

# **Social Work Students' Beliefs about the Causes of Poverty in Egypt**

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### **Abstract:**

Eradicating poverty in all its forms everywhere is the main goal of the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030. Based on the importance of the community social work's role in poverty, the study aimed to identify the beliefs of social work students about poverty, its causes, and ways to deal with it. Some of the study's main results included the students' concept of poverty namely, Multidimensional Poverty (financial deprivation, decreased income, poor health, poor housing, deprivation of education, freedoms, and human rights). Regarding their beliefs about the causes of poverty, the constructivist interpretation ranked first, then the individual interpretation, and the fatalistic interpretation ranked last. The poverty level in society was found remarkable, and the anti-poverty programs in Egypt functioned at a medium level. The participants expressed the necessity of changing anti-poverty policies.

**Keywords:** Poverty, Social work, Individualism, Constructivism, Fatalism.

### **Introduction:**

Increasing numbers of people in Egypt are living in poverty (United Nations, 2018, p. 2). According to the World Bank, Egypt is categorized as a lower middle-income country, with a GNI per capita (PPP) of \$12,910 in 2021, which notably falls below the global average of \$18,625. Moreover, Egypt's Gini coefficient (i.e., a measure of inequality) is 31.5 (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024, p. 14). Besides, the poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines (% of the population) in Egypt was 29.7% in 2019 (World Bank, 2024).

**Many studies have analyzed the causes of poverty** in different countries. For instance, Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, and Tagler (2001) concluded that participants most likely blamed poor people themselves for their poverty. However, effects toward the poor, stereotypes of the poor, and attributions for the causes of poverty varied among individuals from different sociodemographic backgrounds; they were related to core American values such as work ethics and belief in a just world. Attitudes toward the poor and attributions for poverty are likely related to positions on public policy issues concerning the provision of welfare, availability of health insurance, provision of childcare for the working poor, etc., and thus, have major implications for important social and political outcomes.

In Jordan, moreover, Al-Othman (2005) identified the beliefs of Al-Karak Governorate's residents about the causes and determinants of poverty. Based on the descriptive analyses, the respondents believed that structural factors were the most important in explaining poverty, followed by the fatalistic explanation, and finally the individualistic explanation. Additionally, Ljubotina and Ljubotina

(2007) investigated how students in Croatia perceive causes of poverty and examined the differences in attributions of poverty between students of social work, economics, and agriculture. The study showed that students of all three faculties put the most emphasis on structural causes of poverty (3.54), followed by micro-environmental (3.18), individual (2.95), and fatalistic causes (1.81), respectively. Social work students perceived individual factors as significantly less important causes of poverty.

Another study by Tudy Clark (2007) summarized over 14 years (1991-2004). Graduate social work students ( $n = 2,213$ ) in ten California schools were surveyed about their perceptions of poverty as they entered and exited their graduate programs. Entering students expressed preferences for societal/institutional change methods to address poverty instead of individual adaptation methods. In addition, the exploratory research of Hong and Wernet (2007) focused on the structural context of working poverty, thereby transcending its individual or behavioral aspects. The major findings of the study highlighted four primary sets of factors—demographic, human capital, employment barriers, and labor market positions—that contribute to an individual's likelihood of being among the working poor. The structural factors, including employment barriers and labor market positions, significantly contributed to the effects of human capital and demographic variables. All four factors require attention in community and policy practice to improve the lot of American workers in an increasingly global marketplace.

Also, Shiraz (2011) reviewed some of the theories that explain the poverty phenomenon in Saudi Arabia and explored student's attitudes toward the poor. The study concluded that structural factors at the political, socio-economical, and financial levels, on the one hand, and some of the issues related to these factors, such as minimum wage, unemployment, equality, and justice, on the other, are the most influential factors in explaining the causes of poverty. The second most important factors affecting poverty are the individualistic ones which include motivation, hard work, training, and education. Fatalistic factors, such as disease, disability, and bad luck, are the third in rank. Blomberg, Kroll, Kallio, and Erola (2013) conducted their study to understand the most commonly perceived reasons for poverty among Nordic social workers are connected to 'social blame'. However, Nordic social workers display a surprisingly large variety of and variation in perceptions; there are great differences between

countries, but also within countries. Norway and, above all, Sweden seem to be the countries in which social/structural conditions are most commonly perceived as the reason for poverty.

Bray and Balkin (2013) analyzed the responses of 285 Master's-level students, concerning their multicultural competency and beliefs about the causes of poverty. Students who thought individuals were responsible for their poverty reported lower multicultural competency, higher color-blind racial attitudes, and lower multicultural social desirability. Students, who believed poverty is caused by societal factors, in contrast, self-rated lower in color-blind racism, lower in multicultural competency, and higher in multicultural social desirability.

Kafawin (2017) attempted to explore social work students' perceptions of the causes of poverty in Jordan. The study found that the students' concept of poverty was linked to material poverty to a large degree. For their beliefs about the causes of poverty, the constructivist interpretation ranked first, then the individual interpretation, and the fatalistic, cultural, and psychological interpretation ranked last. Regarding anti-poverty programs in Jordan, the participants expressed their dissatisfaction with them and their conviction of the necessity of changing anti-poverty policies. They also pointed out that the reality of the relationship between social work and poverty is limited to individual intervention in dealing with the poor, and not at the policy level.

Moreover, Daas (2018) ensured that the debate on poverty and the means to eradicate it has seen years of theorizing. There are several approaches to understanding this phenomenon which can be individualistic or structural. Poverty is not just an economic concept, but also political. It should be perceived as something structural by nature: Individuals are somehow victims since the constitution of poverty, its characteristics, and causes are not mostly individualistic. Even thinking of poverty as "cultural" is not acceptable.

Calnitsky (2018) clarified and contrasted the explanatory mechanisms in individualistic and structural accounts of poverty. Calnitsky argued that individualistic approaches obscure a great deal of the theoretical substance in the causal explanation of poverty, as they lack a macro-level appraisal of the subject. Such arguments can explain why one person has a higher risk of poverty than another, but they ignore the fact that a full account of poverty is not furnished by a simple addition of all the separate individual-level accounts. He also

claimed that there are two separate macro-level explanations of poverty: where these explanations attempt to provide accounts of the “empty places” of poverty into which individuals get slotted, situational accounts attempt to explain the circumstances under which specific “poverty-generating” behaviors arise. He concluded by providing a synthesis of individual and structural accounts of poverty, showing that while the two approaches need not be viewed as entirely antagonistic, the former should be accorded a far more modest role and indeed subsumed into broader structural accounts.

Furthermore, Demirtas, Polat, Özalp Ateş, and Ka‘opua (2022) investigated student perceptions of health inequalities and causes of poverty. The study showed that social work students more likely attributed the causes of poverty to social injustice and a lack of opportunities, whereas nursing students had more fatalistic explanations or beliefs, maintaining that outcomes are pre-determined and, therefore, cannot be changed. In both groups, those who agreed that there were problems and deficiencies in health service provision and that poor groups suffered from health issues were more likely to associate poverty with social injustice and lack of opportunities. Those without a systemic understanding of poverty and health inequalities showed a tendency to hold more individualistic/fate-related perspectives.

As Stoeffler (2019) confirmed addressing poverty is not only a part of social work; in many ways, the profession is defined by its interface with poverty. The Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers unequivocally directs social workers to engage in social justice work, specifically related to poverty. The Council on Social Work Education has clearly stated that poverty needs to be a part of the educational framework in accredited programs. Nevertheless, there is evidence from the literature that neither the profession nor its educational programs have fulfilled their expressed commitments to addressing poverty. The intersection of critical theory, anti-oppressive social work theory, learned helplessness theory, and hope theory offers insights and perspective on needed dimensions in poverty alleviation to enable practice within the mission, ethics, and values of the social work profession.

Also, given the scale and complexity of this issue, social workers need analytic and intervention skills to address its impact and its existence at community and societal levels, and they need to stay attuned to the personal disempowerment and hopelessness that

typically plays out for individuals whose lives are adversely affected by poverty in any of its forms. There is much here for social workers to digest and think about. There is a lot of work still to be done (Hingley-Jones & Kirwan, 2023, p. 134).

This is confirmed by Dowling's (1993) study that investigated to what extent social workers' attitudes to poverty have been translated into actions. Factors affecting social workers' ability to turn attitudes into actions have included the restructuring of welfare, which has involved social service cutbacks and financially restrictive social security policies, and social workers' subjective norms and behavioral controls. The study also considered how social workers aid social service users with financial difficulties, through welfare rights advice and/or advocacy or direct cash payments. It is suggested that social workers are increasingly being expected to collude with the DSS' functions of income maintenance and, hence, their role as welfare rights advocates/advisers can be compromised. However, social service users' increasing poverty indicates that social work's help with financial and material needs may be an important part of the social work task from a consumer's perspective, both in training and work.

In addition, Boone, Roets, and Roose's (2019) study confirmed that although participatory social work approaches have been considered a fruitful strategy, critical questions are raised about the social justice aspirations of participatory social work with people in poverty. Findings suggest that even in practices that situate the principle of participatory parity at the heart of their fight for social justice, power asymmetries, and social inequalities require attention. Exclusionary mechanisms become apparent in how practitioners try to support the participatory parity of people in poverty in the different components of the organization. When practitioners try to overcome these exclusionary effects, the sheer complexity and inescapable power struggles become visible. Moreover, the ambiguity of how practitioners attempt to empower people in poverty and enhance structural change leads to tensions between affirmative and transformative strategies in the fight against poverty.

Husz, Kopasz, and Medgyesi (2022) confirmed that social workers may play an important role in the implementation of welfare policies targeted at the poor. Their norms, beliefs, and attitudes form local anti-poverty programs and affect discretionary practices with their clients. The study revealed that most social workers explained poverty with structural causes, but individual blame was also frequent.

Contrary to the study's hypothesis, the level of local poverty did not significantly increase the adoption of structural explanations but did raise the occurrence of individualistic ones. The results suggest that efforts should be made to improve the poverty indicator framework to better understand the phenomenon of spatial concentration of multiple disadvantages and its consequences for the poor.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, the literature related to social work and poverty in Egypt is devoid of such studies. Therefore, the researcher saw the necessity and importance of studying the concept of poverty among social work students and their vision of the causes of poverty and ways to combat it. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the concept of poverty and the social work students' beliefs about it, its causes, and the methods that must be used to deal with it.

**Accordingly, the purpose of the current study is** to explore the perceptions of students concerning the causes of poverty and the methods to address it. Students were surveyed from undergraduate social work at Beni Suef University, Egypt.

**The study was guided by the following questions:**

- 1- What do social work students think about the concept of poverty?
- 2- What are students' beliefs about the causes of poverty and its explanation (individual, structural, and destiny causes)?
- 3- How do students view efforts to combat poverty in Egyptian society?
- 4- How do students evaluate the role of social work in the field of poverty?
- 5- Are there differences in responses due to demographic characteristics (gender, residence, job, and social class)?

**Therefore, the study's hypothesis is as follows:**

There are statistically significant differences between social work students' responses about the causes of poverty based on some demographic variables such as gender, residence, job, and social class.

### **Poverty Definition**

**Poverty** entails more than the lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion, as well as the lack of participation in decision-making (United Nations, 2024).



**The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)** neatly reflects both the incidence or headcount ratio (H) of poverty, defined as the proportion of the population that is multidimensionally poor, and the average intensity (A) of their poverty, defined as the average proportion of indicators in which poor people are deprived (Arab Human Development Report, 2014, p. 11).

**The MPI** is an international measure of overlapping deprivations in multiple dimensions of well-being, typically including health, education, and living standards, which complement traditional monetary poverty measures. In recent years, MPI has become an indispensable tool for assessing socioeconomic conditions and growth in both developing and rich countries (United Nations, 2022, p. 2).

**Beliefs about poverty** are defined as personal views and perceptions about the causes of poverty. According to Feagin (1975), there are three main types of reasons for poverty: individualistic, structuralist, and fatalistic. Individualistic beliefs attribute poverty to the poor people themselves (personal problems) like lack of ability, effort, and morals. Structuralist beliefs locate the causes in the social and economic systems (social problems) like lack of opportunities, discrimination, and exploitation of poor people. Fatalistic beliefs put the causes beyond individual and environmental control (fate) such as luck, sickness, and chance (Law & Shek, 2014).

**Explanations of the causes of poverty** can be classified into three broad families of theories: behavioral, structural, and political. Behavioral theories concentrate on individual behaviors as driven by incentives and culture. Structural theories emphasize the demographic and labor market context, which causes behavior and poverty. Political theories contend that power and institutions cause policy, which causes poverty and moderates the relationship between behavior and poverty (Brady, 2019, p. 157).

**The theoretical discourse on the causes of poverty** is dominated by individualistic and structural perspectives. The individualistic approach focuses on cultural and behavioral factors. Poverty is conceived as a result of internal factors such as inappropriate behavior of the poor, lack of motivation, or living an indecent way of life. The structural approach focuses on external factors and emphasizes the unfavorable position of the poor in the social hierarchy (Husz, Kopasz, & Medgyesi, 2022, p. 1072).

### **The operational definition of poverty in the current study:**

Poverty is multidimensional, including financial deprivation (lack or decrease in income), poor health status (lack of treatment), unavailability or poor housing, deprivation of education, deprivation of freedoms in general, including political freedom, a violation of the rights of the poor as a human being. Causes of poverty can be classified into three perspectives, i.e., individual, structural and destiny causes. One of the issues raised by community social work in dealing with poverty is whether social work will continue to deal with the poor and not with poverty and whether the professional intervention will remain at the individual and family level, or whether it can develop to deal with communities, legislations and policies. This is what was covered in the tool used in the study.

### **Methods:**

#### **Participants:**

The participants for the study were a purposive sample of undergraduate social work students (3rd and 4th grade) at Beni Suef University in Egypt, who responded at the time of data collection to the email invitations to visit the electronic questionnaire. (301) participants were qualified and fully completed a demographic questionnaire and the research measures. The total usable rate of participation was 10% of all senior students of the third and fourth years out of (3000) students during the data collection period from 1/2/2024 to 28/2/2024.

#### **Sample Description:**

The majority of social work students were women (n=248/301, 82.39% female), whereas the males were (17.61%). Their ages range from 21-24 years old. As for the residence, students from the countryside reached (61.79%) and those from the city (38.21%). The largest group of students (78.74%) is those without jobs. For the social class, students in the middle class constitute (7.75%), working class (19.60%), poor lower class (2.99%), and upper rich class (1.66%).

#### **Measures:**

This research is considered analytical, descriptive, using quantitative qualitative methods. It was based on a questionnaire containing dimensions to measure students' beliefs about poverty. The researcher designed a questionnaire by referring to the theoretical heritage and related studies to the subject of the study. The study used a Likert scale with three answer statements. Consequently, the levels of agreements according to means in the triple Likert scale are as follows:

Values	Level
If the statement mean ranged between 1 and 1.66	Low Level
If the statement mean ranged between 1.67 and 2.33	Medium Level
If the statement mean ranged between 2.34 and 3	High Level

### Validity and reliability:

The researcher presented the study form to (5) arbitrators from the faculty members of the Faculties of Social Work at Helwan and Beni Suf University to judge the validity of the questions included in the form. A settlement was adopted on the agreement not less than (80%), and some phrases were deleted, and some were reworded. Accordingly, the tool was in its final form.

The researcher directed the questionnaire to a sample of (50) students. The responses were utilized to assess the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. The results of both Cronbach's alpha and Reliability (Consistency) for each construct are summarized in the following table as follow:

**Table No.(1):** Cronbach's alpha and Reliability (Consistency) values

Variable	No. of Statements	Cronbach's alpha	Reliability (Consistency)
Individual causes of poverty	10	0.693	0.832
Structural causes of poverty	10	0.722	0.850
Destiny causes of poverty	5	0.604	0.777
The reality of poverty in society	7	0.622	0.789
Social work role with poverty	5	0.660	0.812
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>0.798</b>	<b>0.893</b>

**It is obvious from table 1 that:** regarding the scale of individual causes of poverty, indicating that the Cronbach's alpha value is greater than 0.6 denoting the minimum value for accepting the reliability of the scale, where it is equal (0.693). For structural and constructive causes of poverty, Cronbach's alpha value is greater than 0.6, i.e., the minimum value for accepting the reliability of the scale, where it is equal (0.722). For destiny causes of poverty, Cronbach's alpha value is greater than 0.6, which is the minimum value for accepting the reliability of the scale, where it is equal (0.604). For the reality of poverty in society, Cronbach's alpha value is greater than 0.6 which is the minimum value for accepting the reliability of the scale, where it is equal (0.622). For the role of social work with poverty, Cronbach's alpha value is greater than 0.6 which is the minimum value for accepting the reliability of the scale, where it is equal (0.660). All the scales of the research have great reliability values so it is very dependable.

## Results

### *Results of study questions:*

#### 1- Concept of poverty:

**Table (2): Concept of poverty**

What is the concept of poverty?		Frequency /%	Rank
1	Financial deprivation (lack or decrease in income)	65 (21.6%)	2
2	Poor health status (lack of treatment)	28 (9.3%)	4
3	Unavailability or poor housing	35 (11.6%)	3
4	Deprivation of education	27 (9%)	5
5	Deprivation of freedoms in general, including political freedom	13(4.3%)	7
6	A violation of the rights of the poor as a human being	20 (6.6%)	6
7	all of the above	237 (78.7%)	1

**Table 2 shows that** the concept of poverty represented in multidimensional poverty (all of the above) is up to 78.7%, while the concept of poverty denoted in financial deprivation (i.e., lack or decrease in income) is 21.6%.

#### 2- Causes of poverty:

**Table (3): Structural causes of poverty**

Structural causes	M.	S.D.	Level	R.
Low wages in some jobs and professions	2.841	0.393	High	1
Lack of sufficient job opportunities and increased unemployment	2.814	0.446	High	2
The low standard of schools attended by the poor	2.595	0.561	High	5
There is little justice in our society	2.548	0.596	High	8
The country's weak economy has brought them to this situation	2.558	0.578	High	7
The poor live in weak and dysfunctional families	2.439	0.643	High	10
The presence of corruption, nepotism, and mismanagement in some institutions	2.621	0.550	High	4
Surrounding economic changes and global crises	2.651	0.537	High	3
The government's neglect of the suffering and needs of the poor	2.505	0.609	High	9
Discrimination against the poor , and the environment in which they grew up (neighbourhood, region) did not provide them with equal opportunities	2.591	0.562	High	6
Structural causes of poverty	2.616	0.295	High	1

**Table 3 demonstrates that** according to the rank of means, the level of structural and constructive causes of poverty is high with a mean of (2.616). The indices of the afore-mentioned causes of poverty are ordered based on the given means as follows: First, "Low wages in some jobs and professions" with a mean of (2.841); second, "Lack of sufficient job opportunities and increased unemployment" with a mean of (2.814); third, "Surrounding economic changes and global crises" with a mean of (2.651); fourth, "The presence of corruption, nepotism, and mismanagement in some institutions" with a mean of (2.621); fifth, "The low standard of schools attended by the poor" with a mean of (2.595).

**Table (4): Individual causes of poverty**

Individual causes	M.	S.D.	Level	R.
The poor spend extravagance on their expenses	1.814	0.747	Medium	8
The poor now do not know how to manage their finances	2.017	0.768	Medium	7
They do not know how to take advantage of the opportunities available to them	2.266	0.704	Medium	4
The poor do not work hard enough and do not have the will to change	1.674	0.766	Medium	9
The poor are generally incapable and lack motivation and perseverance	2.086	0.774	Medium	6
The large size of the poor family (they have a large number of children)	2.721	0.505	High	1
Poor people have laziness and unwillingness to work (loss of initiative)	1.664	0.728	Low	10
The educational level and skills of the poor are low	2.262	0.633	Medium	5
Drug addiction is one of the causes of poverty	2.478	0.686	High	2
Preferring aid and receiving social assistance over work	2.372	0.679	High	3
Individual causes of poverty	2.136	0.363	Medium	2

**Table 4 indicates that** the level of individual causes of poverty (i.e., poverty is the individual's responsibility) is medium with a mean of (2.136). The indices of the afore-mentioned causes of poverty are ordered based on the given means as follows: First, "The large size of the poor family (i.e., they have a large number of children)" with a mean of (2.721); second, "Drug addiction is one of the causes of poverty" with a mean of (2.478); third, "Preferring aid and receiving social assistance over work" with a mean of (2.372); fourth, "They do not know how to take advantage of the opportunities

available to them" with a mean of (2.266); fifth, "The educational level and skills of the poor are low" with a mean of (2.262).

**Table (5): Destiny causes of poverty**

Destiny causes	M.	S.D.	Level	R.
Bad luck of the poor	1.814	0.769	Medium	5
Poverty is a destiny decreed by God Almighty	2.591	0.645	High	1
( Illness, old age, and disability) Poverty is their fate	2.063	0.778	Medium	3
The poor lack the talent and ability to succeed (this is their share)	1.917	0.794	Medium	4
Poverty because he was born poor ( from a poor family )	2.076	0.760	Medium	2
Destiny causes of poverty	2.092	0.467	Medium	3

**Table 5 highlights that** the level of destiny causes of poverty (i.e., poverty is Allah's will) is medium with a mean of (2.092). The indices of the aforementioned causes of poverty are ordered based on the given means as follows: First, "Poverty is God's will" with a mean of (2.591); second, "Poverty because he comes from a poor family" with a mean of (2.076).

**Table (6): Ranking the students' beliefs about the causes of poverty and its explanation**

Causes of poverty	M.	S.D.	Level	Arrange
Structural causes	2.616	0.295	High	1
Individual causes	2.136	0.363	Medium	2
Destiny causes	2.092	0.467	Medium	3

**Table 6 shows that** the level of structural and constructive causes of poverty (i.e., poverty is the responsibility of society and the external environment in which the individual lives) is the most profound reason for poverty, achieving a high level with a mean of (2.616), followed by the individual causes of poverty (i.e., poverty is the individual's responsibility), reaching a medium level with a mean of (2.136), and finally, the destiny reasons of poverty (i.e., poverty is Allah's will), attaining a medium level with a mean of (2.092).

### 3- Poverty reality (efforts to combat poverty in Egyptian society):

**Table (7): Poverty reality in society**

Item	M.	S.D.	Level	R.
Poverty is increasing in Egyptian society	2.718	0.500	High	3
Anti-poverty programs reduce Poverty in society	2.299	0.666	Medium	5
The government must provide More cash aid for the poor	2.731	0.557	High	2
The government should only help The helpless are poor	1.890	0.874	Medium	7
Employment and productive projects It is the solution to poverty	2.767	0.489	High	1
Awareness, education and training is the solution	2.704	0.492	High	4
The government is not serious about a solution The problem of poverty	2.289	0.697	Medium	6
The reality of poverty in society	2.486	0.278	High	

**Table 7 manifests that** the level of poverty reality in society is high with a mean of (2.486). The indices of the aforementioned causes of poverty are ordered based on the given means as follows: First, "Employment and productive projects is the solution to poverty" with a mean of (2.767); second, "The government must provide more cash aid for the poor" with a mean of (2.731); third, "Poverty is increasing in the Egyptian society" with a mean of (2.718); fourth, "Awareness, education and training is the solution" with a mean of (2.704); and fifth, "Anti-poverty programs reduce Poverty in society: with a mean of (2.299).

### 4- Role of social work in the field of poverty:

**Table (8): Social work role with poverty**

Item	M.	S.D.	Level	R.
The social work at the university contains sufficient materials on poverty and its theories, which helps the graduate to understand poverty and ways to deal with it.	2.668	0.532	High	4
The role of social work currently is to deal with the poor as individuals and families only	1.850	0.833	Medium	5
The role of social work must include dealing with anti-poverty policies in the community	2.757	0.501	High	3

Item	M.	S.D.	Level	R.
The role of social work must include adjusting social welfare policies to wards social investment for the poor	2.781	0.474	High	2
The role of social work must include amending institutions and legislation caring for the poor	2.817	0.428	High	1
Social work role with poverty	2.575	0.303	High	

**Table 8 displays that** the level of social work role in poverty is high with a mean of (2.575). The indices of the afore-mentioned causes of poverty are ordered based on the given means as follows: First, "The role of social work must include amending institutions and legislation caring for the poor" with a mean of (2.817); second, "The role of social work must include adjusting social welfare policies towards social investment for the poor" with a mean of (2.781); and third, "The role of social work must include dealing with anti-poverty policies in the community" with a mean of (2.757).

***Hypotheses results:***

There are statistically significant differences between social work students' responses about the causes of poverty according to the following demographic variables: gender, residence, job, and social class.

**Table (9): differences in responses based on demographic characteristics**

Variable	Gender		Place of residence		Current Job		Social Class	
	T-test	Sig.	T-test	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
Individual causes of poverty	2.120	0.146	0.109	0.741	1.419	0.228	2.453	0.063
Structural and Constructive causes of poverty	3.131	0.078	0.664	0.416	1.123	0.346	0.523	0.667
Destiny causes of poverty	1.012	0.315	0.512	0.475	0.991	0.413	0.483	0.695
The reality of poverty in society	0.285	0.594	0.247	0.620	0.926	0.449	0.606	0.612
The role of social work with poverty	3.512	0.062	0.014	0.906	1.295	0.272	2.068	0.104

**Table 9 shows that** the t value for all variables of research is not significant; it is greater than 5% for all variables. Consequently, it can be concluded that there are no differences in responses of the students' sample according to gender and residence. Moreover, the F value for all variables of research is not significant; it is greater than 5% for all variables. Therefore, it can be deduced that there are no



differences in the responses of the students' sample according to the current job or social class. Hence, these results confirm that there are no significant differences in students' responses according to all demographic variables.

Given the aforementioned results, the hypothesis can be rejected as follows: There are statistically significant differences between social work students' responses about the causes of poverty according to the following demographic variables: gender, residence, job, and social class.

### **Discussion:**

The current study revealed that 74.42% of sampled social work students view poverty as a comprehensive concept whose factors overlap, whereas 21.6% see it as financial deprivation (i.e., lack or decrease in income). This is consistent with the United Nations' current concept of multidimensional poverty (2024). However, it contradicts Kafawin's study (2017) which indicated Jordanian social work students' perceptions of the poverty concept as linked to material poverty to a large extent.

Results showed that when investigating the causes of poverty, participants emphasized structural factors. The following results constitute the students' beliefs of the poverty's causes: The structural and constructive causes of poverty are the most remarkable, marking a high level with a mean of (2.616), followed by the individual causes of poverty (i.e., blame the poor), marking a medium level with a mean of (2.136), and finally, the destiny causes of poverty (i.e., poverty is Allah's will) of a medium level with a mean of (2.092). This agrees with most studies such as Ljubotina and Ljubotina (2007), Shiraz (2011), Kafawin (2017), Calnitsky (2018), and Demirtas, Polat, Özalp Ateş, and Ka'opua (2022).

Scholars interpret these findings, reflecting the future workers' and students' internalization of the beliefs and desired values of the social work profession. However, other studies such as Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, and Tagler (2001) concluded that participants most likely blamed poor people themselves for their poverty. In addition, Blomberg, Kroll, Kallio, and Erola (2013) indicated that the most commonly perceived reasons for poverty among Nordic social workers are connected to 'social blame'. Nevertheless, Al-Othman (2005) indicated the respondents' belief of structural factors as the most important in explaining poverty, followed by the fatalistic, and finally the individualistic (Ljubotina & Ljubotina, 2007). Another research pinpointed four primary sets of factors including demographics, human capital, employment barriers, and labor market positions that could contribute to an individual's likelihood of being among the working poor (Hong & Wernet, 2007). The level of poverty reality in Egyptian society is high with a mean of (2.486).

This is consistent with the theoretical framework advanced by the United Nations (2018, p. 2) and the World Bank (2024). The level of social work's role in poverty is high with a mean of (2.575); the role of social work must include amending institutions and legislation caring for the poor, adjusting social welfare policies toward social investment for the poor, and dealing with anti-poverty policies in the community. This is consistent with the results of Clark's study (2007) that entering students expressed preferences for societal/institutional change methods to address poverty, as opposed to methods of individual adaptation. Implications for social work education and practice are identified.

In addition, the results of this study align with the Code of Ethics of NASW which directs social workers to engage in social justice work, specifically related to poverty. Stoeffler (2019) pointed out that there is evidence from the literature that neither the profession nor its educational programs have fulfilled their expressed commitments to addressing poverty. Besides, Husz, Kopasz, and Medgyesi (2022) stated that social workers may play an important role in the implementation of welfare policies, targeting the poor. Boone, Roets, and Roose (2019) explained how practitioners' attempts to empower people in poverty and enhance structural change led to tensions between affirmative and transformative strategies for fighting poverty.

The study highlighted that there were no significant differences in social work students' responses concerning all demographic variables such as gender, residence, job, and social class. This differs from the results of previous studies such as Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, Tagler (2001) and Kafawin (2017).

### **Conclusions:**

Students see structural/societal factors, such as the economic system (represented in job opportunities, unemployment, and low income), social system (indicated in lack of justice and maldistribution), administrative political system (including corruption, nepotism, mismanagement) and educational system (as shown in low education and increased dropout) as the main causes of poverty in Egypt. Individual factors connected with an individual's personal characteristics were considered less important, while luck and fate were considered the least important. This study presents a contribution to the research on perceived causes of poverty in Egypt. Despite the efforts and initiatives undertaken by the state to achieve Egypt's Vision 2030, such as a decent life. In developing countries, governments focus on methods of dealing with poverty and the poor by social protection and social security, but it often does not deal with the problem's roots. Therefore, to provide effective solutions to poverty, it is necessary to work in a comprehensive approach that

includes drawing strategies, enacting legislation, and developing plans that seek to bring about change in the economic, social, and cultural environment. Social work as the structural factor is attributed the utmost importance in explaining the causes of poverty by students, confirming that social work can intervene in anti-poverty policies. Social work plays a crucial role in achieving social justice, advocacy for the marginalized, and empowerment, to make change through legislation and social action, at the level of community organization and community work in social work. Poverty is one of the main interests in the field of social work; this is the reason for this study to examine perceived causes of poverty by future social workers who will work with the poor, expected to show greater understanding for the poor. In conclusion, it is difficult to claim that there is a solution that would limit the high rates of poverty that Egyptian society experiences and control the harsh conditions that the poor encounter in this society. Therefore, it is essential to focus on the model of change in social work that aims to alter some features of existing social systems, believed to cause and persist poverty.

**The main limitation of this study:**

is its limited possibility to generalize findings. Our conclusions relate only to social work students at Beni Suef University. Further research is, thus, necessary to explore perceived causes of poverty in a wider range of participants including other students, young people, older people, and the poor. Poverty research could serve as a good guideline for the creators of social policies focused on preventing or helping eradicate poverty.

**Recommendations of study include the following:**

- (1) The need to develop community social work curricula on poverty, analyze and measure them, and enforce more policies on dealing with poverty, (2) Developing field training for students related to poverty courses, and (3) Conducting further studies on poverty, emphasizing ways to combat it, and the role of social work in the field of poverty. There is a need to improve the efforts of community social workers at the policy level, developing welfare policies and amending legislation and advocacy.

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