2019)

Muslim faith restricted Ameena from discriminating against people based on their appearance. Faith motivated Ameena to unconditionally respect her clients and accept them and their circumstances without being much non-judgmental. It is apparent from the above quote that Ameena connected shukr (gratitude) with the social worker's principle of being non-judgmental, which aligned with building meaningful relationships with clients.

Social work practitioners' beliefs and values linked them with becoming non-judgmental in their social work practice differently. Some social work practitioners' belief that God only

holds power to judge people shaped their practice. They perceive themselves as obliged to accept clients by expressing love, respect, and forgiveness. Faith motivated social work practitioners to align themselves with social work values such as social service, social justice, accepting the dignity and worth of the person, and integrity, which made them adopt a non-judgmental stance in their social work practice. The following section will describe how social work practitioners' beliefs influenced them to relieve stress by protecting themselves from professional burnout.

### ***Relieving Stress and Self-Care***

Social work practitioners believe engaging in everyday spiritual practices plays a significant role in self-care and healing from professional burnout. Ameena experienced that adhering to the Muslim faith provided her with various strategies to prevent professional exhaustion. The inner peace she acquired through faith-based practices such as five-time prayers and Islamic mindfulness influenced her to calm herself and step back in situations where she could easily lose control while working with clients who had mental health disorders such as post-natal depression, schizophrenia, and psychosis. The action of stepping back provided her with the opportunity to reinforce that she would need to save her inner peace and the feeling of calmness to maintain her connection with God, which is an essential part of her spirituality.

Ameena's self-care practices are Namaz (Muslim prayer followed by ablution, which is a ritual of washing some of the reflex points of the human body, such as ears, face, hands, and feet) five times every day and Murāqabah (Islamic meditation). During ablution, Ameena felt herself renewing positive energies and cleansing negative energies with water. The following quote explains Ameena's response to how practising the ritual of ablution and Namaz impacted her everyday social work practice.

When I wash my hands and face during ablution, it is really refreshing. I have done a study on reflexology as well. When I massage the reflex points of my ears using water, I feel there is a certain kind of positive energy entering into my body. Also, washing the fingers of the feet and the hand helped me to feel that I have removed negative energy from my body. This helps me to develop stronger connections with my clients. (B. Aameena, personal communication, January 27, 2019)

The ritual of ablution affected Aameena's social work competence in looking after herself. Aameena perceives that if she practices self-care, she will be better able to connect with her clients daily. The practice of ablution helped her replenish her heart and body with positive energy, which impacted her building relationships with clients. She also felt fresh and clean to enter an act of worship, namaz prayer, which she perceived as a conversation with God. Doing Namaz helped her to stay relaxed and peaceful when she got to encounter stressful situations as part of her social work practice and that she felt herself reluctant to work in social work settings where she could not arrange time to pray.

Praying five times a day. I would not want to work in any place where I cannot continue my prayers. I do not take a long time to do it. It may be five minutes or less than five minutes. That is what keeps me going. (B. Aameena, personal communication, January 27, 2019)

Aameena indicated that she used to reflect on the events that affected her social work practice and self-care strategies. Aameena also practised Murāqabah every day and considered it as an opportunity to personally reflect on her thoughts, evaluate actions, and that provided her the sense of direction when she got distracted from doing any tasks. The following quote explains how Murāqabah affects Aameena's social work practice.

Murāqabah really calms me down if I get a chance to reflect on myself and evaluate myself on a day-to-day basis. Because I do Murāqabah in the morning before sunrise and after sunset. Murāqabah gives me a lot of inner peace. It gives me direction when I disengage from everything, including my thoughts. It refreshes my thoughts. You know, a lot of people do get burned out in social work, or they get frustrated. I hardly ever get frustrated, and that is because of the inner peace. (B. Aameena, personal communication, January 27, 2019)

The belief underlying Murāqabah, which influenced her to be mindful of thoughts and actions, is that Allah always observes her thoughts, feelings, and actions. Therefore, Murāqabah enhanced the process of self-reflection and brought the experience of inner peace.

Christian beliefs influenced Diana to experience peace through Christian meditation.

For me, it is more on meditating around Bible at night. In the primary mental health sector, as a social worker, every day I hear the stories of people with anxiety, people with depression. It helps me find guidance, when I am engaged in my meditation on the Bible and that helps me to relieve stress and to keep me healthy, sound mind. So, I can be available for my clients. (C. Diana, personal communication, January 4, 2019)

It is evident from this quote that Diana used to meditate on the Bible. This meant that she selected passages from the Bible and linked it purposefully with her current situation. Diana viewed the Bible as the sacred textbook containing God's words, reflecting faithfulness or sense of obedience to God's words. Thus, meditating on Bible involved reflecting on the situation in front of God, which seemed to be like Amelia's case. Both forms of meditation practices involved a component of worship.

Indigenous beliefs influenced Maia to view Gods as guardians of the natural world, and she believes that they can protect her. She experiences a connection with the natural world by acknowledging and respecting various domains of nature, such as forests and oceans. According to Maia, Tangaroa is the God of oceans, and water is the starting point of life. Water has a life force, and she considered it a powerful cleansing agent. The following quote presents Maia's spiritual experience of connecting with water.

When I go to the beach, I would flip the water over myself as a cleansing, but also as acknowledging with regards to entering the ocean and keeping myself safe and feeling that respectful connection. I acknowledge you, and I enter your space.  
(S. Maia, personal communication, February 2, 2019)

Maia's sense of connectedness with the ocean and water affected Maia's social work competence of self-care. The following quote explains Maia's response to how her connectedness with water and nature influences her social work practice.

If I would go to a home visit, and I felt this was a bit of heavy space, like all the topics are heavy and I can sense the heaviness for the family to talk about. The topic may be something that happened in their lives. For me, even I left that place, I will then be, depending on how my body feels, my mind and my wairua (spirit), I would then drive down to the local beach, which is very close, and then I would do a prayer and cleanse myself in the water before I would go to the next house. So, I would not take any residue from one family to another home. I would like to go to a new home with a fresh mind and not transfer or even take home any feelings or any spiritual attachments associated with that case. (S. Maia, personal communication, February 2, 2019)

It is evident from this quote that Maia applies her connectedness with the ocean and water to manage the stress associated with her social worker role. Maia believes that acknowledging the power of the ocean through prayer and cleansing herself in water can provide her with an experience of physical and spiritual cleansing. Maia intends to use the healing properties of water to refresh her body, mind, and soul after attending to complex social work cases.

Ameena also indicated using water as part of the ritual, ablution to cleanse herself. Ameena differs from Maia in that ablution is the practice that makes herself clean to get into a space of worship. The practice of ablution intends to purify Ameena physically and spiritually. Ameena would need to follow specific methods to perform ablution, such as washing her feet, hands, ears, and face three times with water to remove the impurities in the body, and she would keep herself mindful of her actions and thoughts.

Social work practitioners' beliefs affected their self-care strategies. Religious forms of meditation provided a sense of peace of mind for some social work practitioners. Others developed self-care strategies from their indigenous beliefs, reflecting their belief in human beings' connectedness with the environment and the power of water. Two participants, Ameena and Maia, significantly differed in their intentions while cleansing with water. In the case of Ameena, cleansing body, mind, and soul is the Islamic ritual, which is required before undertaking spiritual practices such as prayers. Ameena's purpose was to ensure that she remained in a clean state to enter a space to perform practices such as namaz. Ameena indicated that she got peace of mind by connecting with God through namaz prayer and that visiting the space of the ocean remained not significant. In Maia's case, visiting and praying in the space of the ocean and sprinkling with water itself had a healing effect. Maia aimed to renew and sustain a relaxed mind to provide social work clients with complete attention.

The data analysis gathered shows that spirituality has a relational nature as participants' experience of spirituality involved a relationship with the numinous, a relationship with self and a relationship with clients in their unique situations. Therefore, it appears that spirituality is not impractical and airy-fairy for my participants. It is practical and visible in their everyday social work practice and personal life. The following section describes social work practitioners' views about social workers' role in addressing spirituality.

### **Social Workers' Role in Addressing Spirituality**

Social work practitioners' beliefs influenced their perceptions about integrating spirituality into social work practice. This storyline presents social work practitioners' ways of addressing clients' beliefs and perceptions about their role as social workers in addressing beliefs.

Diana believes that God's spirit dwells within her heart. She viewed herself as being created by God, and she said: "There is one God, Jesus Christ. Jesus gave us his spirit to guide us. He created human beings in the image of him. So, we can love, think, feel, and react differently from animals" (C. Diana, personal communication, January 4, 2019). The following quote presents Diana's response to how her relationship with God influenced her everyday life.

Having a relationship with God provides me with more peace and harmony in life. We are not constantly confused or in doubt. There are ups and downs. Yes, we do not say life is smooth. But we do not get bogged down by challenges. We can take the challenges in our stride, seek the Lord every time, and move forward.

(C. Diana, personal communication, January 4, 2019)

Diana perceives that reconnecting with God's spirit led her to experience peace and harmony in her everyday life. Due to the presence of God's spirit, Diana felt herself being able to detect ways to overcome challenges, which provided her with the guidance to be determined to achieve happiness and well-being. This belief influenced Diana to perceive the role of a social worker as a mentor to help the clients understand their strengths. The following quote explains Diana's response to addressing her belief in God in social work practice.

I encouraged the people I work with to understand the reality of things. When people are down and need support, I need to tell them that I go through ups and downs the same way they are in the position right now, and I am there to help them. Just because I am helping them does not mean everything is right in my life. I used to tell my clients we can raise and think about ways to overcome problems when our life goes down. That gives my clients and me a sense of clarity of mind. (C. Diana, personal communication, January 4, 2019)

It is evident from this quote that belief in God influenced Diana to build effective connections with her clients. For example, when Diana openly acknowledged herself as a person who also went through difficult situations, she seemed to be trying to build purposeful relationships with her clients by empathizing with them. It is also becoming apparent from the above quote that Diana viewed helping her clients gain clarity of mind as essential to make them actively involved in the social work process. Diana's spiritual activity, which she uses to clarify her mind, is prayer. Her spiritual experiences influenced her to inspire clients from similar religious backgrounds to consider taking advantage of spirituality-based interventions such as Bible reading. The following quote explains Diana's response to how

her beliefs shaped addressing spirituality into social work practice with clients from her religious background.

There is a connection between spiritual beliefs and mental health. In mental health assessments, I look at the spiritual needs of clients. It is easier for me to ask them about their beliefs. I used to ask them whether they believed in God. Some say that they used to go to church, and they left. That is fine, but there is an encouragement because that is my experience. I encourage them to try Bible reading to see what it will do for them. (C. Diana, personal communication, January 4, 2019)

When Diana asked her clients whether they believed in God, read the Bible, or went to church, she assumed clients who identified themselves as Christians might cope better if they engaged in spiritual practices such as reading the Bible. Two concerns related to Diana's way of integrating spirituality into mental health assessments. The first concern was that Diana limited her clients' opportunities to reflect on their spiritual activities. For example, she did not mention asking her clients about their interest in spiritual practices such as meditation, yoga, or other spiritual practices. Therefore, it appears that she perceives herself as holding a superior position regarding her spiritual experiences through participation in faith-based activities. The second concern was that she encouraged clients to read the Bible as an intervention without asking about their interests, which seemed to be an imposition of her beliefs on clients. The following quote shows Diana's perception that expressing love and care to clients effectively addresses spirituality in social work practice.

I would say my spirituality is more than a religion. It talks about love, caring for them. The aspect of love and care comes forward in the job itself. I am there to support them in getting the services that they need. I will only share my spiritual

beliefs if they are keen to know. (C. Diana, personal communication, January 4, 2019)

Diana indicated that as a social worker, she would need to express love and care towards her clients and that sharing her beliefs with them may not be necessary to share her beliefs with them if they did not ask her first. As she recommended Bible reading as a cure without being asked by a client to share her beliefs, the above quote shows that she expressed patronizing behaviour grounded in religious superiority. Some clients from other religious backgrounds may perceive Diana as a Christian social work practitioner who placed her belief systems superior to theirs, which may prevent them from feeling comfortable sharing their spiritual experiences with Diana and feeling judged. Therefore, it is crucial to avoid patronizing behaviours by examining the influence of faith on communication. Diana would need to think about how not to impose personal beliefs on clients.

Vance also indicated expressing love as the role of a social worker in integrating spirituality, Vance said:

I believe that God has given people the right to deny him. He is not imposing. He does not want human beings to fight on his behalf. He would not ask me to tell people that you would die or get a bad illness if they did not believe in him. God does not work that way. As a social worker, my job is not to preach to people about faith. I am not interested in that. I can certainly show my love for them without preaching. (G. Vance, personal communication, October 16, 2018)

Vance considered preaching faith as arrogant behaviour for a social work practitioner. The role of a social work practitioner is to express love. When Vance expressed his disinterest in teaching people his beliefs, it seemed that he preferred to keep spirituality as a personal resource. Consistent with Vance, Ameena believes that social work practitioners should keep

their spiritual beliefs as personal resources for themselves becoming effective in helping their clients in a respectful manner. Ameena understood that showing unconditional respect is a social work value that she would need to adhere to while working with clients from different backgrounds. She said:

I worked with clients who came from different religious and spiritual beliefs. My concept is clear that my beliefs are for myself to practice. I need to keep those with me as my precious belongings. I know, people have got their own set of beliefs and values and I just respect them. They continue with what they want to do. So, I am not there to influence them on their religious or spiritual values. I am just there to assist them with achieving their goals. (B. Ameena, personal communication, January 27, 2019)

It is noticeable that personal spirituality does not impede social work practitioners from valuing clients' right to practice their own beliefs and practices. Vance applied faith to energize his clients, he said:

When discussing about how I apply my faith, especially with Māori clients, I always ask them whether they want to pray. It is not necessary that my clients need to have similar beliefs to me. It is their opportunity. I would offer that. (G. Vance, personal communication, October 16, 2018)

Diana revealed that understanding clients' spiritual beliefs is important for mental health assessment. In the social work practice context of Aotearoa New Zealand, some of the health models, such as Te Whare Tapa Whā, included addressing spirituality as part of assessing the well-being of the Indigenous people. Diana used to ask clients whether they used to attend any church services or believe in any God or belong to any community to explore practical

strategies to boost their mental health. She linked assessing spiritual beliefs as part of her social worker role to ensure clients' health and well-being.

Spiritual beliefs are part of the assessment. It is not something that I ask them illegally or is not supposed to be asked. I am in a Māori based practice. It has the model of health, Te Whare Tapa Whā. One of the pillars of the model is spirituality and I need to look at the spiritual well-being of my clients. At the beginning of the sessions, I can ask them whether they would like to start the session with a karakia or their prayer. If they say no, that is fine. (C. Diana, personal communication, January 4, 2019)

Ameena's beliefs influenced her to believe that she would need to promote the dignity of mental health clients. She said:

I work in mental health. So, many people who cannot get perfectly better for the rest of their lives. While working with these clients, I think getting their hearts at peace is part of my role as a social worker. I need to make them understand that the negative events are just one part of their lives, not the end of the world. There are other ways to overcome problems, and as a social worker, I needed to assist them in setting goals to overcome the problem. I believe that if God takes away one thing, there will be another thing he gives to replace it. So, then I try to look for the client's strengths. So, the strengths perspective with a solution-focused view and psychosocial models provides the wrap-around services to the clients. (B. Ameena, personal communication, January 27, 2019)

This quote proves Ameena's perception that her clients may hold different strengths to compensate for their weaknesses. This perception is derived from her belief in God, which

motivated her to explore her clients' strengths. The following quote explains how Ameena addressed spirituality in social work practice.

Some of my clients firmly adhere to the church, and I ask them what makes them happy. One of my clients said I like to play piano for my church. I asked her whether she would like to play the piano for me while sitting at the library. She said yes, and she had done well. After that, she said I had forgotten it for a long time. Another client wanted to learn guitar, and I supported her. As long as people want to do things or when we think about clients' progress, religion or spirituality did not put a metal hat on us that we cannot think beyond it. (B. Ameena, personal communication, January 27, 2019)

It is clear from this quote that Ameena viewed integrating spirituality into social work practice as exploring clients' inspirations, interests, and strengths as their God-given gifts. This way of addressing spirituality in social work practice can help her clients experience autonomy and dignity. Ameena understood that spiritual wellbeing is crucial for human beings to survive. She said:

We live in this world. Our bodies need food from here. But our soul is from a higher power. It did not originate from this world. Our soul needs spiritual food. Without spiritual food, our souls will be depleted. I think, regardless of where we come from, we all need to look after our spiritual wellbeing. (B. Ameena, personal communication, January 27, 2019)

Consistent with Ameena, Oceana also indicated that addressing spiritual beliefs are crucial in social work practice. The following quote explains Oceana's response to how her faith influenced her to address spirituality in her social work practice.

When I am speaking to a client over the phone, who holds similar faith, I will remind them about their faith. The conversation must be opened by them telling me where they are at in terms of their religious beliefs. If they open the conversation, I will tell them, as you told me, you are a believer, and you are a Christian. I would encourage them to find out whether there are any beliefs that they can tune in to support their wellbeing. If I identified they a medical need, I would refer them to medical practitioners. I would try to make them understand their spiritual needs are also important. I do not want to upset or disrespect the client. I would remind myself that it is about my client and always pray to my God to have wisdom in how I talk to them and trying not to impose my beliefs on them. (K. Oceana, personal communication, January 7, 2019)

It is apparent from this quote that Oceana's way of addressing spirituality included showing respect. While working with clients, Oceana felt social work practitioners must prefer clients' beliefs and spiritual choices over introducing their beliefs to the clients, which she interpreted as showing respect. Moreover, Oceana points out she would not want to open a discussion on clients' spiritual or religious beliefs if clients did not discuss faith, which resonates with other social work practitioners' views.

Social work practitioners address spirituality in their social work practice by expressing love, caring, empathy and respect to their clients. Social work practitioners felt reluctant to talk about their faith if the client did not ask them any questions related to their faith. However, some of them encouraged their clients to reconnect with their faith if they identified their clients and themselves held similar beliefs. Listening to clients' beliefs is viewed by participants as part of respecting their inherent dignity and worth and a valuable source of inspiration for planning for a better future.

## **Chapter Six: Findings - Spirituality and Public**

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section begins by presenting beliefs that provided participants with a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives and how they link them with spirituality. The second section explains the influence of beliefs on participants' well-being. The third section presents participants' views about incorporating spirituality into social work practice and their perceptions about the role of social workers in integrating spirituality.

### **Meaning and Purpose**

I asked participants to share their perceptions about what gives them a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. All of them expressed experiencing connections is an important aspect of their lives, and they strive to develop meaning and purpose through those connections. Their experience of meaning and purpose vary because they are connected to different beliefs. Participants perceived culture, religion, education, nature, and work as significant factors in shaping their identities and beliefs. Participants' responses to whom they feel connected varied depending on their experiences. This section presents participants' understandings of how they experience connections with self, God, nature, and friends and how it relates to their experience of spirituality. Participants' experience of meaning and purpose are described under nine sub-categories: destiny and free will, being creative and holding aspirations, self-expression, self-improvement, raising a son and understanding life as numinous, gaining personal fulfilment, listening to people, interconnectedness, and service through a helping profession. This section also describes what social workers need to be prepared for in relation to addressing spirituality with their potential clients.

### *Destiny and Free Will*

Religious teachings and belief in God can be a source of meaning and purpose. Laila believes in the Muslim faith, which taught her about destiny and free will, and she constructed meaning and purpose out of it. Belief in destiny is that Allah predetermines the past, present, and future events, and hence she would be unable to predict the outcome of her decisions and actions. She would need to accept the results without questioning them. If any bad event happens in her life, her belief in destiny influences her to convince herself that God has the will to give her good in the future. Thus, belief in destiny helped her to accept both good and bad events in her life as the will of God. The following quote presents Laila's response to what provides a sense of meaning and purpose in her life.

The purpose of my life is to be a good person, especially following what religion taught me. I believe, living on the earth and everything I do here is just a test from God. I believe in destiny. Whatever comes true from God, I believe in that.

(S. Laila, personal communication, March 2, 2019)

Laila presented her perception about viewing life as a test from God, which she connected with her belief in destiny and free will. From an Islamic point of view, understanding life as a test from God indicates that human beings need to perform the best actions to succeed in the test, and they have free will, which indicates that they are free to make moral choices and perform actions. In essence, Laila would need to believe in the presence of Allah and be conscious of her thoughts and actions to become a good person. Because she believes that Allah observes her thoughts and actions every time and that if she is not righteous, Allah will punish her. Therefore, she perceived performing five-time prayers, purification of mind and body through ablution, reading Quran, fasting, and giving charity as significant to becoming a good person and avoiding punishment. Moreover, religious teachings inspired her to care for

others. She believes that helping people attain their well-being is also an essential to being a good person.

Practising prayers only does not mean that you are a good Muslim. You must care about others. You must teach others what Islam teaches you. For example, my religion, Islam, taught me peace, care about others, kindness, patience, and thinking about others. (S. Laila, personal communication, March 2, 2019)

Laila linked her sense of meaning and purpose with spirituality. She experiences the presence of God in every aspect of her life. She felt she could not separate experiencing closeness with Allah from her everyday consciousness from an Islamic perspective. Therefore, relationship with Allah is a significant aspect of Laila's everyday experience of spirituality and personal identity.

Knowing how the Muslim faith influenced Laila to experience spirituality can make social work practitioners aware that their clients may keep certain beliefs significant in their lives, such as destiny and free will. Social work practitioners apply these beliefs to motivate their clients to cope with adverse circumstances. For example, some clients may struggle with accepting traumatic events. As the incidents that happened in their lives would be irreversible, social work practitioners could check whether they can apply religious beliefs such as the belief in destiny to make their clients accept realities. Clients' belief in free will is a valuable resource for social work practitioners to inspire them to make choices and decisions. These beliefs will guide social work practitioners in understanding clients' behaviour.

The following section presents how Luna constructed a sense of meaning and purpose without the help of religion and the experience of spirituality.

### *Being Creative and Holding Aspirations*

Luna recognized herself as an atheist, significantly different from Laila. Luna opposed following any religion by stating that religions were made by man to create power imbalances. Creativity and aspirations provide Luna with a sense of meaning and purpose in her life. She seems to be very creative in setting different goals to achieve her aspirations, which seems to be like some of the participants who prioritised setting goals as an essential strategy to achieve meaning and purpose in their lives. For example, living life as a strong independent woman is one of the aspirations indicated by Luna to experience meaning and purpose in her life. Luna's understanding of herself living without family played a significant role in shaping this aspiration. The following quote presents Luna's response to what provides her a sense of meaning and purpose in her life.

My work gives me a sense of meaning and purpose. I work as an executive assistant for a health organization. So, my main goal is to help people improve their health. I am assisting the doctors in running their practices more effectively. It is not only because I work in an environment that cares about people but also it cares about its staff. Working with like-minded people and having fun also made my life meaningful. Because I do not have children or partner. Sometimes, I miss that family concept. But I am used to it. I do have cousins in the country. The other things that make my life meaningful are my friends and travel. I like to travel and explore things. Music and movies are very significant in my life. Also, aiming to get somewhere, I always strive to look after myself. I feel I have achieved a lot as a woman on my own, you know, keeping my home running. (K. Luna, personal communication, March 4, 2019)

Luna provides equal importance to work and mental health. Luna ensures that her workplace environment provides her sense of belonging, happiness, satisfaction, and creativity. It is noticeable that Luna spoke about her work as fulfilling as it involved helping people access health services. Luna viewed helping others and building effective social relationships as essential to making her life meaningful. For example, Luna mentioned that she has friends, which can prevent her from feeling lonely. Meeting friends, travelling, music, and movies can make her happy and make her feel connected. Happiness can positively impact Luna's mental health, and she can connect well with her aspiration of living life to its fullest by being an independent woman.

Luna linked meaning and purpose with spirituality. She viewed spirituality as the means of achieving greater happiness. Luna encompassed various activities to experience spirituality, and her indication of listening to music while sitting in the car and singing shows that some spiritual experiences are deeply personal and do not need to be religious. The following quote presents why Luna viewed music as a spiritual experience.

I wanted to move forward in my life. I still like being busy, going to work, and waiting in the traffic for an hour, most often during the day. There is pain, but sometimes, I use that time to listen to my music. I like enjoying music, and I can sing in the car. Music is also integrated into my spirituality. Because music is a powerful thing for moods, it can make me happy. It is very interconnective. (K. Luna, personal communication, March 4, 2019)

Luna connected herself with music to transcend life. It made her happy to be successful in her life endeavours. She also reported that experiencing a relationship with the universe is her way of experiencing numinous. Luna believes that the universe holds higher power and

indicates her experience of having a relationship with nature as spiritual. She differentiated religion from spirituality and perceived herself as spiritual but not religious.

Luna's spiritual experiences exemplify the relevance of holistically exploring the context of social work clients well as what gives meaning and purpose in their lives, such as work, family, and relationships. If any of the clients indicated to be spiritual but not religious, it might signal to practitioners that there will be spiritual experiences deep in their hearts that cannot be related to religious worship. In such cases, social work practitioners can check whether their clients hold any aspirations, which would help them understand their clients' sense of meaning and purpose or transcendence. They can encourage their clients to talk about their ways of making meaning and purpose in their lives through experiences such as work, art, music, friendships, and travel. Providing space and time for the clients to share their aspirations, interests, and ways of experiencing happiness can be a link to addressing spirituality in social work practice. It is also important to make sure that their clients hold on to achievable aspirations, as sometimes unrealistic aspirations could negatively impact their mental well-being. The following section presents Fiona's experience of meaning and purpose through focusing on expressing herself.

### ***Self-Expression***

Fiona believes that experiencing and expressing the freedom to improve herself is a significant aspect that provides her with a sense of meaning and purpose in her life. She viewed that expressing herself could impact her quality of life. The following quote presents what provides Fiona with a sense of meaning and purpose.

It is just engaging in something that relates to my purpose. Artistic practice aligns with my own beliefs, things to do with, I guess, socio-political, environmental, and spirituality. It is important to express myself about those things. At the same

time, I am also investigating those things, choosing topics that I would like to learn more about and know about myself. (T. Fiona, personal communication, March 15, 2019)

This quote shows Fiona's perception that the complete meaning of thoughts and emotions is easily understandable when they are expressed. She views art as a creative way to understand and express self by exploring thoughts and emotions. Art motivated Fiona to study various subjects, such as science and spirituality to explore and improve herself. Fiona felt happy, energetic, and creative when she engages in art as an everyday practice to participate in continuous learning and communicate knowledge and feelings creatively with others.

If I am not engaged in artistic practice, a part of me is not alive. So, feeling those things in some way creatively every day is important. It is one of the pillars of what makes me happy. (T. Fiona, personal communication, March 15, 2019)

Fiona is involved in painting, sculpture, and nature photography. These aesthetic forms linked her with experiencing transcendence. Fiona believes that there is a higher power in the form of energy, and that she views spirituality as the process of connecting to that higher energy or higher consciousness. According to Fiona, art can help her attain higher consciousness, wisdom, and happiness. In this sense, art could be a form of prayer.

Social work practitioners can explore their clients' interests in arts. Art-based interventions can increase clients' ability to critically thinking. Social work practitioners can provide clients the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings about various subjects. It will help social work practitioners to make their clients feel free to express themselves, which may enhance clients' creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving. The following section

describes Meagan's experience of making meaning and purpose in her life through improving herself.

### *Self-Improvement*

Meagan's desire for self-improvement provides her life with a sense of meaning and purpose. The following quote illustrates this.

I am interested in the arts. It is one way of engaging with some of the things that I struggle with about living, the things that you have to work with when you do not understand why things are happening. I find that art is quite uplifting, and you can get into the truth of everything, and on the flip side, you can write about something that is quite a fairy tale. It is a way of finding some light in the dark, sometimes, maybe. (W. Megan, personal communication, March 18, 2019)

Consistent with Fiona, Megan also indicated art as the source of experiencing numinous and transcendence. In contrast with Fiona, Megan expressed spiritual pluralism, which meant she used multiple ways to experience spirituality. Megan differs from Luna in that she used Buddhist practices and drawing to experience numinous and transcendence, while Luna did not associate any such practice to improve herself. The following section describes Megan's spiritual journey.

Megan was brought up in a Christian family, and she believed in God and used to go to church. When she became an adult, she was inspired by Nichiren Buddhism, and shifted from Christianity to Buddhism. She indicated herself as an atheist and held the perception that believing in God could not help her to attain enlightenment. According to her, Nichiren Buddhism places more emphasis on improving oneself, which is the reason for Megan to become a practising Buddhist. Megan believes that enlightenment is possible for all human

beings, and they could eliminate their sufferings if they followed the teachings of Buddhism. She intends to bring enlightenment into her and other people's lives. The following quote presents Megan's multiple experiences of spirituality.

There has always been something that I had gravitated towards or called to when I needed some help, whether it will be someone who died in the past, the feeling that I am being looked after, or just a sense of the right way to go. I believe that there is an energy that looks after us and helps us if we need anything.

Spirituality is a part of all of that. Even with Buddhism and chanting, you just go to a place, centre yourself, and bring yourself back to yourself and nature. (W. Megan, personal communication, March 18, 2019)

Megan's experience of spirituality as a form of energy can provide her with a sense of protection, which is one form of expression indicated in this quote. This expression of spirituality is linked with experiencing ancestral presence under challenging circumstances. Megan also experiences spirituality through centring towards herself. She believes that she can work on her spiritual aspect through practices such as chanting. Megan felt that chanting transformed her by cultivating a sense of self-love, which has transformative potential. The concept of self-love implies her capacity to love her thoughts and actions without resisting them. She uses the concept of self-love to extend herself loving to other beings on the planet. Megan's perception is that experiencing self-love can influence her to use her thoughts, emotions, and feelings to enhance her productivity and well-being. Even though Fiona did not focus on employing practices such as chanting to cultivate self-love, artistic practice and experience of freedom can enhance her love towards herself.

It is noticeable that Megan indicated herself as an atheist. Her experiences and expressions of spirituality provide social work practitioners with the insight that potential clients can be

spiritual without being religious and follow a specific spiritual path or tradition, as indicated by Megan. Therefore, it may be helpful for social work practitioners to ask their atheist or non-religious clients about their beliefs and a range of ways of expressing the freedom to be themselves and acting in accordance with their highest beliefs. Megan's experiences demonstrated the significance of exploration of a whole range of experiences and expressions of clients' spirituality could enhance clients' self-improvement and their ability to love themselves and others. The following section describes Poppy's sense of meaning and purpose and experience of spirituality as dismantling the concept of self from being.

### ***Raising a son and Understanding Life as Numinous***

Poppy's desire to protect her son provides her with a strong sense of meaning and purpose in her life. Poppy's unconditional love towards her son indicates that personal roles can motivate people to lead meaningful lives. Poppy got divorced and felt 'ungrounded' for many years. Even though Poppy grew up in a Christian family, she exited Christianity when she turned eighteen. She encountered Krishna consciousness and Dzogchen Buddhism. Buddhism influenced Poppy to understand that life has a bigger purpose. The following quote presents Poppy's response to what provides her life with a sense of meaning and purpose and how it links with spirituality.

As a mother, my son is a massive part of my life. I wanted to look after him the best I could, which is one aspect of meaning and purpose in my life. But, even more than my son, the main thing that gives me meaning is my desire to discover who I am. Some religions, such as Hinduism, call it enlightenment or awakening. You can call it anyway. I know that I am not my body, and I am not my mind. I know that something unique is to be discovered. We all are the same thing. My

number one purpose is to do everything I can to find out who I am. (A. Poppy, personal communication, March 19, 2019)

Poppy understands life itself as a numinous experience. Poppy views thoughts, and emotions as unreal, as the self is an imagination. This means that when people place more emphasis on their thoughts and emotions, they will stay away from the truth of life. She experiences she went astray from enlightenment when guided by herself. Poppy perceives that if she thinks and feels too much about her goals, emotions, and thoughts, she will resist experiencing inner happiness. Poppy's sense of discovering whom she is, is found to be different from others as she opposes focusing on self. It differs greatly from participants who found meaning and purpose in life by setting goals to improve themselves. Poppy developed a personal spiritual philosophy after studying Tibetan Buddhism.

The masters, the enlightened ones, have left practical knowledge, a kind of manual to live a good life to be fulfilled, be happy, be peaceful and live harmoniously with each other, the animals, and the earth. I tried to live my life according to the teachings I found. (A. Poppy, personal communication, March 19, 2019)

Achieving spiritual enlightenment is significant in Poppy's life. It can help her lead a peaceful, happy, and fulfilled life. Poppy wanted to achieve a newer state of consciousness, which she would need to prevent thoughts and judgements. She perceived herself as God in the form of energy. God, in her view, is "love", and she viewed everything on the planet, including her, plants, and animals, are one, the God, that is love.

Poppy's understanding of God indicates that people may interpret the term God differently. It provides social workers with the insight that they would need to explore their clients' perceptions of God. It will help them differentiate their beliefs about God from their

clients' beliefs. Moreover, social work practitioners can check whether any roles provide their clients with a sense of meaning and purpose and help them identify meaning and purpose for their lives. If there is any indication from potential clients' side that they sense life has a more significant spiritual meaning, it would be wise to assist clients in creating a personal spiritual philosophy. The following section presents how Harold experiences meaning and purpose through developing self.

### ***Gaining Personal Fulfillment***

Harold's quest to achieve personal fulfilment provided him with a sense of meaning and purpose in his life. He views that he can transform himself by focusing on self-development, which resembles Megan's belief that the self is powerful. Harold differs from Megan in that he aspires to increase his self-esteem to develop his potential to relate to others. He intends to pick up cues from other people's lives to improve his knowledge and other people's self-esteem. Because he may view active listening as an important skill, he would need to develop to understand others which can make him successful in his career as a psychologist. The following quote presents what provides Harold with a sense of meaning and purpose.

What gives me a sense of meaning is pursuing fulfilment. I am creating value for others and myself. Self-improvement is significant to me. I like other people to do well, so I offer advice. But I am not overly reliant on the progress of the other person. Because I believe it is a kind of self-decision. So, I allow pursuing fulfilment to other people like I am giving them information. If they would like to progress and do things, that is fine. Because it is more about me making an effort. I really enjoy conversations with people, which I find very fulfilling. I enjoy learning about the way people work. What fulfils me more than anything is trying to remove the barriers for people that prevent them from being able to self-

actualize, which is the best they can be. It is not doing things for people. It is not managing emotions. It is about helping them identify their goals, assessing the current situation, and developing actionable steps. I also do that for my thoughts.

(E. Harold, public participant, personal communication, May 5, 2019)

Harold's sense of meaning and purpose is developed from one of the theories of psychology, Maslow's Hierarchy of needs. He integrated Maslow's indication of self-actualization as the highest level of needs in his construction of meaning and purpose. Harold found himself aspiring toward achieving self-actualization, which meant that he desired to become the best version of himself. He believes that he has the agency to help people realise their talents and possibilities to have the most significant achievements in their personal lives. Harold perceives that identifying needs and values and setting goals according to them are essential aspects of improving the self for human beings. He linked spirituality with developing self-awareness and improvement.

Spirituality is very personal. It starts with self-awareness. How do I feel about this? Where am I want to go? After that, I figure out how do I get there. Then I can come up with actionable steps. (E. Harold, public participant, personal communication, May 5, 2019)

Even though Harold had the knowledge of Christianity he acquired through Sunday school teachings, he did not experience spirituality through religious beliefs or practices. He indicated himself as not religious. Harold read extensively about various other religions, such as Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism, and intends to develop values by extending knowledge about diverse religious perspectives to self-development. Harold shows religious pluralism.

I could not be religious. But I use it as an excuse. It is not in my best interest to go to churches. I used to go to Sunday school until twelve years old as part of my family tradition. I felt I learned from there how to value friends. But I do not see any point in relying on information from one source. Believing in one religion may limit me from getting information from one source. I would like to develop my values from many different sources also. I do not really mind where did someone get information. But I will look at how they value others and live. (E. Harold, public participant, personal communication, May 5, 2019)

Harold's experience of spirituality differs from Laila's. While Laila firmly adheres to Islamic beliefs and links spirituality with a relationship with God, Harold shows religious pluralism and links spirituality with self-development. Harold's experience exemplifies that some clients who hold religious pluralism may indicate themselves as non-religious but may develop values from different religions. Therefore, it is important for social workers to ask subjective questions to understand potential clients' understandings of spirituality. He also indicated how his profession and beliefs are closely interrelated. Another participant, Emily, also identified herself as non-religious and interpreted spirituality differently. The following section describes Emily's experience of spirituality through developing a sense of connectedness with friends and experiencing joy and her sense of meaning and purpose.

### ***Listening to People***

Emily made meaning and purpose in life from her work as a counselling educator. Educating professionals to listen to their clients provided Emily with meaning and purpose. The following quote presents Emily's response to what provides her life with a sense of meaning and purpose.

I think educating professionals to listen is very meaningful to me, probably, because of my personal experiences with the system. I found that many educational institutions train students on how to talk, and what they should or should not do. But there is not so much around listening. Listening is critical. The root cause of our problems in this world is that we do not hear enough. We think we are listening, but we listen to our own voice. (S. Emily, personal communication, May 20, 2019)

Emily recognised herself as a Christian, which does not necessarily indicate that she experiences spirituality through a relationship with God. Some people may disassociate the presence of God from their everyday lives, and their belief in God would not be consistent throughout their lives. In Emily's case, it seems that feeling the presence of God is the lesson she acquired from culture. To Emily, experiencing the presence of God during adverse circumstances is not a result of her engagement in religious practices such as prayer.

I am a protestant, and I was brought up in the Christian tradition. I am very faithful to the Christian faith tradition, which means we celebrate Christmas and Easter. It is a culture and the values I have embedded in. We have ten commandments, and even though I did not think about the ten commandments, it is sort of our culture built on them. So, the way I have opinions about things, and my prejudices come from the culture I was raised in. You have the culture, and then you would say you believe in God. Sometimes, the existence of God is a big question. It is part of the culture in which you feel safe and secure. God will be there sometimes and sometimes not. I am not enlightened by the presence of God all the time. (S. Emily, personal communication, May 20, 2019)

Emily viewed spirituality as a sense of connectedness with others and that perceived listening as an important way of connecting with people.

I feel, spirituality is a sense of connection to something or somebody. It does not exist without the other or having a dialogic relationship with something that is not me. I think that spirituality is connectedness, and when you say sense of meaning and purpose in life, that is spirituality. But, regarding God, I would like to believe in him. I had a major crisis happened in my life, and then I saw him or registered that there is a God or felt it. But, right now, I do not think there is a God in my everyday life. There is a sense of disconnection from my belief in God. This kind of spirituality I follow. I am not very religious now. (S. Emily, personal communication, May 20, 2019)

Emily's understanding of herself as being spiritual does not indicate that she is a religious person or experiencing the presence of God. Togetherness with friends provides Emily with the opportunity to lean on each other, which is a significant source of joy for Emily. Thus, Emily experiences spirituality in the form of joy through togetherness with friends and experiencing the freedom to express herself. "When I am with some of my friends, I feel very secure with them. I experience joy, and it is very easy. Joy just flows, and you feel connected. You may also feel who you are" (S. Emily, personal communication, May 20, 2019).

Emily experiences herself as being secure and safe with some of her friends, which made her shift from experiencing the presence of God to experiencing the presence of friends as spiritual. Social work practitioners can make a difference in their clients' lives by helping them find meaningful connections with fellow beings. Emily's data provides insight that culture may impact potential clients' perceptions about belief in God. Listening to clients' experiences of culture, religion, and spirituality is essential to make them feel safe to disclose

their problems and spiritual experiences. The following section describes Olivia's experience of spirituality which focuses on relationality.

### *Interconnectedness*

Olivia viewed everything existing on this planet as interconnected. She experienced transcendent connections between herself and everything existing on the planet, including human beings, animals, and plants. She believed that everything on the planet has a soul and a specific purpose of fulfilling as part of leading meaningful lives. Being consciously aware of her connections with people, earth, and animals was perceived to be important for her to feel grounded and respected. The following quote explains Olivia's response to what provides her with a sense of meaning and purpose.

I feel everything has a soul. People may experience the world differently. But we need to be constantly reminded that we are connected, and we see that connection always manifesting in how we treat the planet and others. There is a sense of constant internal reflection in my mind about how I connect with this planet, people, plants, and animals. I believe that we come from oneness, and I continuously remind myself and others that it is all about the soul and feeling respected. (N. Olivia, personal communication, May 25, 2019)

Olivia's understanding of spirituality differs from Harold's in that her way of developing an awareness of self leads her to engage in ongoing internal reflection to remind herself about how her soul relates to human beings, animals, and plants. Olivia interpreted spirituality as experiencing the freedom of choice and thoughts. Even though Olivia did not connect spirituality with believing in God, she acknowledged herself as belonging to the Christian religion. She viewed Christianity as the religious identity she acquired from her culture, which resembles Emily's understanding of religion. This is an important indication for social

workers as they need to realise that people who identify with similar religious denominations may differ in how they experience spirituality. Not everybody needs to understand spirituality as experiencing closeness with the numinous. Therefore, social workers' ways of addressing spirituality should go beyond understanding people's religious beliefs and making assumptions about them. The following section presents Donald's experience of spirituality.

### ***Service through a Helping Profession***

Donald indicated that his work as a nurse provides him with a sense of meaning and purpose, which resonates with many participants who found their work spiritually fulfilling.

When I joined the nursing school, probably, that is when I realized that nursing was a calling for caring. It is more like I give my life in the service of others. This realization influences my life. If I feel a little bit unwell or lazy to go to work, I think somebody who may be injured or has an advanced disease needs my care. I need to get up, get ready, and go. So, a caring attitude influences the work that does. Sometimes, I look forward to meeting my clients. (K. Donald, personal communication, June 2, 2019)

Donald understands spirituality as experiencing a connection with the numinous. Prayer is Donald's everyday spiritual practice which makes him feel confident. Donald perceives that if he engages in prayers, numinous will bless him, and that sense of blissfulness can help him overcome the struggles in his everyday life. Prayer created an experience of joy in Donald's life. Interestingly, Donald did not recognize himself as belonging to any religious affiliation.

I could not tie myself to any religion. I do not want to identify myself as a Christian or Hindu. I used to listen to all religious lectures, and I wrote down

good things I could apply to myself. It does not matter what religion taught that lesson. (K. Donald, personal communication, June 2, 2019)

It is evident from this quote that Donald wishes to acquire knowledge from all the religious resources rather than relying on one religion. When Donald spoke about his readiness to write down information from different religious lectures, it seemed that he was directed at improving himself by applying multiple strategies. It resembles the religious pluralism expressed by Harold. Therefore, social work practitioners must explore whether potential clients hold knowledge and experience of multiple religious beliefs. Assessing the applicability of their beliefs is essential rather than asking them to name their religious affiliations. It is noticeable that even though Donald did not declare himself as a Christian or Hindu, he is involved in spiritual practices such as prayers. It meant that social work practitioners could not predict clients' experiences of spirituality by only knowing the name of their religious affiliation.

This section provided an account of participants' diverse perspectives about the meaning and purpose of their lives and spirituality. Participants experienced spirituality in different ways. It is noticeable that many participants did not experience spirituality by connecting with God and following religion. They share connections with nature, and self-improvement in common. Even though some participants recognized themselves as Christians, they found themselves did not rely on religious practices such as prayer or going to church to experience a connection with the numinous. It supports the notion that people experience spirituality in various ways. For example, experiencing joy through meeting friends or engaging in any form of artistic expression can be a spiritual experience. The spiritual expressions presented in the chapter included participants' sense of creativity, freedom, entertainment, belonging to each other, numinous, and nature. The following section will describe how beliefs influenced the participants to experience well-being in their everyday lives.

## **Influence of Beliefs on Well-Being**

Participants derived strengths from their spiritual experiences, which enhanced their well-being. This section will describe participants' experiences of how beliefs impacted their well-being.

### ***Belief in Destiny and Well-Being***

Some people develop courage from their religious beliefs. For example, Laila identified that the Islamic belief in destiny provides her with the courage and patience to overcome struggles. Believing in destiny helped her convince herself that Allah could transform her failures into successes for the future, and she would accept the realities of her life with a strong belief that something good would come out of it. It reduces distress during difficult circumstances, and she keeps herself optimistic through prayer, which can make her more resilient. The following quote explains how prayer affected her well-being.

I experience an everyday relationship with Allah. When I engage in prayer, I feel like I can make a bond with my God. I am close to him during the five-time prayers, and I can share my happiness, sorrows, and struggles with God. It improves my well-being. When I asked something to God, he gave me the feeling that he was listening to me and that made me feel courageous to move on. (S.

Laila, personal communication, March 2, 2019)

It is evident from this quote that people's experience of having a connection with something more powerful than themselves can enhance their well-being. Prayer provides Laila with the experience of having an everyday conversation with God. She understood God as a powerful listener, which led her to set aside time to self-reflect on her thoughts and emotions. This self-reflection alone does not result in courage. Belief in destiny is combined

with self-reflection during prayer, which results in the formation of courage in her heart.

Laila resembles the five-times Muslim prayers, Namaz, as a yoga exercise.

Five-time prayers are a kind of exercise that enhances my well-being. When I am doing ablution, it gives me refreshment, and the prayers provide me with strength in my soul. It is a kind of yoga exercise. When I do the prayers, it strengthens my body. That is why I would say it affects my well-being. When I stopped my prayers, I felt depressed, honestly. It is a special thing for my well-being. (S. Laila, personal communication, March 2, 2019)

The conversation with God, the Namaz, involves physical movements, which can aid her in stretching out the muscles and bones, which can help relieve tension from the body and mind. Namaz is a simple health activity that does not require long workouts. As Laila experiences prayer, increases inner calmness in her heart and removes sadness, it seems that simple body movements can impact one's health and well-being. The ritual of ablution before performing the prayers can prepare her to get out of her busy life schedule and take time to reflect. As ablution involves washing hands, face, and feet with water, it can make her feel refreshed to move forward. Laila's belief in destiny also inspired her to acquire guidance by reading the Quran. The following quote presents Laila's response to how belief in destiny influences her everyday life.

It guides me in being a good person. The guidance is what he is giving me in everyday life. The better guideline for my life is the book Quran. If I have a problem, I go through the book in every situation. It gives me relief. It solves a lot of my issues. (S. Laila, personal communication, March 2, 2019)

Laila's experiences exemplify the significance of understanding clients as whole persons. Clients may hold knowledge of practices for taking care of their bodies, minds, and souls. Social work practitioners can ask their clients to talk about the relevance of beliefs and practices for their well-being. When working with Muslim clients, social work practitioners could assess whether they can use belief in destiny and spiritual practices such as prayer to develop their clients' courage and enhance their well-being.

Donald's perceptions about how he maintains connections with self incorporated belief in destiny. The following quote describes Donald's response to how he maintains a connection with self.

If I really want to connect with myself, I will need to sit down and think. I need some quiet time. But I do not do it every day. I will do it once a week. I will sit down and reflect. For me, reflection has a lot to do with my decision-making. When I decided to come to New Zealand and work as a nurse here, I firmly believed God had a plan for me. My destiny is well planned by my God. Open communication with family members, talking, and feeling connected, that is one thing I do to connect with myself. Sometimes, I take a walk, and that works for me. If I take a walk, even if I am not going anywhere or it is not just part of my exercise, I feel relaxed. (K. Donald, personal communication, June 2, 2019)

Donald's ways of connecting to himself are taking some quiet time to reflect, talking to family members, and walking. Donald's self-reflection included beliefs about God, which seems like Laila, who perceives events occur in her life as pre-determined by God. Donald considered walking as a critical stress-releasing activity. It evidences that movement and self-reflection can release stress. People can integrate faith as a significant motivator to enhance

their courage to make decisions. The following section describes the influence of nature on participants' well-being.

### *Nature and Well-Being*

Participants indicated that their connection with nature enhanced their well-being. While Luna pointed out that nature influenced her in building tenacity as her strength, Olivia and Fiona revealed that nature made them resilient. This storyline describes participants' experiences of the influence of nature on well-being.

Luna went through various adverse life situations, such as divorce, parental death, job loss, and relationship loss. Luna's connection with nature influenced her to be tenacious. One of the significant strengths Luna perceived to be essential for achieving her goals is tenacity. Luna said, "tenacity is the ability to follow through on what you are wanting to achieve and not letting go until you have reached your goal" (K. Luna, personal communication, March 4, 2019). Having a relationship with nature influenced Luna to regain self-confidence. Luna experiences peace of mind and happiness through her connection with nature, and she recovers from adverse life circumstances. The following quote explains how her relationships with nature influenced her well-being.

There have been times I have gone through the universe and asked for my needs, and I have got them fulfilled. So, I believe that the universe can fulfill my needs, but I need to be sincere in what I want. To me, nature is the ultimate grounder. It made me laugh when I was feeling unhappy. The best medicine sometimes is enjoying nature. For example, just swimming and walking on a beach in the sand can make me feel grounded and peaceful, and I can feel simplicity if I go deep into nature. (K. Luna, personal communication, March 4, 2019)

Luna perceives that nature cannot support human beings' greediness. Therefore, she would need to be sincere about her needs. She viewed clarity of mind as essential to understanding her problems. Luna indicated that making physical movements in nature, such as walking and swimming, made her view problems as simple rather than complicated. Luna's sense of connectedness with nature has implications for social work practice as social work practitioners can encourage their clients to connect with nature to experience happiness, peace, and clarity of mind providing this is way how they energise themselves, relax or get more connected with their true needs and wishes. This indirect work on problem-solving may offer inspiration that is more in harmony with the clients themselves as opposed to imposing solutions that may not resonate with them.

Nature influenced Fiona in mindful thinking while analysing situations and problems. Mindful thinking can help Fiona increase focus, responsiveness, and creativity, which enhances her problem-solving skills. Fiona was engaged in Yoga, Chi-Kong, doing rhythmic physical activities like running, walking in nature, and dancing to develop herself. Fiona's understanding of spirituality as receiving higher energy influenced her to connect with nature. Nature can be a source of energy. Therefore, she conducted physical activities in nature. The following quote explains Fiona's response to getting a sense of higher energy.

I feel open and kind of channeling conscious thoughts through specific practices. I am doing a lot of writing. Words would come to me, and I wrote them down over a few months, and then I knew I would put myself out like I must do a speech. When I ran in the forest, I would always get phrases and excerpts to come to me, and I wrote down when I was back. In the end, I had pages of stuff and then rearranged them like a puzzle into the speech. Many of them came from somewhere else, which means from a higher energy source. (T. Fiona, personal communication, March 16, 2019)

It is evident from this quote that running in the forest can be a spiritual practice for her to guide her thoughts creatively. This spiritual practice involved physical movements and a sense of exposure to nature. It seems that running the body, mind, and spirit through the sceneries of nature can make her feel an adequate flow of creative thoughts coming from a higher energy. When Fiona used the phrase “putting herself out” to indicate her intention behind writing her thoughts on paper, it appeared that she aimed to develop the courage to do activities that she was terrified of doing, which may solve her problem. Fiona felt connected to herself through her engagement in spiritual practices, and they reflected creativity and imagination. “If I neglect those practices or part of me, I feel disconnected. Taking time to do such practices makes me much richer, more authentic about who I am or whom I am developing” (T. Fiona, personal communication, March 16, 2019). This quote indicates that people can build authenticity by connecting with nature. It resonates with Luna’s belief that nature can help people identify their needs.

Olivia’s sense of meaning and purpose, belief in the interconnectedness between human beings and nature, influenced her well-being. Olivia spoke about experiencing freedom through connecting herself with nature. It resonates with Fiona experiencing freedom while running in the forest to develop authenticity. Olivia also indicated movement as an everyday activity which helped her build strong connections with her inner self. Through movement, Olivia allowed herself to experience the freedom of expression, which she connected with nature. “When I walk in nature, I walk in different ways. It is about allowing myself to experience the freedom of expression” (N. Olivia, personal communication, May 25, 2019).

Olivia experienced that movement and creative expression affected her to reduce stress and anxiety. Olivia’s movements, such as listening to music while walking, conscious acts of breathing in and breathing out the air, and touching the ground, evidence the integration of nature into the development of self, which resonates with Fiona’s perceptions. Nature

refreshed her mind, and she felt effective in connecting with people. As Olivia experiences freedom of thought and choice through these activities, she considers them her spiritual practices.

When I go for a walk, I listen to music to switch off my mind. It helps me with my interactions with people. Breathing the air and touching the ground is important. So, I do that consciously, and my mind feels refreshed. My body also feels well. (N. Olivia, personal communication, May 25, 2019)

Megan's understanding of spirituality as the experience of higher energy also influenced her to connect with nature. Megan understood nature as an energy resource. For example, Megan experiences that she is receiving energy through her senses, such as sight, smell, and touch, when she is connected to nature. Megan's experience of learning from nature resonates with Fiona's experience of getting information after running in nature. The following quote explains how Megan connected her experience of spirituality with nature, which influenced her well-being.

When I feel lost, I will always go back to nature. I get a connection with nature and feel grateful. I think the planet is fantastic. I believe the energy comes from nature rather than up in the sky. I think it is more tangible for me and something that I can relate to, see, smell, and feel. I also believe that we are not the only intelligent species in the system. I am still learning. So, I would like to learn new things every day till I die. I wanted to learn something new and feel different. (W. Megan, personal communication, March 18, 2019)

Megan differs from Luna, Fiona, and Olivia in that she is a Buddhist practitioner involved in chanting practice. There is a sense of seeking enlightenment in her heart through chanting.

It provides Megan with a sense of inner peace. Even though meditation is also a spiritual practice in Buddhism, Megan felt harder to control her mind from wandering around. While chanting, she repeats the mantra “Nam Myōhō Renge Kyō”, and that helps her get into a state of mind where her thoughts are under control. This leads her to experience peace and happiness.

I struggle with meditation. I felt it harder to blank out my mind. I feel chanting is good for getting the same energy and peace a person receives through meditation. When I chant, my eyes are open. I am chanting to what I call Gohonzon. It is like a scripture. The idea of the Gohonzon is that it is a mirror of yourself. So, it is all about channeling the energy back to yourself. You would be a much better person when you feel good, positive, and like spiritually enlightened. That is how I use it. It is the same thing with meditation. When you chant for something, it helps you keep focus, and it enables you to quit all the business of life. When you sit in meditation, you will be in a silent state. (W. Megan, personal communication, March 18, 2019)

The inner peace and happiness acquired through chanting influenced Megan to concentrate on herself and examine herself with clarity of mind. The following quote explains Megan’s experience of spirituality as experiencing energies from different sources.

I used to go to little healing meetings with other friends. Some of us would massage each other, or we may hold some crystals or stones, things from the earth, and give each other’s readings. It is how we connect. Sometimes, it is just about being open, not having any judgements, and feeling the duty of care we should have towards each other. We used to walk together, and we may stand in the bush or forest and breath together to make ourselves connected. I also have

some great friends. We used to have healing meetings every week, and we have a beautiful healer. She used to teach us things, like how to be open to other energies. (W. Megan, personal communication, March 18, 2019)

Exposure to nature is an essential aspect of experiencing spirituality and well-being. Stones and crystals belong to nature, and they may hold energies. Therefore, holding stones and crystals indicates that Megan experiences spiritual connections with each other through touching stones and crystals. It is evident from this quote that her healing meetings involved teachings about reconnecting to different energies. Nature plays a role in connecting people. For example, Megan viewed activities such as walking in the forest and breathing the air together with friends can make her more connected to friends and open to their energies.

Luna, Fiona, and Olivia viewed challenges as opportunities to teach themselves ways to cope with stress. They did not believe that God could help them solve their problems, and they believed in empowering themselves as an effective way to deal with challenges. They found that being in nature could uplift them. Their experiences exemplify the significance of exploring potential clients' perceptions about the impact of nature on their well-being. Social work practitioners could plan interventions by including exposure to nature as a significant aspect of clients' well-being.

### ***Goal Setting***

Harold connected spirituality with personal development. Understanding spirituality as being aware of self and a sense of developing self through achieving goals influenced his authenticity. Spirituality enhanced critical thinking and learning skills, which improved well-being. In contrast to other participants, Harold spoke about experiencing fear as a motivator during difficult circumstances.

I am terrified if I do not attain my goals. Then the fear pushes me to do something to reach my goals. My fear is active, not passive fear. Passive fear is that you would not do anything when you know something is serious. The active fear is that when you know something is serious, you will explore what is troubling and orientate you towards overcoming it. By overcoming it to a certain degree, you can progress as a person. So, I use fear as a motivator to overcome struggles. I am not reacting suddenly to the fear I have. I am responding proactively to the fear I have. Because I am feeling this emotion, I am going to do it. This is how I frame it. (S. Harold, personal communication, June 8, 2019)

Active fear can be a source of motivation for some people to survive and achieve success in their lives. Active fear could alert people to think critically think about their situations and plan goals ahead. Therefore, during certain circumstances, people can enhance well-being if they can be able to use their fear actively. As Harold believes that he has the agency to develop himself, he believes that this type of fear cannot put him in a dangerous situation. This exemplifies the significance of social workers assessing whether their potential clients may hold any fears which are preventing them from taking action or making them active and alert in overcoming their challenges. Social workers can also link their clients' active fear with their sense of meaning, purpose, and motivation to become active agents in shaping their lives. As goal setting should encompass activities for personal development and well-being, social workers can apply clients' spiritual beliefs and practices as a motivating factor to attain their goals and improve qualities of their lives. The following quote describes Harold's response to how he maintains a connection with himself.

Every day I read the news. I am reading the new science articles that have come out. I have been reading them in the morning for over five years. I exercise, I

have the idea of working for myself, three meals every day. I do not allow myself to skip meals, allowing me to protect my health. Depending on what I do during the day, for example, if I learn more from having conversations with people, I find myself meaningful. Pursuing an understanding of things allows me to gain a broader perspective. Because being able to see things from different angles is also essential. (S. Harold, personal communication, June 8, 2019)

Harold is following routines such as reading, exercising, and eating the right foods at the right time and he believes that setting aside time for self-care, including sports, video games, and reading, helped himself maintain a connection with himself. His discipline and self-care increase a sense of valuing himself and decrease his perception of stress. It is noticeable that conversations with people affect his well-being as well as the experience of learning new information. This influences his sense of well-being and helps him incorporating multiple perspectives and ways to resolve issues through relationality. His sense of spirituality happens through contact, disciplined activity, and engagement. It evidences human beings' gravitation towards learning, connection and being productive at work. Harold mentioned goal setting as an essential aspect of himself relieving stress. "What I have learned about goal setting is very useful. I can connect goal setting with stress management. Being able to find new options during stressful situations is important" (Harold, public participant).

Harold's case exemplifies that social work practitioners should not limit viewing spirituality as encompassing religious beliefs and practices. Social workers identify clients' needs and values and help them in setting goals and strategies. Harold's data provides social workers with the insight that their actions are inclusive of spirituality, even though they did not put them under that label.

Participants' beliefs influenced them to develop various strengths such as tenacity, courage, patience, authenticity and problem-solving. These strengths enhanced their well-

being. Participants discerned that spirituality plays a vital role in their well-being, and they used different spiritual interventions to make their lives peaceful and resilient.

### **Addressing Spirituality in Social Work**

Participants' understanding of spirituality shaped their views about integrating spirituality into social work education and social work practice. This section describes public participants' views about integrating spirituality into social work education and practice.

Some people may understand addressing spirituality as integrating clients' religious beliefs. For example, Laila's experience of spirituality through Islamic beliefs and practices influenced her to view integrating spirituality in social work from a religious point of view. She indicated that addressing spirituality would be an intimidating experience for social workers if social workers and their clients differ in religious beliefs. Laila's experience shows that potential clients and their families may mute themselves from sharing their beliefs with social workers if they identified religious differences between them and social workers. Laila recommended that social workers demonstrate respect for their clients' religious beliefs and practices in such circumstances.

The easy way to understand clients' beliefs is to include religious knowledge or knowledge about diverse religions in their training because the social worker who used to come to my family is Christian, and she does not know about Islam.

Social workers need to know the principles, restrictions, and practices of all religions. If they know various beliefs, it is easy for them to deal with clients.

Some clients may be very sensitive if the social worker does not know about their beliefs. When social workers work with those clients, they will struggle to ask them about their beliefs. If they have a basic understanding, they can be more

confident while dealing with clients. (S. Laila, personal communication, March 2, 2019)

Some potential clients and their family members may view the social worker as incompetent to address spirituality if they found a religious difference and the social worker did not demonstrate any knowledge about faith. Laila's personal experience testifies to that. Making assumptions about client based on their faith may be equally damaging and disrespectful. The social work practitioner may not initiate a conversation on religious beliefs because they may fear proselytization. If both the clients and social workers mute conversations on spirituality, a large part of themselves and a potential resource for problem solving will be muted. It is evident from the above quote that Laila expects social workers to start asking questions about their clients' religious beliefs. Integrating spirituality into social work practice by addressing religious beliefs needs the art of communication. Therefore, a social worker should be competent to use respectful language as a medium of communication between the client and herself, which can help opening clients to explore their beliefs and how they influence their lives.

Laila's recommendation to include basic knowledge about various religious beliefs in social work education can be valuable. However, harmful, and self-destructive forms of religious beliefs cannot be supported. The inclusion of knowledge about diverse religious beliefs and practices in social work education can make social work practitioners familiar with their clients' beliefs, and yet never assume. Even though their understandings of religious and spiritual beliefs can make social work practitioners knowledgeable about beliefs, social work education should also prepare social work students to develop connections between clients' religious and spiritual beliefs with social work principles and ethics.

Some people understood spirituality as a broader concept than religion. For example, Luna viewed addressing spirituality in social work practice as integrating people's diverse spiritual expressions, which resonates with Emily's view of understanding spirituality as an essential aspect of being human. According to Luna, people may understand the meaning of the term spirituality differently, and therefore how they experience, and express spirituality could vary. Social work practitioners should facilitate the inclusion of diverse religious as well as non-religious expressions of spirituality in social work practice. Luna viewed social workers can play the role of a facilitator to help their clients connect with their spiritual beliefs.

Integrating clients' spirituality is not an easy task. First, social work practitioners need to look at their spirituality of themselves. If they cannot understand their spirituality, there is no way to take it to their clients. They must make sure that they know what spirituality means to them first. Spirituality means different things to different people. Social workers also need to understand what spirituality means to other people. For example, as I get older, peace is very important. Enjoyment with friends, coming back to my home, my home is my sanctuary, I come back home for bringing peace. So, you got to make sure that it is an important part of social workers' training. A key element in training should be what it means to them and how wide it is. Suppose like religion, religion is vast, Catholic, Hinduist, and Buddhist beliefs are different. Somehow you need to integrate spirituality in a way that can cover the experiences of different people (K. Luna, personal communication, March 4, 2019)

Luna's experience of how spirituality influenced her to create peace in her life shaped her perceptions. Luna's recommendation for including spirituality in social work education supported social work practitioners' exploration of their own spirituality. Under Luna's

recommendation, there is an underlying assumption that if social work practitioners know about their spirituality, they would be able to relate to their clients' spiritual beliefs and practices. Moreover, Luna's suggestion to teach social work students to explore the diversity of meanings people implied to the term spirituality is valuable. It will help students clearly understand integrating religion as one way of addressing spirituality. Luna's experience of connecting with nature as an inevitable component of her well-being influenced her to link addressing spirituality with ensuring clients' mental health and well-being.

Spirituality is connected to our mental well-being. Where I work, I deal with mental health in that area. Psychological services are part of my agency. People face many mental health issues because they moved away from simplicity and peace in their lives. They are looking for drama. They must tell everybody that they want and get the latest thing. People need to quit their dramas, and they need to engage in five minutes fix. They must ask themselves why they need what they want. (K. Luna, personal communication, March 4, 2019)

According to Luna, when people focus on materialistic enjoyment, people become greedy. Greediness can make them feel anxious and stressed. Luna believes that people are very busy these days and they will often miss to look at their needs and problems and connect them with their inner selves. Luna suggested a five-minutes fix intervention. Five-minute fix indicated spending five-minutes on critically thinking about needs and avoiding greed. Social worker can create peace and simplicity in people's lives through helping them replace greed with need. As mental health professionals, social work practitioners would need to assess their clients' needs. Therefore, social work practitioners should possess effective communication skills and ability to connect across difference.

Some people linked religion with cultural identity, and they did not experience spirituality through religion. Their perceptions about integrating spirituality in social work education and social work practice is shaped by their understanding and experience of spirituality. For example, Emily's understanding of spirituality as building connections with people influenced her to perceive social workers as respectful human communicators in integrating spirituality into social work. Developing the competence to demonstrate respect in relationships requires social work practitioners to become active listeners and structure their communication styles. They would need to apply strategies to become knowledgeable about their own style of conveying messages through verbal and non-verbal communication.

Integrating spirituality is crucial because it is part of being human. The art is learning how to address it as a professional. You must balance between being part of a system and being personal and being spiritual. How social workers can balance these things without intervening in people's private lives is an important question. You must listen and develop an ability to interpret what people signal. If you do not listen, it can be trespassing the boundaries. Social workers need to create an awareness of how they communicate. They can use creative methodologies such as video recordings and role-plays to understand their ways of communicating. (S. Emily, personal communication, May 20, 2019)

Some participants linked spirituality with developing an awareness of themselves. Their views about integrating spirituality in social work practice focuses on exploring clients' interests, and goals. For example, Fiona's experience of spirituality as connecting with higher consciousness influenced her to perceive the role of a social work practitioner in integrating spirituality into social work practice as acting as a guide to enhance clients' connection with themselves, which resonates with Luna's view of understanding social workers in the role of

facilitators. Social workers could plan interventions such as reflective journaling to make their clients feel connected with their inner selves.

Reflective journaling is a good way for people to discover what they feel about themselves. Everyone is interested in different things. Social workers can apply self-reflective writing activities. They should encourage their clients to write a rough overview of their life. Clients need to write about significant events in their lives. Not everything happens. They would reflect on those events objectively a little bit. (T. Fiona, personal communication, March 16, 2019)

Harold's understanding of spirituality as developing self-awareness influenced him to perceive social workers' role in addressing spirituality as assessing clients' needs and expectations about the outcomes they want to achieve. It requires social workers to apply their communication skills, which resonates with Emily's view.

What social workers could do in terms of addressing spirituality is ask clients their desired solutions and needs. Social workers can apply tools to help clients articulate their needs. Being come up with actionable steps and resources is a good thing. Making people aware they have other options is very important. (E. Harold, personal communication, June 8, 2019)

Asking about client's religious beliefs is not mandatory to address spirituality. According to Harold, clients' core values provide insight into major issues in their lives, and their ways of resolving them. Therefore, exploring clients' values can be a link to understand their spirituality as an awareness of themselves. Harold viewed developing trust is essential for social workers to explore their clients' values. Respectful communication can result in the formation of trust. Harold expects social workers to frame questions in a way that accept

every individual's uniqueness and be non-judgmental. The following quote explains Harold's view about the role of social workers in integrating spirituality.

When you talk to someone, you always try to understand their point of view.

Because everyone knows something that you do not know. I do not think you need to ask people about their religious beliefs. But you need to know what their values are. Because all their decisions are influenced by their values. It is also essential to do that in a judgement-free environment. Because people always fear sharing deeply personal aspects of their lives. Social workers need to develop trust and frame questions to explore their values. (E. Harold, personal communication, June 8, 2019)

Some participants indicated themselves as unwilling to affiliate themselves with any religion and understood spirituality as experiencing connections with God. Their connections with God could shape their perceptions about integrating spirituality into social work practice. For example, Donald's understanding of spirituality as experiencing connection with God influenced him to perceive helping clients link with God during illnesses as an essential part of social worker's role. Donald recommended that social workers ask clients directly about their sense of meaning and purpose. It provides social work practitioners clues to explore clients' experience of having a connection with God or people. He also indicated the importance of developing a conceptual framework to help social work practitioners assess clients' spirituality.

What social workers can do is they can develop a framework or guideline like for us in nursing, we have an assessment form. It is called the spirituality assessment form. So, maybe social workers can keep something like that and ask clients what they feel about themselves and the meaning and purpose of life. Social workers

can explore how clients perceive themselves and others and connect with the superpower. Exploring clients' belief in a higher power and helping them link with a higher power is essential when struggling with illness. (K. Donald, personal communication, June 2, 2019)

Megan's understanding of spirituality as experiencing energy through connecting with people influenced her to perceive integrating spirituality as an effective way of addressing cultural diversity. Megan suggests that social work practitioners should explore their clients' spirituality. She understood spirituality and religion as different constructs, which resonates with Luna's view. She viewed spirituality as a universal bond that can make people feel connected. Talking about spirituality can help social work practitioners understand what makes their clients different from them. The following quote explains Megan's view about incorporating spirituality into social work.

Social workers must be open to understanding how diverse the people are, all the different cultures. Even if social workers do not understand a culture, they can always find common ground in spirituality. I may not understand certain cultures or religions because I did not experience them. Sometimes, talking about spirituality can be the link. When social workers felt it hard to tune in with somebody because of language barrier or something that they do not know about their culture, I think, spirituality is something that can join them with their clients. Because I do not link spirituality with religion. I suppose that is why I kept them separate, But I find that something, you can see when you go to meetings, there was spirituality like people from everywhere. It is an energy that binds or connects people together. (W. Megan, personal communication, March 18, 2019)

Participants assigned social workers various roles such as helpers, facilitators, and communicators. It is noticeable that many participants did not view addressing spirituality as asking faith-related questions. As participants' experiences of spirituality shape their perceptions about integrating spirituality, social work practitioners and their clients may perceive the role of social workers in integrating spirituality differently. Therefore, social work practitioners should make themselves aware of their experiences of spirituality so that they can be comfortable talking about it with their clients. It will help social work practitioners to spirituality in a client-centred way. Knowledge about religious beliefs and diverse spiritual experiences and expressions can help them understand clients' spirituality effectively.

As participants' perceptions about integrating spirituality are shaped by their individual experience of spirituality, social workers and their clients' may differ in their understandings and experiences of spirituality. Therefore, it seems that asking clients about their understandings of the term spirituality is significant in integrating spirituality in a collaborative and client-centred way. Addressing spirituality can provide social work practitioners the knowledge about clients' needs and solutions. However, if clients are not willing to share their beliefs, social workers cannot insist on it. Respecting and understanding how intimate conversations on spirituality may be, social workers need to be open and comfortable engaging in these conversations but never misuse their power by imposing them.

## **Chapter Seven: Discussion**

This chapter begins by discussing the findings related to social work teachers', practitioners', and public participants' understandings of spirituality. To build this chapter, I have critically evaluated how the research findings fit with the literature, and the implication of my findings, which leads to developing a conceptual framework for addressing spirituality in social work education and practice.

### **Participants' Understandings of Spirituality**

As mentioned in the introduction, I viewed spirituality and religion as separate but overlapping concepts. Many social work teachers and practitioners I interviewed were subscribers of the Christian faith, and they understood spirituality as experiencing the presence of God and numinous in their everyday lives through religious practices such as meditation and prayers. Several studies have shown that religious beliefs may impact social work teachers' experience of spirituality in their personal lives (Bhagwan, 2011; Kvarfordt et al., 2018). The evidence from this study suggests that religion is one among many ways of experiencing spirituality. People can be spiritual without being religious. Religious beliefs have no significance in some people's lives. Participants experienced spirituality through building and maintaining connections with the universe, family, and friends.

Canda and Furman (2010) presented spirituality as a human quality which covers individual experiences of different beliefs and practices in constructing meaning and purpose. The first interview question I asked the research participants was to reflect on the meaning and purpose of their lives. Nobody avoided sharing personal beliefs and practices related to meaning and purpose and spirituality and that helped me to meet the first objective of my research through adding diverse spiritual perspectives into the discussion. The following

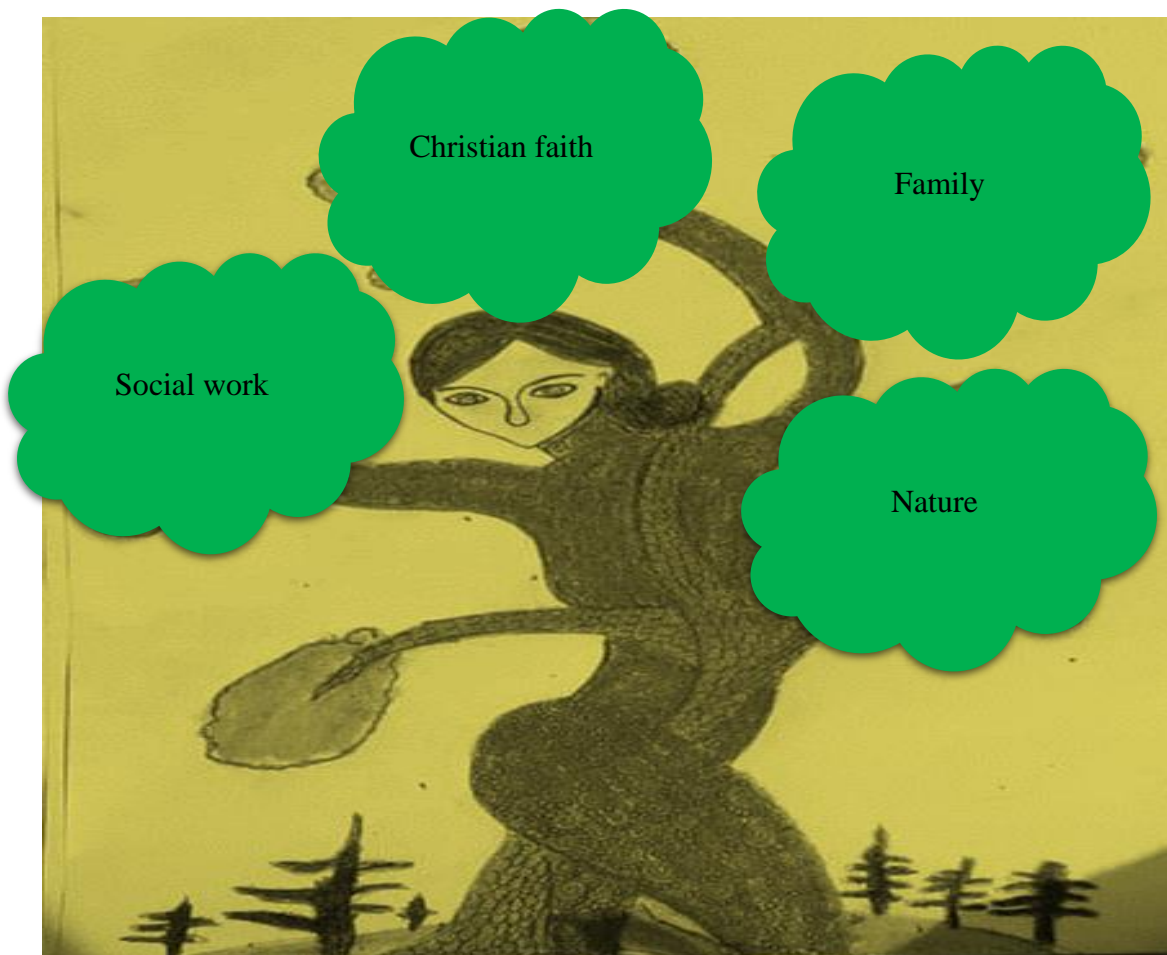
section evaluates the findings related to the perceptions of social work teachers' and practitioners' understandings of spirituality, followed by public perceptions.

### **Social Work Teachers' and Practitioners' Perceptions of Spirituality**

Social work teachers and practitioners constructed meaning and purpose differently out of the Christian faith, family, nature, and indigenous beliefs. Figure 2 illustrates social work teachers' and practitioners' perceptions of meaning and purpose.

**Figure 2**

*Social Work Teachers' and Practitioners' Perceptions of Meaning and Purpose*



### *Christian Faith*

An interesting finding from my research is that social work teachers and practitioners who hold Christian faith can develop a different understanding of meaning and purpose and practical application from their faith-based leanings and interpret spirituality as experiencing numinous. The Christian faith provided social work teachers and practitioners the personal perspective to consider God as a source of unconditional love, guidance, hope and strength. Two social work practitioners from my research applied such a perspective to eliminate the adverse effects of child abuse and domestic violence in their lives and have put it in perspective through their faith. In Bhagwan's (2013) research, social work teachers linked the rationale for including spirituality in social work practice with their understanding that spirituality can promote healing during difficult circumstances such as depression and trauma. The finding that emerged from my research relates to Bhagwan's (2013) finding in a way that it provides insight that social work practitioners may hold personal experiences of faith and spirituality, which could shape their attitudes regarding the integration of faith and spirituality into social work. One of the social work practitioners held the Muslim faith, and I found she also acknowledged God as the supreme power and source of love and acceptance, which Christian social work practitioners also indicated. This finding suggests that experiencing the presence of God as a source of love and acceptance is confined not only to the Christian faith but also to other religions.

Some social work teachers and practitioners indicated that Christian beliefs played a significant role in developing a mindset to help people, which eventually connected them with engaging in social work teaching or practice as a meaningful way of living their lives. Larsen (2011) found social work practitioners' belief that social work practice can be one way of spiritual development. Previous research showed that the relationship between faith and social work is reciprocal (Oxhandler et al., 2021) and therefore social work practice can also

affect faith and spirituality. In the current study, the findings presented under the subcategory of transformed beliefs illustrates that social work practice can impact social work teachers in changing conservative Christian beliefs and broadening their understanding of spirituality.

Data analysis shows that social work practice impacted a social work teacher to understand spirituality as establishing deeper connections with people by being open and respectful towards diverse cultures and beliefs. Tony's revised understanding of spirituality implies that social work teachers can transform their belief systems to be more harmonious with how they are and what they do in terms of their teaching philosophies. To follow Lyndsay's (2002) recommendation to integrate spirituality in a non-imposing manner, social work teachers' examination of faith would be the first step to begin with. It is crucial for Aotearoa New Zealand social work teachers to examine whether and how monotheistic religious beliefs conflicts with students' beliefs in multiple Gods or having no God. Knitter (2010) reflected that a conservative understanding of one true God might affect social work practitioners to view other religious beliefs as inferior. Tony's experience with the conservative Christian faith resonates with Knitter's (2010) reflection. Social work teachers need to help students who hold the Christian faith to examine whether and how their faith allows them to respect Indigenous and diverse religious and spiritual beliefs and practices.

An interesting finding is that social work teachers may link the meaning and purpose of their lives with conservative beliefs such as belief in the second coming of Jesus Christ. Findings show that such conservative beliefs can cause implicit biases towards students. For example, Charlie's belief in the second coming of Jesus Christ influenced him to believe that God can be a punishment giver, which may affect judging students' beliefs and actions. These findings further support the idea of examining faith and transforming beliefs to reduce the impact of implicit biases on social work teachers while teaching social work and addressing spirituality.

Another notable finding is how Jesus Christ helped people while living on earth influenced a few social work teachers' understandings of meaning and purpose. They linked their perception of meaning and purpose with equity. For example, a social work teacher, Daniel, highlighted that Christian faith motivated him to include ensuring equity as an essential aspect of making meaning and purpose. This finding is significant as it provides the social work profession the insight that social work teachers can use their faith to develop equitable teaching practices which may help transform social work practice by preparing students to deliver high quality client-centred social work services. If social work teachers can promote equity in the classroom space, it may lead to the development of social equality as social work students will be the advocates who treat each client in an equitable manner by understanding and respecting the diversity among people.

### ***Family and Nature***

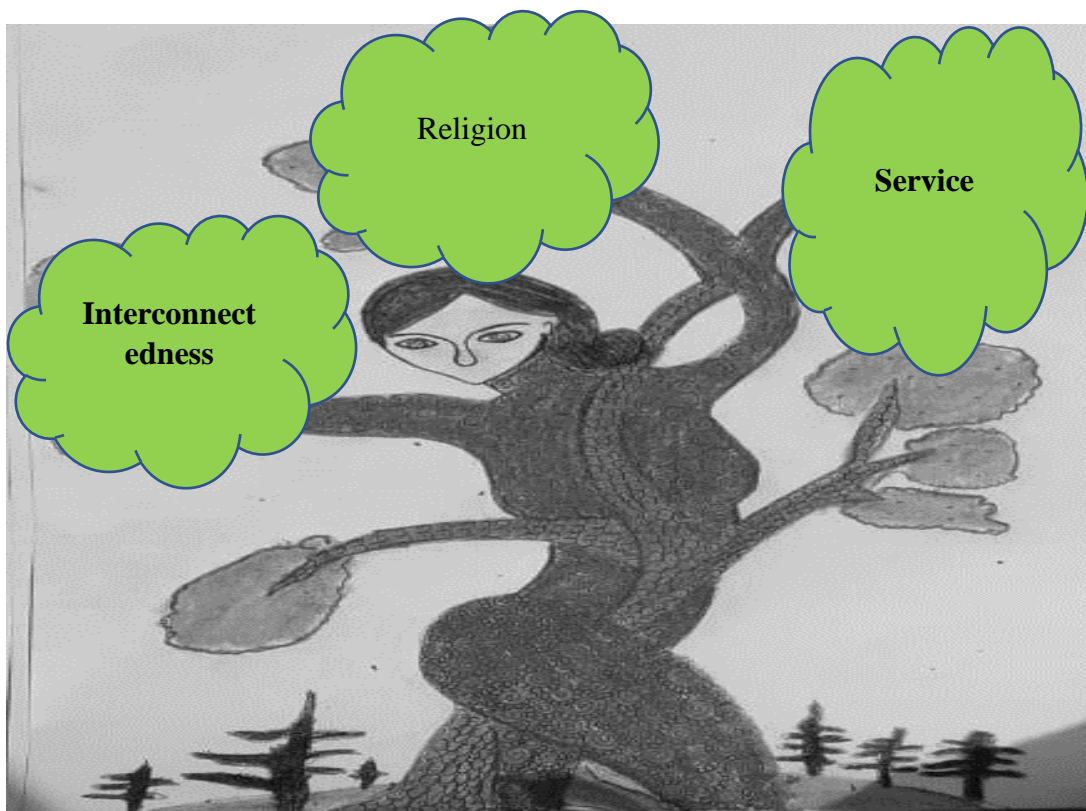
The findings show that social work teachers' connection with nature and family members can be significant sources they can employ in the process of finding subjective sense of meaning and purpose in their lives and experiencing spirituality. Previous research has shown that connectedness with nature can enhance well-being (McMahan & Estes, 2015; Passmore & Holder, 2017; Passmore & Howell, 2014). Social work teachers experienced a sense of creativity and happiness while they linked their connectedness with nature and social work teaching. This finding is relevant as social work teachers can deeply explore their connectedness with nature when they examine their spirituality. Bhagwan (2011) found that social work teachers' experience of spirituality involved their respect and love towards nature and various seasons. Social work teachers may link themselves with nature as the source of creativity and happiness so that they can guide students to explore the impact of exposure to nature on client well-being.

Love for their family seemed to be influential for some social work teachers to construct meaning and purpose in their lives. This finding is consistent with Bhagwan's (2011) findings as some social work teachers mentioned that they experienced spirituality through experiencing a sense of connectedness with their children. My research findings indicate that family can be a relational aspect of spirituality, and a wider understanding of the term family may lead to establishing empathetic connections with students yet being mindful of professional boundaries. When students become social work practitioners, the experience of exploring their spirituality during the course may extend their empathy towards clients, especially if social work teaching includes relational and spiritual experiences such as sharing a sense of connectedness with family and commitment to family wellbeing.

## **Public Perceptions of Spirituality**

### **Believing in Connections**

Compared to social work teachers and practitioners, public participants' perception about the meaning and purpose of their lives included numerous beliefs about what and to whom they were connected. Previous research also indicated that public participants had diverse beliefs about spirituality (Rothman, 2009). This thesis advanced the findings of Rothman (2009) by describing how public participants experienced a sense of meaning and purpose in various ways and their perceptions of spirituality could be addressed in social work practice. The following section discusses diverse perceptions of meaning and purpose, spirituality and the importance of social workers being aware of that. Figure 3 illustrates public perceptions of meaning and purpose.

**Figure 3***Public Perceptions of Meaning and Purpose****Religion***

Religious beliefs can be a powerful resource for some people to construct a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives and they may experience spirituality through maintaining a relationship with God. There are different religions in the world and data analysis shows that there are similarities between beliefs shared by participants. For example, a public participant, Laila was a follower of the Muslim religion, and a social work practitioner, Vance, followed Christian religion. Their belief associated with destiny and free will was almost identical. Both viewed future, and past events in their lives as predetermined by God and that provided them the courage to accept challenges and they felt they hold the freedom to take decisions by themselves. An implication of this is the possibility that social work practitioners could use religion and belief in God as a frame of reference to understand and respect clients' beliefs that may be very different to their own. Larsen and Rinkel's (2016)

findings asserted that personal spirituality could help social work practitioners to integrate religious or spiritual beliefs and practices into social work practice with clients. Building on commonalities could expand possibilities for respectfully exploring differences enabling clients to grow in directions they prefer improving the quality of their lives.

### ***Service Through Helping Profession***

Donald believed that being a nurse gave him a sense of meaning and purpose. An unexpected finding that emerged from Donald's interview data was that when I asked him about his religious affiliation, he said not applicable. However, he interpreted spirituality as experiencing the presence of God. He followed the teachings of different religions and expressed that praying every day can be an effective strategy for getting the protection of God during difficult circumstances. As Donald has not intended to identify himself as belonging to any religion, he experienced spirituality through a sense of connection with God in his everyday life. This finding has implications for social work education as some clients may be spiritual pluralists, and therefore, social work practitioners would need to go beyond asking clients to identify with one religion and focus more on how they experience spirituality and what it means to them.

### ***Being Creative and Holding Aspirations***

The findings show that people can experience spirituality through creativity, which is consistent with the results from Rothman's (2009) study. Creative expressions of spirituality may vary for everyone. For example, a public participant, Luna, is an atheist who took responsibility for herself, living independently and happily. She linked the meaning and purpose of life with her aspiration to become a stronger woman who can manage herself living without family. Work, building connections with friends, travelling, enjoying nature, listening to music, and watching movies were important ways she applied to make herself

happy. She interpreted spirituality as experiencing happiness; these findings suggest that it may not be possible to assess spirituality using the framework of religion in every case. Thus, it can be recommended that social work education would need to help social work students to explore whether and how they, their colleagues and their clients develop their understandings of spirituality creatively without imposing their religious beliefs. Yamada et al.'s (2020) research highlighted that mental health service users identified various activities, such as singing and engaging with nature, as spiritual experiences that promote mental health. Social work practitioners could ask their clients questions about what enhances their spirit as an effective way to address spirituality creatively.

Some public participants made meaning and purpose in their lives by creating different ways to express and improve themselves. They linked spirituality with their experience of higher consciousness, and they found engaging in the art could be a part of the process, which will help develop an awareness of thoughts and feelings creatively that inform their practice. This fits with research suggesting that individuals can make spiritual experiences through religious beliefs such as belief in God and art (Rothman, 2009). The benefits of art appear to enhance the ability to think critically and express emotions. Thus, the findings suggest that engagement in art may lead to experiencing happiness and creativity in life for some people when they succeed in sharing their thoughts with others. Two participants, Fiona and Megan, spoke about art as an everyday spiritual practice and identified themselves as atheists; therefore, this research raises the possibility that social work practitioners could assess whether and how art-based interventions can an effectively addressing spirituality with atheist clients.

Another important finding was that participants exhibited spiritual or religious pluralism to improve themselves. For example, within the sub-category of self-improvement, Megan spoke about her diverse experience of spirituality in different ways, such as feeling the

ancestral presence in difficult life situations and her previous experience of following the Christian faith. Another public participant who did not identify with a single religious affiliation indicated that he incorporated knowledge gained from reading about various religions, such as Hinduism and Christianity, to develop himself. These results suggest that people can also link their experience of spirituality or religion with their involvement in continuous learning and personal development activities. Therefore, it seems that if social work practitioners do not address the religious or spiritual dimension of their clients' lives, they will be more likely to discard clients' ability to make choices to improve the quality of their lives.

### ***Interconnectedness***

Olivia, a public participant, spoke about her sense of meaning and purpose as experiencing a sense of connection with everything on the planet, including plants, animals, and the universe. This finding relates to Rothman (2009), as atheist participants in her study spoke about the experience of interconnectedness as a source of spirituality. In contrast to Rothman (2009), an unexpected finding was that Olivia indicated herself as belonging to the Christian religion. Notably, Olivia understood that her religious identity is acquired from her culture and interpreted spirituality as experiencing the freedom of thought and choice. Olivia did not believe in God or experience spirituality through religious interventions such as prayers or reading sacred textbooks, although she said she is a Christian. This finding signposts to social work practitioners that they cannot solely rely on assumptions about clients' religious affiliations to frame questions related to spirituality, such as whether they believe in God or go to church but need to have an open mind and listen to unique experiences that every client brings.

A few participants linked spirituality with their experience of getting joy through enjoying connections with friends. Evidence suggests that listening to people can be a significant source for constructing a sense of meaning and purpose.

There are many ways an individual can experience meaning and purpose, and spirituality. Findings show that some may experience life has got a more significant purpose beyond themselves. For example, even though Poppy viewed fulfilling the personal role of a mother as a significant source of meaning and purpose for her life, she believed that life also has a higher purpose which she needed to discover. This finding indicates that some people may understand themselves as personally responsible for developing a greater purpose in life, which Poppy connected with achieving spiritual enlightenment.

The process of discovering a bigger purpose in life may affect changing religious beliefs and values. For example, Poppy quit Christianity and changed understanding of God. Poppy's spiritual view of life as numinous influenced her to understand God as love and shared her perspective that plants, animals, and humans are Gods. Findings indicate that people might change their understanding of spirituality during different stages of life, and they may construct a spiritual philosophy which meets their spiritual needs. Further research should explore whether and how people change spirituality during various stages of life and that affects their well-being.

### **A Conceptual Framework for Addressing Spirituality in Social Work Education and Practice**

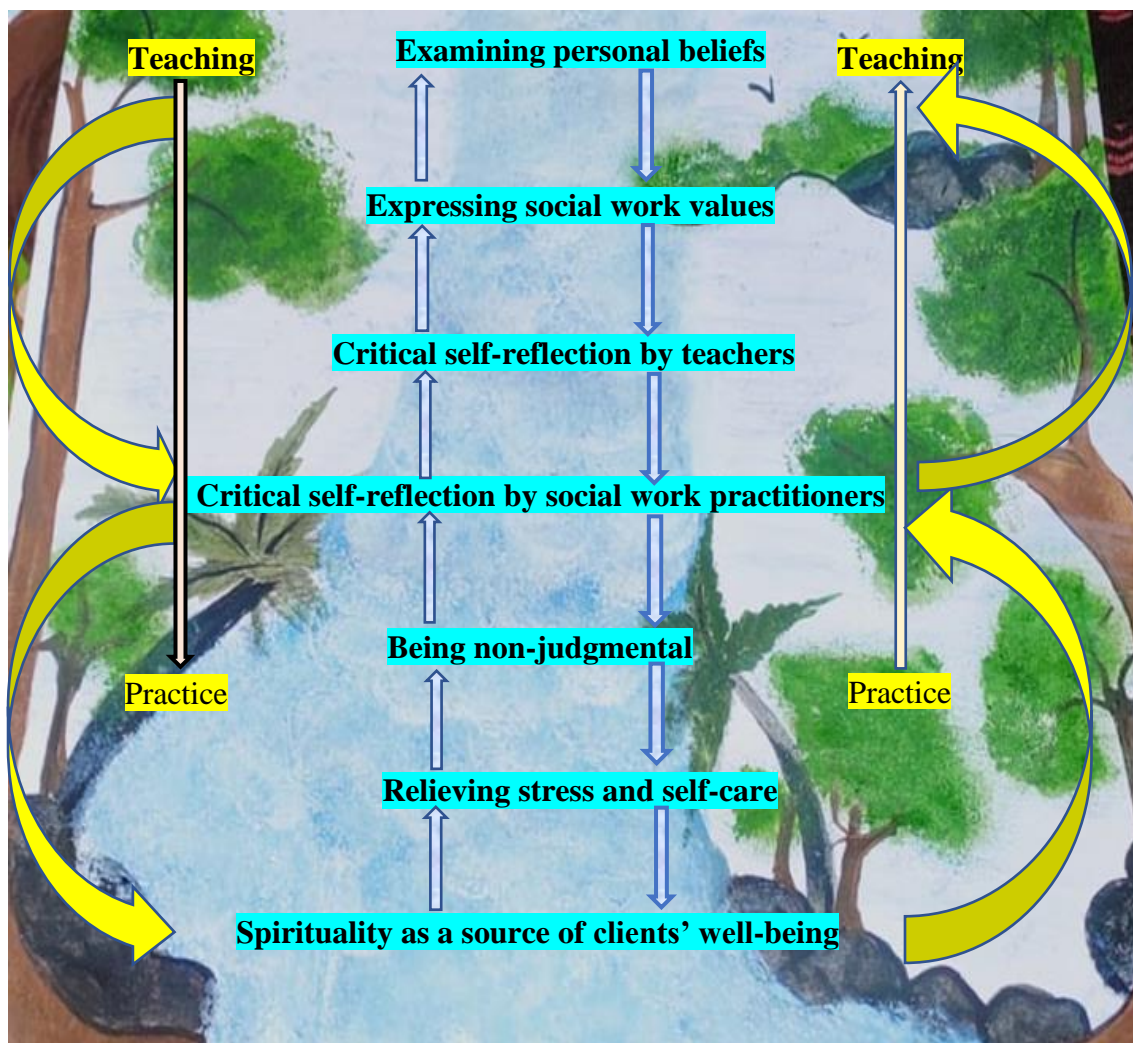
The personal religious or spiritual beliefs social work teachers follow could determine teaching methods to address spirituality in social work teaching. This finding fits Russel's (1998) research suggesting that social work teachers may understand spirituality as a personal and professional resource that can help prepare students to address clients' spiritual needs

through their teaching. Public participants also understood spirituality as a deeply personal experience that emerged from their connection with different sources such as religion, self, nature, friends, and work. This finding and personal experience of spirituality may inform social work teachers to teach students to consider spirituality a profoundly personal experience for themselves and their clients to live meaningful lives.

Social work teachers can encourage students to explore their own experiences related to spirituality and connect them with social work, which can help them find ways to address clients' spirituality. Therefore, building authenticity and a non-judgmental attitude is equally important for social work teachers and practitioners when addressing spirituality. This may be challenging as social work teachers assess students' work, and social work practitioners often assess their clients' ability to lead independent lives. An interesting finding that emerged from my research is that social work teachers' examination of spirituality as the source of creativity and self-care influenced social work practitioners to examine their own beliefs and explore spirituality as a self-care strategy for clients, suggesting that teachers' examination of spirituality can be beneficial to social work practitioners and clients. Some social work teachers may have unexamined beliefs, and there may be differences between teachers regarding the influence of spirituality on their teachings depending on whether and how they examined their spiritual or religious beliefs. The important finding is that social work teachers who examined their beliefs and assumptions related to spirituality and faith were less likely to impose beliefs unintentionally on students than those who have not examined their personal beliefs. The conceptual framework informs social work teachers and practitioners about how they can address spirituality in social work teaching and practice, and figure 4, which I draw, presents the framework.

**Figure 4**

*A Conceptual Framework for Addressing Spirituality in Social Work Education and Practice*



## Addressing Spirituality in Social Work Teaching

### Examining Personal Beliefs

#### *Creativity and Self-Care*

Some social work teachers examined personal spirituality as the source of creativity and self-care for themselves, which helped them to become creative in building trust, a non-judgmental attitude, and authentic relationships with students in the teaching and learning environment. Thus, examining personal beliefs related to spirituality helped social work teachers to overcome the challenge of managing themselves in a position of power and

creating a classroom space where students feel free to express their personal beliefs. Many social work teachers shared their experience that providing students with the opportunity to have a safe context to talk about spirituality may encourage them to give their clients the time and space to discuss spirituality when they become social work practitioners. This finding suggests that social work teachers' examination of spirituality would inspire them to create contexts for exploring students' spirituality.

### ***Being Authentic***

According to findings, engaging spirituality in the teaching and learning context is found to be beneficial for examining personal beliefs, which could help social work teachers achieve more authenticity. In the current study, some social work teachers' examination of beliefs originating from their Christian faith connected them with the idea that they are spiritual beings in the sense that they have a personal relationship with God. Their experience of spirituality through engagement in everyday religious practices such as prayers is consistent with social work teachers' experience of spirituality through religion, which was reported in earlier investigations (Bhagwan, 2013; Kvarfordt et al., 2018). These studies also reported that social work teachers could connect spirituality with their social work teaching roles hence experiencing a sense of calling, transcending the notion of teaching as a mere job.

My research suggests that social work teachers could connect spirituality with their social work teaching roles by exploring their authenticity. Several values, such as love, kindness, acceptance, and compassion, emerged from their belief associated with experiencing the presence of God, and the expression of those values in the classroom can significantly improve social work teachers' ability to develop meaningful relationships with students.

Being true to themselves as spiritual beings may influence social work teachers to establish a sense of coherence between beliefs about the meaning and purpose of their lives and values. Creating such coherence needed a deeper awareness of the influence of the

spiritual dimension on social work teaching. Therefore, it seems beneficial for social work teachers to explore their understanding of who they are and the meaning and purpose of their lives. Experiencing coherence between personal spiritual beliefs and values could impact social work teachers in building and expressing authenticity in the teaching and learning context. The values such as love, kindness, and compassion may flow from within the teacher's heart to students automatically when teachers become authentic.

Authenticity in social work practice with clients is also relevant, and social work teachers can use spiritual experiences to inspire students to build authentic relationships with clients. For example, Catherin's personal experience of faith as the source of creativity and self-care influenced her to express love and acceptance to students, which made her an authentic teacher. Her authenticity manifested when she encouraged students to understand spirituality as a self-care strategy. When social work students sense teachers' authenticity, they may experience greater belonging to the subject and the profession, which could motivate them to examine personal beliefs to find ways to become authentic with their clients.

This research found that belief in the universe can also impact the expression of authenticity in the teaching and learning context. For example, a social work teacher, Julia, believes that the universe is the source of higher energy for her every day, which could be transferable to social work students through teaching, suggesting that the experience of spirituality without religion can be a personal source of creativity and strength for social work teachers. Her use of mindfulness as a classroom intervention with students' permission to assist them in exploring the use of self and building their authenticity was a clear manifestation of how her everyday spiritual practice influenced teaching methods to address spirituality in the classroom.

Data analysis indicated that connection with the universe influenced Julia to address spirituality as a self-care strategy for students engaging in social work. This finding fits with

previous research (Kvarfordt et al., 2018), which found social work teachers' spirituality as influential in developing a positive attitude towards addressing spirituality in social work teaching and practice. Julia also stressed the importance of social work practitioners developing the competence to help their clients eradicate harmful spiritual practices. She believed that developing social work students' awareness of the beneficial aspect of their spiritual beliefs and practices is vital to help them address spirituality with their clients. Such an opportunity to develop an awareness of spirituality in the classroom can improve social work practitioners' ability to critically reflect on the impact of beliefs and values on social work practice and engage in authentic conversations with clients around spirituality.

Critical examination of whether and how social work teachers experience conflicts between spiritual or religious beliefs, values, and social work becomes essential. The present study found that some social work teachers did not identify the assumptions underlying their religious beliefs. Lack of critical examination of the faith-based assumptions may lead to social work teachers' experiencing conflicts between their beliefs and students' beliefs. Such an example of a conflict evidenced in the study was that one social work teacher held a faith-based assumption that he was an ambassador of God, which impacted him in imposing personal beliefs on students through conducting prayer in the classroom without students' permission. This confirmed Sheridan's (2010) concern that some social work teachers' and practitioners' unexamined religious beliefs led to unintentional violations of student's or client's right to self-determination and reduced their appreciation of spiritual diversity. Therefore, it can be anticipated that if social work teachers examine the influence of faith on their social work teaching, they could resolve potential conflicts between their beliefs and students' beliefs by relying on social work values as proposed by a code of ethics (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2019) as basic guidelines. The following section

presents some strategies social work teachers employ to manage conflicts and prevent themselves from imposing beliefs on students.

## **Expressing Social Work Values**

### *Aligning Personal and Social Work Values*

Exploring personal values can help social work teachers align with professional social work values and strengthen their commitment to social work values, which could make them conscious of setting effective boundaries while addressing spirituality within social work teaching. Some social work teachers involved in my research critically analysed how they can connect personal and social work values. For example, Amelia mentioned love, caring, and truthfulness as personal values, which she got from faith. She used the faith-based concept of commitment to link personal values with the social worker's value of expressing compassion and treating human beings with dignity. This finding suggests that social work teachers and practitioners may hold personal values originating from faith, and if they link personal values with professional social work values, they can differentiate personal values from students' or clients' values whilst respecting them.

Some social work teachers aligned respect with social justice. Lee and Barrett (2007) found that social workers' faith and spirituality can motivate them to view themselves as social justice advocates. My research also found that social work teachers' personal beliefs about spirituality made them more committed to linking students with social justice through their teaching practice. For instance, as a social work teacher, Daniel's beliefs about the meaning and purpose of his life, ensuring equity in equality and diversity for clients, influenced him to connect it with social justice. He viewed cultural humility as an effective strategy for helping students connect with social justice. Fisher (2020) asserted that cultural humility could be a valuable tool to relate cultural diversity with social justice. Fisher (2020) suggested that training on cultural humility should be provided to psychologists to make them

humble practitioners who can address issues of injustice in their practice. In Chapter Five (p. 107), I presented Daniel's teaching strategies to develop cultural humility in social work students.

Data analysis indicated that Daniel was self-aware of the influence of faith on his sense of cultural humility. As Knitter (2010) mentioned, the monotheist belief associated with Christianity did not prevent him from strengthening cultural humility. Daniel supported the integration of spirituality into social work teaching, which is consistent with previous studies (Kvarfordt et al., 2018; Russel, 1998). It seems that if social work practitioners were provided with increased education and training, they would integrate clients' spirituality more effectively without having any boundary violations or imposition of their beliefs.

### ***Modifying Personal Values***

Kvarfordt et al.'s (2018) study raised the concern that social work teachers may experience conflicts between themselves and their students due to differences in religious or spiritual beliefs and values. Findings show that some social work teachers modified their personal religious and spiritual beliefs and values to uphold the social worker value related to the dignity and worth of the person. For instance, as a social work teacher, Kelsey's identification of acknowledging cultural diversity and protecting client's right to self-determination as essential to practice social work in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, influenced her to add two principles to modify her value system. Kelsey described that she included two principles into her value system: linking people's faith with social work and ensuring that she would not force what she believed on anybody. These principles helped her to connect it with one of the essential social work values, respecting the dignity and worth of the person. Such value modifications done on a personal level enhanced social work teachers' competence to address cultural diversity and students' right to self-determination, which could help them

create a professional context for addressing spirituality where spiritual diversity will be appreciated.

### **Critical Self-Reflection by Teachers**

#### ***Creating Contexts***

Social work teachers' spirituality influenced them to create contexts for students to explore their spirituality through building effective relationships with them. This finding was also reported by Coholic (2006). Social work teachers' experience of religion and spirituality can provide them with a personal context to initiate spirituality-related conversations. For instance, Catherin revealed her Christian identity to seek permission from students to discuss spirituality and faith in the classroom. In Catherin's case, critical self-reflection about religion and her belief in God made her feel more comfortable asking students to share their spiritual beliefs with her and their colleagues. This finding suggests that social work teachers could focus on developing open-mindedness to engage in authentic conversations around faith and spirituality, which requires critical examination of own faith as a first step to practise critical self-reflection. This will help social work teachers train students to become reflective practitioners.

When social work teachers explore whether and how faith-based aspects of their personal lives hinder their ability to demonstrate open-mindedness with students, they could transform those beliefs to become open-minded and culturally respectful in their professional lives. If social work students learn how teachers applied spirituality to develop open-mindedness to create contexts for discussing spirituality in the classroom, students could acquire insights from teachers' experiences and develop ways to create contexts for clients to talk about spirituality. Therefore, the findings of this thesis suggest that social work teachers' critical self-reflection of faith and spirituality can be applied in creating contexts conducive to exploring spirituality. However, it could be crucial for social work teachers and students to

ask themselves to what extent they will need to share their spiritual beliefs if they plan to engage in self-disclosure. Exploration of potential contradictions between social work values and doctrines and dogmas coming from some religious as well as non-religious beliefs may enable teachers and students equally to better understand the true meaning of non-judgmental attitude and client's right for self-determination.

The present research showed that social work teachers' recognition of the significance of spirituality in the socio-cultural context where they practise social work might affect their views about whether and how they address spirituality in their teaching practice. Several previous investigations (Furman et al., 2005; Stirling et al., 2010; Vetvik et al., 2018) conducted with social work practitioners found that the context of the country played an important role in shaping social work practitioners' decisions to integrate spirituality into social work. Therefore, social work teachers building contexts for addressing spirituality in Aotearoa New Zealand required an assessment of the importance of spirituality within the socio-cultural context of the country.

Some social work teachers from my research supported the view that non-disclosure of religious identity with students is an effective strategy which could help in build context to address spirituality. This finding relates to Tallon and Domdom's (2022) indication that some Christian social work practitioners are cautious of revealing their religious identity and sharing their spiritual experiences within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, even though the society is becoming increasingly religiously pluralistic and less secular. Reflecting on findings from my research, public participants in Aotearoa New Zealand showed a wide religious and spiritual pluralism, which suggests that social work teachers would need to talk about diverse religious or spiritual beliefs in the classroom. In such a social work practice context, I perceive that social work teachers can apply the art of critical self-reflection to build contexts for addressing religious or spiritual diversity in the classroom, which could

make social work students perceive teachers as authentic and consider addressing religious or spiritual pluralism as valuable as long as it does not overpower and silence minorities.

Phillips's (2014) research conducted with non-Māori social work practitioners found that social work teacher's inclusion of Māori karakia increased their awareness of Māori people's spiritual beliefs when they were students and that they experienced greater confidence while practising social work with Māori. My research found that some non-Māori social work teachers used their experience of inviting students to lead or participate in karakia before classes to create a safe learning space. Social work teachers believed that allowing students to start the class with karakia is one way of showing respect towards Indigenous people's spiritual beliefs and language. If social work teachers can reflect on how they applied spiritual beliefs to show respect to students' diverse beliefs, they can avoid the issue of boundary violations. Such reflections on their faith without students' requests might not raise the issue of boundary violations, as Kvarfordt et al (2018) indicated. Therefore, this research suggests that teachers' development of the art of self-reflection can help overcome the fear of potential boundary violations. Social work teachers can avoid the fear of imposing beliefs on students by presenting rationales about the significance of their faith in addressing spirituality prior to self-reflection, asking for permission, or engaging students in choosing how to start and end the classroom time. Previous studies (Bhagwan, 2013; Dudley & Helfgott, 1990; Kvarfordt et al., 2018; Lindsay, 2002) reported that most social work teachers spoke about the importance of talking about faith and spirituality in the classroom as part of addressing cultural diversity. Findings from my research suggest that social work teachers can transform their spiritual perspectives to demonstrate respect for diverse spiritual expressions.

### ***Transforming Spiritual Perspectives***

In Aotearoa New Zealand, social work teachers and practitioners need to recognise Māori spirituality because it is an authentic expression of the people of the land and represents a

wide cosmology compatible with social work values (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2019). Social work teachers shared their experience that social work practice within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand influenced them to stretch their understanding of spirituality. Such expansion of consciousness from understanding spirituality as experiencing the presence of God every day to experiencing meaningful connections with people was marked by some Christian social work teachers as an effective strategy to prioritize providing respect for Māori spiritual beliefs, including belief in multiple gods and diverse spiritual beliefs of many cultures present in the teaching and learning context without the need to convert them. This finding suggests that transforming spiritual perspectives can be an effective strategy for social work teachers and practitioners to make respect and inclusivity automatically flow from their hearts to students' religious and spiritual beliefs. This finding is relevant as it appears beneficial for social work teachers to apply transformed spiritual beliefs as the basis of cross-cultural communication to show religious and spiritual inclusivity and respect.

### *Using Spiritual Places*

Consistent with previous research conducted within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand (Napan et al., 2020; Phillips, 2014), findings indicated that some social work teachers used spiritual places as meaningful cultural contexts for teaching and learning. For example, a social work teacher conducted the class in the Māori meeting place, the marae, to help students connect with Māori culture. She applied the Māori value, wanaungatanga (building connections), to make students competent in building meaningful relationships with individuals from diverse cultures. These findings suggest that social work teachers should consider the transformative potential of spirituality associated with cultural spaces such as marae. When social work teachers use marae as a meaningful context for teaching, non-Māori students can connect with Māori values and beliefs more quickly than in the formal

classroom, which could result in greater awareness of cultural diversity, cultural respectfulness, and inclusivity. This research found that social work teachers' critical reflection may impact social work practitioners. The following section describes the components of the conceptual framework related to the influence of spirituality on social work practitioners' practice.

### **Critical Self-Reflection by Social Work Practitioners**

Findings show that social work teachers' critical reflection on spirituality enhanced social work practitioners' critical self-reflection. For instance, some social work teachers from my research applied critical self-reflection as an effective teaching intervention to model openness and cultural respectfulness to students while creating contexts to explore students' spiritual beliefs. It is interesting to note that social work practitioners' critical reflection included examining personal beliefs as a first step, suggesting that teachers' examination of spirituality can impact students' examination of personal beliefs and reflexivity in social work practice.

#### ***Examining Personal Beliefs***

Social work practitioners' examination of their experience of faith as a personal resource in their everyday lives may help them develop a deeper awareness of whether and how their beliefs associated with meaning and purpose and spirituality could be useful for clients. Building and maintaining closer relationships with God was found to be an important aspect of most social work practitioners' understanding of meaning and purpose in their lives. Social work practitioners stated that belief in God can be a powerful source of hope, love, guidance, courage, peace, and forgiveness. If social work practitioners design spirituality-based interventions without having sufficient self-awareness, it may impact clients' well-being negatively. For instance, one of the participants believed that if he follows God's instructions

in his life, God will show him miraculous experiences daily, suggesting that he may put more effort into strengthening his faith through actions such as prayers. Such beliefs can be beneficial to him in a personal sense in that he is trying to link the outcome of his actions with God's decisions, which may impact integrating beliefs while making decisions. However, if his client has no belief in God, attaching meaning to the clients' circumstances using belief in God might not be appropriate as the clients may be unfamiliar with his beliefs and where they are coming from. This finding provides an insight into how social work practitioners can analyse how faith interacts with personal identity while examining their personal beliefs, which could help them differentiate their beliefs from clients'.

### ***Building Relationships and Being Empathetic***

Experiencing God's presence through prayer made social work practitioners perceive themselves as creative in building and maintaining relationships with family members and clients. This finding suggests that examining social work practitioners' perceptions about how faith can be helpful in terms of relating to people and creating a sense of belonging in their personal lives could impact clients' well-being. It is interesting to note that some social work practitioners experienced God as the source of unconditional love and acceptance, which seem to be beneficial in recovery from difficult situations in social work practitioners' lives, suggesting that examining their own experiences of vulnerability can benefit them to relate to clients in the social work practice context.

Another significant finding that emerged from the study was that personal experiences of suffering and vulnerability led them to become social workers, which meant that social work practitioners' personal life experiences could motivate them to become social workers. In such circumstances, practitioners should critically explore whether and how faith-based experiences enhanced their well-being during difficult circumstances and how those experiences are relevant to be empathetic in their social work practice. If Christian social

work practitioners hold any personal experience of being divorced and managing life effectively afterwards, it may be appropriate to use their personal experiences if their clients experience domestic violence and stay in dangerous relationship because they believe that divorce is a sin. A Christian social work practitioner highlighted that personal experience of coping with divorce influenced her to become a family support social worker. Therefore, it can be assumed that beliefs associated with individual expertise in dealing with difficult circumstances are significant when considering social work practitioners' interest in working with specific clients. Therefore, social work education that allows social work students to self-reflect on the impact of personal beliefs on professional practice is more likely to create competent and respectful practitioners who can be creative in building meaningful relationships with clients. On the contrary, where those experiences and motifs are not examined, they can create imposition of beliefs on clients.

### ***Connecting Personal Beliefs and Social Work***

Exploring connections between personal beliefs and social work practice is significant. Social work practitioners' faith connected them with doing social work. One of the personal beliefs that motivated social work practitioners to practise social work is that God has a pre-determined purpose for them to be social workers. From understanding the purpose of life from such a perspective, some social work practitioners indicated social work as a spiritual vocation that could fit with their beliefs and values. This finding suggests that the knowledge and values social work practitioners acquired through reading sacred textbooks could help link them with social work. For example, in this study, a social work practitioner, Diana, believes that her strength to do social work came from adopting Bible-based personal values. When social work practitioners perceive faith-based assumptions and values as the sources of strength, it is critical to examine whether and how faith-based beliefs or values conflict with the social work values and code of ethics.

This thesis found that faith shaped social work practitioners' decisions in their professional lives, suggesting that social service organisations should include it as a topic of discussion in meetings. Such inclusion of spirituality will remind social work practitioners of the importance of analysing the influence of spirituality on an ongoing basis while they connect spirituality with social work. Addressing spirituality in professional supervision will help social work practitioners overcome the barriers they will face while addressing spirituality in social work practice and managing caseloads.

Previous research has found that personal spirituality may influence social work practitioners' ways of dealing with ethical dilemmas (Canda et al., 2004). Therefore, consistent with Canda and Furman (1999), this thesis advocated promoting social work practitioners' deep self-reflection and engagement in conversations with clients to determine whether and how their beliefs and values may be in discrepancy with social work values.

### ***Exploring Spiritual Imagination***

Another significant finding is that faith influenced social work practitioners to go through spiritual imagination, which helps to create hope in their personal lives. Even though social work practitioners can pass hope on to their clients, they would also need to explore clients' ways of spiritual imagination which could fit with their beliefs. Data analysis shows that hope helped social work practitioners remove fear and develop the courage to overcome challenges by assuming spirituality as the source of strength. Social work practitioners employed spiritual practices such as prayers to develop hope, which made them feel competent to express love, kindness, and compassion in their social work practitioners' roles. This meant that hope created out of the process of spiritual imagination affected their social work practice, suggesting that hope as a personal belief has the power to flow from personal to professional contexts. Therefore, social work practitioners need to critically examine whether

and how they experience spiritual imagination in their personal lives, which could impact how they experience hope in their social work practice.

Findings show that social work practitioners experienced spiritual imagination differently. These differences reflected how they applied personal hope in their social work practice. For example, the belief that made a social work practitioner Vance, experience spiritual imagination through the Christian faith is that God is in control. Vance's faith-based knowledge of God is in control motivated him to perceive God as the superpower who created everything in the universe, including him, believing that God knew his strengths better than him, which formed the basis of hope expressed in the professional context. However, spiritual imagination negatively impacted Vance's ability to think critically about his existing workload, suggesting that social work education should help students explore whether and how faith and spiritual imagination can hinder their ability to think critically while taking decisions in a social work practice context. The finding also suggested that building self-awareness of strengths is essential in a social work practice context, and if social work practitioners did not explore their strengths in detail, they would not be able to set goals to strengthen them as effective social workers.

Another belief that made some social work practitioners experience spiritual imagination through the Christian faith was that understanding God's presence as a source of unconditional love and guidance in difficult situations, such as domestic abuse, gave them the hope that they could overcome personal struggles. Such experiences of spiritual imagination can be helpful for clients to overcome issues, including domestic violence, if they can develop hope from their spiritual or religious beliefs. Therefore, it seems that social work practitioners can explore whether and how their clients hold any experiences related to spiritual imagination, which could provide them hope that they can succeed.

## **Being Non-Judgmental**

The current study found that social work practitioners integrated faith to develop a non-judgmental attitude suggesting that examining faith could be beneficial in building values and that they may express them towards clients. Participants differ in terms of how they applied faith to become non-judgmental. For example, a social work practitioner integrated his belief in God as the source of love and support, which influenced him to view humility as an effective strategy to demonstrate a non-judgmental attitude towards his clients. This finding suggests that social work practitioners may explore whether and how religious beliefs can make them humble while interacting with clients and how that humbleness could prevent them from being non-judgmental. Larsen and Rinkel (2016) indicated that social work practitioners could apply their belief in God in their social work practice to help others and express compassion and a non-judgmental attitude. Canda et al. (2004) specified the importance of social work practitioners developing a non-judgmental attitude while addressing clients' religious or spiritual beliefs in social work practice.

Social work practitioners can develop forgiveness for themselves and others from their faith-based lessons and belief in God, and they can apply them to become non-judgmental. For example, a social work practitioner, Oceana, expressed that the faith-based learning of forgiveness has the power to develop a peaceful mind, which could prevent her from judgmental thinking. Social work practitioners' understanding of how faith influenced them to forgive themselves and others has implications for clients as they can help clients forgive so that clients can achieve better mental health outcomes. This research also found that when social work practitioners align their beliefs and values with expressing social work values such as integrity, accepting the dignity and worth of the person, and social justice, they can be more non-judgmental in their social work practice.

## **Relieving Stress and Self-care**

The findings from the current study show that spirituality provided social work practitioners with practical ways to reduce stress and avoid professional burnout. Social work practitioners spoke about various religious rituals, prayers, and meditation practices and explained how they helped them in self-care. This finding, which emerged from social work practitioners, resonates with some social work teachers' views of faith as a form of self-care and their application of prayer and mindfulness in personal lives. Therefore, it can be said that social work practitioners and teachers can connect belief in God with their social work practice or teaching by viewing spirituality as a self-care strategy and faith as a medium of self-care. Oxhandler and Giardina's (2017) study reported that social work practitioners needed to be educated in using spirituality in social work practice. The findings from this thesis might inform social work practitioners about how to use their religious or spiritual beliefs effectively for their well-being which could guide them in exploring clients' self-care strategies.

## **Spirituality as a Source of Clients' Well-Being**

Public participants experienced the impact on their well-being through spirituality, and thus this finding suggests that spirituality is a valuable concept social work practitioners need to pay attention to while attending to clients' problems. The present study found that how public participants experienced spirituality and their ways of experiencing well-being may affect their perceptions of how spirituality may be addressed in social work practice, suggesting that clients and social work practitioners may hold different beliefs and opinions about how spirituality can be integrated as a source of well-being. Exploring clients' understanding of the term spirituality is a significant aspect of addressing clients' well-being.

Public participants indicated that social work practitioners are responsible to enhance clients explore and connect with their religious or spiritual beliefs. For social work practitioners to undertake such a responsibility, they need to develop an awareness of their experience of spirituality, their perceptions about how they want to integrate spirituality into their social work practice, and whether and how that aligns with clients' interests. Moreover, findings show that a non-judgmental attitude is significant for social work practitioners in addressing clients' spiritual experiences. As Barker and Floersch (2010) recommended, if social work teachers can design teaching interventions to deepen students' awareness of spirituality, it will help students apply critical thinking to acquire knowledge of the influence of spirituality on clients' well-being and develop a non-judgmental attitude. Findings from this research show that social work teachers' examination of spirituality can play a significant role in indirectly addressing clients' spiritual needs by enhancing students' ability to reflect on their religious or spiritual beliefs critically and expressing a non-judgmental attitude and respect towards clients' diverse spiritual expressions.

This research found that religious and non-religious ways of experiencing spirituality existed among the public participants. Belief in destiny was a notable aspect of monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Islam, which influenced participants' experience of well-being. For instance, a public participant, Laila, described that her Islamic belief in destiny made her courageous to move forward during difficult circumstances, suggesting that human beings may develop courage from believing that there will be God who will help them in future. It is interesting to notice that God is portrayed as a good listener and that prayer is a brilliant avenue for self-reflection during difficulties. Prayer enhanced the well-being of public participants through their experience of having a connection with a higher power, God, suggesting that social work practitioners can explore whether and how their clients experience well-being through religion.

Consistent with previous research (Choe et al., 2020; Nisbet et al., 2011; Sadowski et al., 2020), this research found that nature can be a source of well-being for public participants. Hence, social work practitioners could explore whether and how they can integrate exposure to nature as an effective strategy to enhance clients' well-being. Some public participants perceived their connection with nature could help them develop strengths such as tenacity to achieve their goals during several adverse circumstances, such as divorce, parental death, and job loss, suggesting that social work practice could integrate when appropriate clients' sense of connectedness with nature as an effective way of addressing spirituality to solve their problems and enhance well-being.

Research conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand (Apiti, 2020; Lockhart et al., 2019; Tassell-Matamua et al., 2021) also found that Māori experience greater sense of connection to nature. Two participants, Fiona and Megan, perceive nature as the source of higher consciousness, and this perception influenced them to connect with nature to get creativity and problem-solving skills, which affected their well-being. This expands on Tassell-Matamua et al.'s (2021) study, which highlighted that cultural identity could motivate Māori to give more respect to nature, as Fiona and Megan were not Māori. Therefore, it seems that everybody can experience a connection with nature and embodied sense of well-being in their lives. According to my findings, public participants' relationship with nature seems beyond their cultural identities. Connectedness with nature may indicate a sense of belonging to the place and surroundings but also transcend limitations that rigid beliefs about human behaviour some religious groups may impose.

Oxhandler and Giardina (2017) indicated that social work practitioners might feel uneasy about addressing spirituality if they lack knowledge about different faith traditions and the confidence to discuss spirituality with clients. Public participants shared that demonstrating respect and inclusivity are significant for social work practitioners to address spirituality in a

non-imposing and client-centred manner. Social work teachers, and practitioners, could employ this conceptual framework to think about different ways they can integrate the beneficial aspect of personal spirituality to improve social work teaching, practice, and clients' well-being. Although the conceptual framework that emerged from this research provided insight into social work teachers' and practitioners' spiritual experiences, it needs to be tested in the future. Testing the framework would help address the possible challenges that may arise for social work students and practitioners. Some students may completely disagree with viewing personal beliefs related to spirituality as significant in social work practice. They may perceive discussing faith or spirituality in the classroom as an imposition of teachers' beliefs. Such students may also understand asking clients faith or spirituality related questions as inappropriate. Addressing spirituality requires framing respectful language and active listening skills to overcome these challenges.

## **Chapter Nine: Conclusion**

This chapter begins by presenting the research overview, and then it continues to review the research findings against the initial research objectives. It then outlines the limitations of the research and concludes by presenting the recommendations.

### **Research Overview**

Learning about the significance of spirituality within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand social work practice led to an inner calling to conduct this PhD research further investigating social workers' integration of faith and spirituality within teaching and practice. As I mentioned in the introduction, cultural competence (Social Workers Registration Board, 2022) and the place of spirituality in the code of ethics as a core value (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2019) motivated me to address clients' spirituality as a significant dimension of cultural diversity. A significant question that arose after reviewing the international studies around spirituality in social work education was, "should social work researchers devote their time to exploring social work teachers' spirituality when addressing the inclusion of spirituality content in social work education programmes?" (p.19). This thesis has taught me that attending to social work teachers' personal religious or spiritual beliefs may significantly impact their teaching.

My PhD journey has involved long hours of reading grounded theory textbooks, international and Aotearoa New Zealand literature around spirituality in social work teaching and practice, and transcribing interviews with social work teachers, practitioners, and public participants. Moreover, this journey included coding, critical thinking about the participants' spirituality, reflexively writing memos, and conducting follow-up conversations to expand the storylines.

Interviews with ten social work teachers, six social work practitioners, and nine public participants on personal spirituality formed the basis of creating a conceptual framework. This conceptual framework explains how social work teachers and practitioners can incorporate personal spiritual wisdom into the profession. Critical self-reflection about faith and consideration of spirituality as an effective self-care strategy made social work teachers feel confident in discussing faith in the classroom. The conceptual framework made it clear that teachers' critical self-reflection on spirituality can motivate social work practitioners' examination of beliefs and values, and social work practitioners' critical reflection on the influence of spirituality can inform social work teaching methods and shape practice behaviours.

Grounded theory methods were highly beneficial for the formation of the conceptual framework. During my PhD journey, I felt that coding and memo writing enhanced my ability to reflect on the data, and the storyline method paved the way for presenting the research findings. Public participants' ways of experiencing spirituality showed greater diversity compared to social work teachers and practitioners. Although findings cannot be generalised, they can illuminate us to be prepared for a range of expressions of the numinous and ensure not to impose our beliefs even if belonging to the same religious group.

### **Review of Research Aims and Objectives**

The first objective for my PhD research was to study participants' experience of spirituality. Semi-structured interviews helped me to explore social work teachers', practitioners' and public participants' personal beliefs related to the meaning and purpose of their lives and spirituality. Spirituality appears to be an individual experience guiding the process of building meaning and purpose in life, which involves various religious or non-religious means. While religious beliefs and connectedness with God form the basis of many

social work teachers' and practitioners' experiences of spirituality, public participants' spiritual experiences stressed the importance of believing in numerous avenues of connection, such as nature, self, work, and friends. The findings, therefore, indicate that grounded theory research provides a good starting point for social work teachers and practitioners to understand how their beliefs differ from public participants. This would provide them with methods to relate to potential clients.

The second objective of the study was to understand the influence of spirituality on social work teachers' teaching practices. This study has identified that social work teachers' beliefs can influence their teachings. One of the more apparent findings from this study is that examining beliefs related to religion and spirituality could favour social work teachers in avoiding imposing beliefs by addressing the conflicts they experience while incorporating spirituality in a culturally diverse environment. These research findings also support the view that social work practice experiences can challenge faith as a social work teacher in my research specified that he transforms faith because of the influence of social work on faith. The insights gained from this study may assist social work teachers who follow monotheist religious beliefs to transform their beliefs if they do not align them with social work values. This study contributes to social work teachers' understanding of examining faith and spirituality and managing conflicts.

The third objective of this study was to determine the effect of spirituality on social work practitioners' practice. Findings show that personal spirituality is an effective predictor for social work practitioners in their journey towards finding a personal sense of meaning and purpose. The data show that religion and Indigenous beliefs shaped the experience of spirituality and how social work teachers, and practitioners link it with their social work practice. Social work practitioners' spirituality influenced them to express a non-judgemental attitude, which could deepen their ability to be empathetic and respectful towards clients.

Another significant finding was that social work teachers' spirituality could be influential in developing the art of critical reflection around spirituality in social work, which has implications for practitioners who apply faith to practise spiritual imagination in their personal lives. The storyline titled "experiencing hope through spiritual imagination", which expands on this notion, was presented in chapter five.

The fourth objective of this study sought to explore the different ways public participants experience well-being through spirituality and their perceptions on whether and how social work practitioners should address spirituality in the social work processes. Most public participants were working professionals and engaged in diverse spiritual practices. Even though these findings are not generalisable because of participants' differences in age, sex, profession, and spirituality, this grounded theory research offers experiences of spirituality from public participants' lives and constructive suggestions. These experiences and suggestions may be incorporated into social work education contexts to prepare students to understand effective ways to link spirituality with well-being so they can consider them effectively in practice. A conceptual framework for incorporating spirituality in social work education and practice is developed from the findings that emerged from social work teachers, practitioners, and the public participants' interview data, which helped me achieve the fifth objective of the study.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations which need to be addressed. My literature search was limited to articles and books published in English. Furthermore, the grounded theory requirement that data collection and data analysis be simultaneously conducted was a significant challenge I encountered during my PhD journey. Some social work teachers and practitioners set out specific dates for me to interview them, and I was concerned about losing their participation

if I did not accept these dates. This concern led to compromising simultaneous data collection and data analysis with some participants as I could not complete the transcription and analysis of the interview when two participants gave me a similar date to interview them. I later contacted those participants by phone to clarify concepts and fill gaps in the storyline to overcome this limitation.

Another notable limitation of this research was that most social work teachers and practitioners who participated in my research belonged to the Christian faith, and almost all described spirituality as experiencing more profound connections with God. The study could be improved if the sample involved teachers and practitioners with diverse beliefs about spirituality or who came from diverse faiths.

Selection bias that occurred with public participants was another limitation which I need to acknowledge. When I recruited participants from the public based on the criteria of their interest and willingness to participate in the study, the study included more professionals, such as a psychology student and a nurse involved in the study, who held more diverse spiritual experiences compared to the general public. This helped me to achieve the grounded theory requirement of collecting more data deeply grounded in participants' experiences of the phenomenon. The study could be improved if I could gather information from social work clients directly, but that would potentially raise ethical concerns.

### **Research Recommendations**

1. Future studies should employ qualitative methods to explore the influence of social work teachers' faith-based assumptions and beliefs about the meaning and purpose of their lives on social work teaching philosophies to understand better whether and how they integrate religious beliefs into social work teaching.

2. Further qualitative research should address implicit biases or unconscious beliefs originating from faith, including monotheism, which could negatively impact ethical decision-making and actions in the teaching and learning context. Employing multiple research methods, such as ethnographic observations and psychometric interviews, could help explore unconscious beliefs deeply.
3. Further research is needed to explore the influence of social work practice on social work teachers' and practitioners' experience of faith and spirituality while they practise social work in accordance with the requirements of SWRB and ANZASW.
4. Research should be supported to explore how social work teachers' spirituality and the meaning and purpose of their lives lead to apply cultural humility and critical reflection as an effective way of integrating spirituality in social work education and practice.
5. Studies could explore whether and how social work teachers can use spirituality to develop equitable teaching interventions for students and the impact of it on social work practice.
6. Further work should be done to determine whether and how social work teachers' spiritual beliefs could help them deepen their relationship with students in the teaching and learning context and establish authenticity.
7. Further research needs to be conducted to discover strategies to develop teaching practices to explore students' creativity and self-care by addressing spirituality.
8. Social work education should promote critical conversations around spirituality to help social work students connect personal beliefs and values with social work values.

9. Future research needs to focus on increasing the critical reflection component of spirituality by social work teachers as it would enhance students' critical reflection and set the stage for creating safer contexts to talk about clients' spirituality.
10. Further qualitative research should be undertaken to explore the influence of faith on social work practitioners and being non-judgemental.
11. Further study focusing on how social work as a spiritual calling aligns with social work values is needed.
12. Qualitative research could be conducted on how social work teachers' and practitioners' spiritual beliefs shape addressing spirituality in social work teachings.
13. Spiritual imagination needs to be addressed in social work education to enhance practitioners' critical thinking of caseloads and talking about their caseload.
14. Further grounded theory research should be undertaken to investigate the influence of social work practitioners' everyday spiritual practices on self-care and reducing professional burnout.
15. Social work education needs to focus on developing protocols to encourage social work practitioners to take safer caseloads and discuss self-care needs by addressing spirituality in social work practice as an effective self-care strategy in supervision meetings.
16. Further qualitative research is needed to explore the views of social work managers and supervisors around spirituality as a field of practice.
17. Future research should focus on interviewing ex-clients and social work students to explore their experiences of spirituality.
18. Future research should focus on testing the conceptual framework.

## Final Thoughts

This grounded theory research transformed my awareness that individuals can interpret spirituality differently and that their spiritual beliefs and experiences can enhance well-being and creativity. This study provides evidence of a more significant discrepancy between social work teachers, practitioners, and the public regarding how they construct meaning and purpose and experience spirituality. Therefore, this study strengthens the idea that social work teachers and practitioners need to examine their spirituality and develop the ability to initiate conversations with clients or students in a culturally and spiritually respectful manner. A significant implication of this study is that social work teachers can integrate the conceptual framework developed from this research to enhance teaching spirituality to promote clients' well-being. This conceptual framework provides insights for social work teachers to consider examining their spiritual beliefs as a starting point to address spirituality in social work. Furthermore, this study informs that social work practice can also influence spirituality and as social work practitioners, addressing social work values sometimes needs modification of beliefs. However, social work teachers and practitioners acknowledged spirituality as a self-care strategy that enhances creativity and relieves stress. They could connect their personal experiences to their professional roles. Therefore, it is essential to address spirituality as a topic of discussion in social work supervision meetings. Such inclusion may greatly benefit clients getting the opportunity to have a deeper conversation about their spirituality with social workers.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview schedule and questions for social work educators

#### Date & time of the interview:

#### Place:

#### Opening:

A brief discussion regarding the aims of the project

The participant will be asked if he/ she would like to begin the interview in any particular manner related to his/her own religious or spiritual beliefs.

#### Questions:

1. Could you please share what gives your life a sense of meaning and purpose? How does it guide your everyday life?
2. What are your personal values? How does it align with social work profession?
3. How did you come to know about your values? What would you consider to be some of your experiences that shaped your values?
4. Could you please share your beliefs about God/ higher power/ the universe?
5. Have you experience any relationship with God/ higher power/ the universe? If yes,
  - Can you please describe your experience of having a relationship with God/ higher power/the universe?
  - Did it influence the way you teach social work? If yes, can you please describe how does it affect social work teaching?
6. Do you identify yourself as belonging to any particular religion? How does your religion assist a student coming from a different faith tradition/secular background?
7. How do you guard against imposing your own religious values onto students?

8. What do you consider to be an important activity in your everyday life that helps you become more attentive to your inner life? How does it affect the teaching and learning process?
9. What are your ways to enhance students' connection to themselves, peers, family, and clients?
10. How do you make differences in your students' life and social work practice?
11. How does your love and caring impact your teaching and learning relationships with students?
12. What do you think about the inclusion of spirituality in social work education and social work practice?
13. Do you address spirituality in any way in your courses? How?
14. Have you attended any professional development courses related to spirituality? Which ones?
15. What are the barriers there to incorporating spirituality into social work training?
16. What do you think what would need to be included in a conceptual framework if we have one?
17. Would you like to receive the interview transcripts back and make amendments on it?

Closing:

Offering a Koha

Thanking the participant

## **Appendix B: Interview Schedule and questions for social work practitioners**

### **Date & time of the interview:**

### **Place:**

### **Opening:**

A brief discussion regarding the aims of the project

The participant will be asked if he/ she would like to begin the interview in any particular manner related to his/her own religious or spiritual beliefs.

### **Questions:**

1. Could you please share what gives your life a sense of meaning and purpose? How does it guide your everyday life?
2. What are your personal values? How does it align with social work profession?
3. How did you come to know about your values? What would you consider to be some of your experiences that shaped your values?
4. Could you please share your beliefs about God/ higher power/ the universe?
5. Have you experience any relationship with God/ higher power/ the universe? If yes,
  - Can you please describe your experience of having a relationship with God/ higher power/the universe?
  - Did it influence the way you practice social work? If yes, can you please describe how does it affect social work practice?
6. Do you identify yourself as belonging to any particular religion? If yes,
  - How does your religion assist a client coming from a different faith/ tradition/secular background?
  - How does it assist a client coming from a same faith/ tradition/ secular belief?
7. How do you guard against imposing your own religious values onto clients?

8. What do you consider to be an important activity in your everyday life that helps you become more attentive to your inner life? How does it affect your social work practice?
9. What are your ways to enhance clients' connection to themselves, peers, and family?
10. How do you make differences in your clients' life and social work practice?
11. How does your love and caring impact your helping relationship with clients?
12. What do you think about the inclusion of spirituality in social work education and social work practice?
13. Has spirituality been in any way addressed during your professional training/development? How?
14. What are the barriers there to incorporating spirituality into social work practice?
15. What do you think what would need to be included in a conceptual framework if we have one?
16. Would you like to receive the interview transcripts back and make amendments on it?

Closing:

Thanking the participant and offering a koha

## **Appendix C: Interview Schedule and questions for the public**

### **Date & time of the interview:**

### **Place:**

### **Opening:**

A brief discussion regarding the aims of the project

The participant will be asked if he/ she would like to begin the interview in any particular manner related to his/her own religious or spiritual beliefs.

### **Questions:**

1. Could please share something about yourself, your work/ study setting?
2. Could you please share what gives your life a sense of meaning and purpose? How does it guide your everyday life?
3. Can you please share any three of your strengths? How did you come to know about your strengths?
4. What would you consider to be some of your experiences that have built your strengths?
5. Could you please share your beliefs about God/ higher power/ the universe?
6. Have you experience any relationship with God/ higher power/ the universe? If yes,
  - Can you please describe your experience of having a relationship with God/ higher power/the universe?
  - Did it influence your life? If yes, can you please describe how does it affect your way of living?
7. Do you identify yourself as belonging to any particular religion? If yes, how does it affect your well-being?

8. What do you consider to be an important activity in your everyday life that helps you become more attentive to your inner life? How does it affect your decision making and problem solving?
9. What are your ways to enhance connection with family, peers, and friends?
10. Do you have any direct/indirect experiences with social work services? Can you please share your experiences?
11. Do you agree/disagree with incorporating spirituality into social work practice? Why/why not?
12. If you agree with incorporating spirituality into social work practice, can you please share your views about the role of social workers?
13. What would you consider to be an easy way for social workers to explore the influence of religion/spirituality in clients' lives?
14. What do you think what would need to be included in a conceptual framework if we have one?
15. Would you like to receive the interview transcripts back and make amendments on it?

Closing:

Offering a Koha

Thanking the participant

## Appendix D: Information Sheet



**INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUALITY ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATORS, SOCIAL WORK PRACTITIONERS AND THE PUBLIC (AS POTENTIAL CLIENTS): ADDRESSING SPIRITUALITY WITH GRACE AND INTEGRITY**

### INFORMATION SHEET

#### ❖ Who is the researcher?

My name is Hairunnisa Muhammed Shafi. I am a PhD candidate in Social Work at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand. I have two academic supervisors. Dr. Ksenija Napan is the primary supervisor who is an associate professor at School of Social Work, Massey University. She is wholeheartedly committed to doing spirituality-based inquiries and developing innovative teaching and learning methods. Dr. Heather Kempton is the co-supervisor who is a senior lecturer at Massey University School of Psychology. She is a curious scholar involved in inquiring the cognitive aspects of mindfulness/meditation practices.

#### ❖ What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to explore the influence of spirituality on social work educators, social work practitioners, and the public (as potential clients). This study will also aim to develop a conceptual framework that will provide information about how to integrate spirituality in a more collaborative and client-centred way for promoting clients' well-being.

#### ❖ What are the benefits of the research?

The research seeks to generate new knowledge about the influence of spirituality on Aotearoa New Zealand's social work professionals and potential clients. The research outcome will help to

develop spirituality integrated social work teaching and social work practice methods that respect clients' spiritual beliefs and values.

❖ **What would I have to do?**

You would be asked to take part in an interview which would last around 60 – 90 minutes and be conducted at a suitable location we agree on. The interview would be recorded so that I have an accurate copy of your comments for analysis. You are free to ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time and to decline to answer any questions. The information you give me will be kept completely confidential, and your name and details will not be known to anyone else but myself. I may use some quotes from your interview in my PhD thesis, but I will not disclose your identity as I will use a pseudonym. Findings from the research may also be presented at conferences or written up in journal articles.

❖ **What are my rights?**

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any question
- Withdraw from the study at any time up to two weeks after the interview
- Ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview
- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation
- Provide information on the understanding that your name and answers will be kept confidential
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded

❖ **Privacy and confidentiality**

Your privacy will be maintained throughout this study. Your answers will be stored in the researcher's password-protected computer only for data recording purposes and you do not need to give your name or contact details. Your involvement in this study is confidential.

❖ **Low-Risk notification**

This project (4000019489) has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Associate Professor Tracy Riley, Acting Director (Research Ethics), email [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz).

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you can contact either the researcher or her supervisors.

**Researcher**

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**Appendix E: Human ethics notification**

humanethics@massey.ac.nz

Jul 27, 2018, 11:17  
AM

to Hairunnisa.Muhammed.Shafi.1, H.Butter, K.Napan, humanethics

HoU Review Group

Ethics Notification Number: 4000019489

Title: Impact of spirituality on social work educators, social work practitioners, and public (as potential clients): A constructivist grounded theory study

Thank you for your notification which you have assessed as Low Risk.

Your project has been recorded in our system which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Associate Professor Tracy Riley, Acting Director (Research Ethics), email [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz). "

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish require evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to complete the application form again answering yes to the publication question to provide more information to go before one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

You are reminded that staff researchers and supervisors are fully responsible for ensuring that the information in the low risk notification has met the requirements and guidelines for submission of a low risk notification.

If you wish to print an official copy of this letter, please login to the RIMS system, and under the Reporting section, View Reports you will find a link to run the LR Report.

Yours sincerely

Associate Professor Tracy Riley, Dean Research  
Acting Director (Research Ethics)

## Appendix F: Participant Consent Form



School of Social Work  
Albany

*Project Title: Impact of spirituality on social work educators, social work practitioners, and public: A constructivist grounded theory study*

Hairunnisa Muhammed Shafi – PhD (Social Work) candidate

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read the Participant Information sheet and I have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time. Please tick to indicate you consent to the following.

- I agree to participate in this research under the conditions set out in the information sheet
- I agree to the interview being audio recorded
- I wish to have data placed in an official archive
- I consent to the information collected for this research study, once anonymised (so that I cannot be identified), to be used for any other research purposes

I wish to receive the summary of findings: Yes/No

Declaration by participant:

I ..... hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature:

Date:

**Appendix F: Table showing Line-by-line coding**

Transcribed Interview data	Line by line coding
<p><b>Sense of meaning and purpose/ understanding of spirituality</b></p> <p>1. Vance: My spirituality is what gives me a sense of meaning and purpose</p> <p>2. I think knowing the creator and what his plans are and</p> <p>3. Having a relationship with him is most important</p> <p><b>Meaning of the phrase 'God is in control'</b></p> <p>4a. I think God is in control no matter what situations arise in my life so that gives me a hope.</p> <p>4b. even when things are not looking well, rather than focusing on the problem, I rely on solutions from God</p>	<p>1. Understood spirituality as meaning and purpose</p> <p>2. Knowing the creator and his plans</p> <p>3. Having a personal relationship with God</p> <p>4a* Being hopeful by thinking God is in control</p> <p>4b. Relying on solutions from God</p>

**How spirituality****influences everyday life?**

4c\* That gives me strength  
to carry on and I see  
change/miracles on a day-  
to-day basis. 4d\* I only  
know that it is God. I do  
not have any logical  
explanations

4c\* Getting strength

4c\* Believing in miracles/ changes in  
circumstances

4d\* Knowing God

4d\* Lacking logical explanations

## **Appendix G: A Sample Memo Written After Line-by-Line Coding**

### ***Vance's Feeling of Being Connected to God***

Vance believed that God is in control. The participant's understanding of the meaning of the phrase 'God is in control' is that God can provide solutions to various problems and what he will need to do is to just wait for God's timings rather than being overstressed on problems. I looked at the interview transcript and I found he pointed out two instances where the application of this phrase worked: 1) When he had any financial difficulties, he used to wait for God's timings 2) 'In social work practice, if things are not looking good', I felt myself disagreeing with application of the phrase. 'I coded it as 'unexamined assumptions or opposed to be an agent of change rather than looking at problems to find out most significant solutions/ helping the client understand the situation. While he believes that solutions will automatically emerge and he is experiencing miracles on a day-to-day basis, I would say he is not able to differentiate what he did to make the miracle happened. Hence, critical analysis of the impact of beliefs on social worker role is important whenever he experienced miracle happened.

## **Appendix H: An Example of Reflective memo: Researcher positioning**

### ***Vance's feeling of being connected to God***

I found myself strongly believing in God, like Vance perceived being connected to God. But, how my perception of being connected to God differs from Vance's perception? Is there any differences and similarities between me and my participant in terms of being connected to God? I used the two instances said by Vance to enhance my thinking. In the first instance, I felt strongly agree with Vance. I found I was relying on God whenever I encountered any financial crisis, I put my feelings associated to this instance as 'personal', 'feeling not ok to discuss financial issues with human beings', 'Trust God', 'pray and feel cool', and 'compromise'. For the second instance, I disagreed with Vance, and I realized my feelings were 'professional', 'feeling ok to help client in getting financial aid', 'trust myself', 'pray and feel cool', and 'do not compromise'. I found I was integrating the belief 'being connected to God' differently into my personal and professional life. I noticed that 'Pray and feel cool', remained the same personally and professionally. This is noted as the similarity between Vance and me. Both of us believed in God as a source of hope, but religious differences did not make any differences for how I spell and use the term 'God'. I was surprised that 'trust God' in personal life became 'trust self' in professional sphere. I understood 'trust self' in my thinking differ from my participant, he used 'trust God', that is 'relying on God' in his words. 'Being able to provide logical explanations' was seemed to be important for me in terms of justifying my actions in the professional context for trust myself. I felt this influenced me suggesting Vance will need to critically think about his role as a social worker in the problem-solving process when he said believing in miracles.

'Trust self' could be 'an instrument of God'. This is relevant as social workers need to support clients to have a sense of being active agents of change, not the powerless victims of circumstances.