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Strengthening Social Work's Human Rights Mandate:

A Qualitative Research on Feminist Activism, Gender-Based Violence and the Role of Social Work in Croatia

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Abstract:

This thesis investigates how cooperation between social work and feminist activism can support the realisation of social work's human rights mandate. Drawing on literature that highlights a persistent gap between human rights theory and practice in social work, this study explores the potential of collaboration to advance women's rights and promote social justice, using gender-based violence as a concrete intersection of activism, human rights and social work practice. The research is guided by the overarching aim of understanding what meaningful cooperation between social work and feminist movements can look like, how it can advance women's rights, and how it can contribute to bridging the theory-practice gap in social work. Methodologically, the thesis combines a systematic literature review with qualitative research conducted in Croatia. The systematic review maps global academic discourse on the relationship between social work and feminist movements, identifying recurring critiques and tensions. Building on this foundation, the qualitative research explores local dynamics through key informant interviews with feminist activists and social workers. It provides in-depth insights into experiences of cooperation, perceived barriers, and the necessary conditions for effective cooperation. The findings suggest that trust-building, open dialogue, and mutual respect are essential to build impactful alliances to addressing gender-based violence through collective efforts and advance women's rights. Finally, the results also indicate that cooperation between feminist movements and social work holds strong potential to support social work in fulfilling its human rights mandate.

Key words: human rights in social work; feminist activism; gender-based violence; women's rights; social work practice; activist social work; cross-sector cooperation; Croatia; qualitative research; systematic literature review; advocacy

1. Introduction

1.1 Social Work as a Human Rights Profession

The social work profession is guided by human rights principles. According to the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) (2014, para. 1), "principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work." This global definition was officially approved by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) General Assembly and the IFSW General Meeting in July 2014. In the *Commentary Notes for the Global Definition of Social Work*, the IFSW (2014, Principles Section, para. 2) further asserts that "advocating and upholding human rights and social justice is the motivation and justification for [the profession]."

There are other frameworks in social work that also explicitly emphasize human rights as a fundamental principle of the profession. Human rights, along with the *Global Definition of Social Work*, have been incorporated into numerous key guidelines and documents related to social work practice and education. These include, for example, the *Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles* (IFSW, 2018), the *Mission Statement* of the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW) (EASSW, n.d.), the *Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development Commitment to Action* (IFSW, 2012), as well as foundational documents of European national social work associations, such as e.g. the Croatian Association of Social workers (Hrvatska Udruga Socijalnih Radnika [HUSR], 2014).

In 1994, the United Nations published a comprehensive document, entitled *'Human Rights and Social Work'*, which clearly proves the interconnection between those two domains (United Nations Centre for Human Rights, 1994).

Furthermore, beyond international frameworks, human rights have also long been a significant area of study and research within the academic discipline of social work. Scholars such as Staub-Bernasconi (2016) and Gatenio Gabel (2024) highlight early approaches to social justice and human rights within social work practice demonstrating that, although formal guidelines on human rights in social work are relatively recent, the idea of advocating, protecting and promoting the fundamental rights of service users has long been embedded in the profession. Early pioneers such as Jane Addams and Mary Richmond not only advocated for a vision of social work closely aligned with the principles of human rights but also laid important

foundations for the contemporary understanding of human rights within the profession (Gatenio Gabel, 2024; Staub-Bernasconi, 2016).

Following the institutionalization of human rights in social work during the 1990s, research and theoretical frameworks conceptualizing social work as a human rights profession have gradually increased, and the (inter-)relationship between the two fields is now widely recognized (Androff, 2018; Carvalho et al., 2025; Reynaert et al., 2021; Staub-Bernasconi, 2016). According to Androff (2018), human rights are not only a motivation and justification for social work practice but human rights *"must be implemented, integrated, and applied across all practice domains, modes of intervention, and modalities"* (p.181).

This thesis investigates the effective application of human rights in social work practice.-Based on the reviewed literature, a clear gap between theory and practice can be identified; social work is failing to uphold its human rights mandate (McPherson & Abell 2020; Carvalho et al., 2025). To overcome this gap the profession has to make political action and activism central to its daily practice, not only in principle but in everyday interventions and methods (Androff, 2018; Gatenio Gabel, 2024). In alignment with scholars, such as Noble (2015) and Thompson (2002), this thesis argues that cooperation between social work and social movements presents one possible pathway for social workers to realize their human rights mandate. To explore how such cooperation can strengthen efforts to promote social justice and human rights and contribute to the realization of the human rights mandate of the social work profession, the focus of this thesis is narrowed down to the context of feminist social movements, and moreover to the issue of gender based violence (GBV), a recurrent and critical issue across all three domains - human rights, civil society activism, and social work. GBV therefore serves as a concrete example of the intersection between women's rights, feminist activism, and social work practice. Followingly, the research of this thesis explores the dynamics between social work and feminist movements in addressing GBV and advancing women's rights. The research design combines a systematic literature review with qualitative research in Croatia.

This thesis is structured as follows: the introduction provides the theoretical foundation for the following research. It first examines necessary conceptual shifts of social work practice towards a rights-based approach, social work mandates, and the urge to re-policize the profession. Subsequently the introduction outlines the intersection of women's rights, social work and feminist activism on the example of GBV. The research is presented in three

chapters: chapter 2 sets out the research aims and methodology, chapter 3 presents the systematic literature review, and the final chapter 4 provides the qualitative research in Croatia.

1.1.1 Conceptual Shifts in Social Work Practice Towards a Rights-Based Approach

To realize a practical implementation of human rights into social work practice scholars agree on the necessity to apply a so called '(human-)rights-based approach' (Androff, 2018; Gatenio Gabel, 2024; Ife et al., 2022; McPherson & Abell, 2020; Reynaert et al., 2021; Staub-Bernasconi, 2016). Two core conceptual shifts can be identified in the transition from a needs-based approach to a rights-based approach to social work practice: The first shift concerns the perception of service users: within a rights-based framework, they are no longer seen merely as passive recipients of care, but as active and equal participants in shaping the interventions that affect their lives (and potentially the lives of others). The second conceptual shift relates to the understanding of individual suffering and 'social problems'[1]. Rather than framing these issues as isolated struggles rooted in personal circumstances and distracted from a broader socio-political context, a rights-based approach emphasizes the role of structural inequalities and systematic discrimination that service users often face and that shape their experiences (Androff, 2018; Carvalho et al., 2025; Gatenio Gabel, 2024; Ife et al., 2022; McPherson & Abell, 2020; Reynaert et al., 2021; Staub-Bernasconi, 2016)

This understanding of structural inequalities is rooted in critical social work theory. Foucault's ideas about the concept of power and his analysis of social control (Keeling & Van Wormer, 2012), along with Marxist and feminist theories (Pease et al., 2020), significantly influenced the development of critical social work. Critical social work is the foundation of a rights-based approach and links systems of power and oppression to 'social problems'. This critical approach to social work connects personal struggles to broader structures, aiming to promote social justice and systemic change (Pease et al., 2020). Radical social work takes these ideas further by urging practitioners to pursue progressive, collective action for socio-political,

[1] I avoid using the common term "social problem" for the issues that social workers address because the term "social problem" can unintentionally imply that individuals alone are responsible for the challenges they face. In reality, as discussed in this thesis, many of the societal challenges that individuals face - such as poverty, homelessness, gender-based violence, racism, mental health issues, etc. - are not the result of personal failure, but are rooted in structural and systemic inequalities. Therefore, I will use the term in brackets or instead I use terms like "systemic inequality" or "structural injustice" to highlight how these problems are firstly almost never individual, but collective struggles and secondly produced and maintained by social, economic, and political systems. This shift in language emphasizes the need for collective responsibility and structural change rather than focusing blame on individuals.

cultural and environmental justice, while critically examining and challenging existing systems of power (Noble, 2015).

By recognizing service users as active participants in shaping the support they receive, and by understanding ‘social problems’ within the broader context of structural injustice and discrimination, social workers can support individuals in moving away from self-blame. Viewing service users as rights-holders whose struggles often arise from systemic rights violations fosters empowerment, raises awareness of structural inequality, and helps shift the narrative from shame to agency (Ife et al., 2022; Reynaert et al., 2021). The rights-based approach to social work practice is a core foundation of this thesis and thus will be a baseline thought for the argumentations on social work in this thesis. Overall, the rights-based approach calls for a shift from addressing individual needs in isolation to a more holistic understanding of social justice, in which human dignity, human rights, agency, and participation of service users are central to practice.

Critical social work and a rights-based approach to social work practice require a critical examination of the profession’s mandates, which are diverse and sometimes contradictory. The conceptual shift towards a rights-based practice does not take away the importance of individual help and care, but additionally adds another mandate to the social work profession, which Staub-Bernasconi (2016) refers to as the "3rd mandate".

According to longstanding practice, social work has been understood as operating under a double mandate of help and control; the first mandate refers to the service users and can be seen as the mandate of ‘help’, while the second mandate involves fulfilling the expectations of the state, affiliated agencies or society, representing the mandate of ‘control’ (Staub-Bernasconi, 2016). While the mandates of help and control reflect the statutory role of social work, the third mandate aligns with the activist role of the profession, which reflects its political and transformative goals, enabling social workers to advocate for structural change grounded in human rights principles (Blok and Hartman, 2016). These dual and often controversial roles are predisposed to create tensions or conflicts in practice, particularly when national policies constrain the ability of social workers to offer profound, rights-based support to service users (Gatenio Gabel, 2024). As explored by Blok and Hartman (2016), social workers, within their statutory role, are tasked with implementing laws and policies that may contradict the professions ethical commitment to human rights and social justice, and therefore its activist role. Balancing statutory duties with the professions activist role is challenging and requires a professional autonomy (Blok and Hartman, 2016), which according to

Staub-Bernasconi (2016) lies within the third mandate of social work and derives from the profession itself. It empowers social workers to make their own judgements based on science and the ethical codes of the profession even if those judgements may not align with regulations or expectations of state agencies. Additionally, the third mandate also legitimizes to refuse mandates, expectations, and regulations from state agencies if they are violating fundamental rights (Staub-Bernasconi, 2016). Gatenio Gabel (2024) is taking the idea of the third mandate even further by focusing on social workers' responsibility to empower individuals and communities to claim their rights and "call governments out when they fall short of fulfilling their obligation to uphold human rights and justice" (p. 159). Also, Reynaert at al. (2021) point out that social workers must collectivize individual experiences of human rights violations to bring them to a public debate. And Androff (2018) adds that this collectivization of individual experience is useful to provide evidence for structural problems.

Consequently, addressing, and challenging structural injustice at the societal and political level is not only central to a rights-based approach but also aligns with the foundational mandate of social work as a human rights profession, one that protects, promotes, and advocates for the effective realization of human rights and social justice. However, when it comes to the practical application and implementation of human rights in everyday social work practice – particularly assessments, applied methods and interventions – a lack of clear guidance and action frameworks is evident, highlighting the need to politicize the social work profession.

1.1.2 The Need of a (Re-)politicization of the Social Work Profession

Various scholars have identified a persistent gap between the theoretical commitment to human rights and the activist mandate of social work, and the practical implementation in everyday professional practice (Androff, 2018; Gatenio Gabel, 2024; McPherson & Abell, 2020, Reynaert et al., 2021).

Androff (2018) and Reynaert et al. (2021) have attempted to address this gap by proposing action frameworks for a human-rights-based approach to social work practice. Although developed independently, their models are grounded in notably similar concepts and demonstrate significant overlaps. Androff (2018) identified a framework for applying rights-based principles in social work; those principles are human dignity, non-discrimination, participation, transparency, and accountability. Each principle is explained through the lens of social work and supposed to be realized through social work interventions and methods, such

as, e.g. empowerment and capacity building. Reynaert et al. (2021) instead developed a model called ‘five building blocks’, with the same aim of applying human rights effectively into social work practice. The five building blocks contain systemworld-oriented action, lifeworld-oriented action, participatory action, joined up action and politicized action. In her book ‘A Human Rights-Based Approach to Justice in Social Work Practice’ Gatenio Gabel (2024) provides illustrative examples of how to integrate the principles of a human-rights-based approach to justice into daily social work practice, as do the frameworks proposed by Androff and Reynaert et al.

In addition to the mentioned approaches for action frameworks Jane McPherson (in collaboration with other scholars, especially Neil Abell) developed a model to measure human rights in social work. Over a few years four index scales have been validated: Human Rights Exposing Social Work (HRXSW), Human Rights Engagement in Social Work (HRESW), Human Right Lens in Social Work (HRLSW), and Human Rights Methods in Social Work (HRMSW), each index scale is again divided into various items of measurement (McPherson & Abell, 2020; Carvalho et al., 2025). McPherson and Abell’s four index scales for measuring of human rights methods in social work have been adapted and applied in several studies in different countries, such as USA, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (McPherson & Abell, 2020) and Portugal (Carvalho et al., 2025).

All so far mentioned scholars consistently prove that political action and activism is not additional but central to social work practice and its mandate as a human rights profession. Social workers are called upon to identify structural power imbalances, systematic injustices, and discrimination, and to challenge these also in their daily practice and intervention methods, particularly when fundamental human rights are under threat. This implies also questioning and challenging regulations and policies of the system they are operating in.

However, evidence from studies measuring human rights in social work, conducted in various countries following McPherson and Abell’s model, indicates a persistent gap between the professional mandate and actual practice. Interventions involving political action and activism consistently score significantly lower than conventional methods focused on individualized help and support. Even though social workers are exposed to and engaged with human rights in theory and even mostly identify human rights violations and structural issues, in practice, when it comes to methods and interventions, social workers often hesitate to assume an activist and political role in their profession (McPherson & Abell 2020; Carvalho et al., 2025). This

disparity suggests that, in practice, social work interventions remain more aligned with the needs-based approach, focusing on individual support and help, rather than fully embracing a rights-based approach, necessary to fulfil their obligations as human rights defenders.

In light of a global resurgence of far-right politics and the escalating backlash against the rights of marginalized communities, social work must urgently reclaim and strengthen its political and activist dimensions. The profession plays a critical role in safeguarding human rights and promoting social justice. This raises essential questions: How can social workers fully realize their political, activist, and human rights mandate and embody their role as human rights defenders and activists within everyday practice? How can social workers become more actively engaged with human rights in practice, while still maintaining the practice of individual help and support?And how can their statutory and their activist role be balanced? The answer lies in a renewed commitment to political action and activism (Androff, 2018; Gatenio Gabel, 2024). Noble (2015) contributes to the growing call for re-politicization of social work by emphasizing the need for a renewed engagement with contemporary social protest movements that pursue shared objectives. Thompson (2002) demonstrates how social movements have historically influenced social work practice by shifting its focus more explicitly towards the struggle for social justice.

The fight for social justice and human rights is not confined to professional domains; it is strongly advanced by civil society actors, such as social protest movements and grassroots activist initiatives. The intersection between social work and social movements emerges from clear convergence of purpose: both are fundamentally committed to the promotion, protection and advancement of human rights and social justice. Recognizing and strengthening these connections is critical for addressing systematic power imbalances and inequalities and enhancing collective efforts towards societal transformation (Della Porta & Diani, 1999; Noble, 2015; Thompson, 2002).

Building on this perspective, this thesis aligns with the argumentation of Thompson (2002), Noble (2015), and Della Porta & Diani (1999) asserting that closer engagement and collaboration with civil society activists and social (protest) movements represents a possible pathway and a necessary step for social work to strengthen its political and activist dimensions, thereby fulfilling its mandate as a human rights profession. By building alliances between social work and social movements in the advocacy for human rights, both fields could significantly enhance their collective impact, creating stronger, more unified efforts towards

challenging systemic injustices and promoting human rights and social justice. Through mutual support between civil society activists and social workers, ‘social problems’ can be addressed on a political and structural level (in national and international political contexts) and thereby the social work profession can move beyond traditional, institution-centred and needs-based models of practice.

In this context, this thesis critically examines how social work could adapt a bottom-up, rights-based approach to social justice by positioning itself as a bridging profession between civil society activism, as represented e.g. by (grassroots) social protest movements or NGOs, and the international framework of human rights. To explore how such cooperation can serve as a pathway for addressing systematic inequalities holistically and with greater impact, the focus is narrowed down through the concrete example of gender-based violence (GBV), a recurrent and critical issue across all three domains and therefore making an effective example of their intersection.

1.2. Gender-Based Violence: An Interface of Social Work, Feminist Activism and Human Rights

1.2.1 Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) offers a compelling example of the interconnection between human rights, activism, and social work because all three fields intensively engage with this issue: Numerous human rights conventions and protecting mechanisms explicitly address GBV as a grave human rights violation (UN Women, 2024a); various feminist civil society actors worldwide consistently prioritize the fight against violence against women and girls (VAWG) (Cossyleon & Woolley, 2020); and social workers frequently encounter survivors[2] of GBV in their practice (Keeling & Van Wormer, 2012; UN Women, 2015). Women and girls across all political, social, and economic contexts are affected of different forms of GBV (UN Women, 2024a), highlighting the urgent need for social work to move beyond a merely reactive role and to instead address the issue proactively on a structural level and through rights-based interventions. This chapter explores GBV as a point of convergence between human rights frameworks, feminist activism and social work practice. To do so, it first defines GBV, outlines its various forms, and highlights its global impact on women and girls. It then examines how human rights framework, feminist activism, and finally social work practice each engage with

[2] Note on terminology: In this thesis, the term “survivor” is used rather than "victim" to emphasize agency and resilience.

GBV, and influence one another. The central argument is that meaningful and sustainable responses to GBV can be achieved through coordinated efforts across these fields, particularly through mutual support of feminist activists and social workers in advancing women's rights and gender equality.

1.2.2 Definition and Forms of GBV

In order to examine GBV as an example of the interrelations of human rights, social work and feminist activism, the following section will give a short overview about definitions and statistics on this form of violence.

The UNHCR defines gender-based violence as "an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females" (UNHCR, n.d.). According to UNHCR and UN Women, GBV affects women and girls, as well as LGBTQIA+ individuals, with violence against women and girls (VAWG) being the most prevalent form (UNHCR, n.d.; UN Women, 2024a).[3]

The General Recommendations (GR) No. 19 (1992) and No. 35 (2017) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), briefly CEDAW Convention, expand the UNHCR definition by offering additional definitional aspects.

GR No. 19 of the CEDAW Convention (1992) adds that GBV as a form of discrimination hinders gender equality (para. 1), which is targeting women because of their gender (para. 6), and can therefore violate the Convention even if not explicitly labeled as GBV. Furthermore the GR points out that GBV can be perpetrated "by any person, organization or enterprise" (para. 9). According to the GR 19, GBV includes "physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty" (para. 6).

Drawing upon GR No. 19, the GR No. 35 of the CEDAW Convention (2017) provides a broader understanding of gender, by defining gender-based violence as an umbrella term, that includes as well violence against lesbian, trans, and non-binary persons. Furthermore it recognizes the intersectionality of GBV with other forms of discrimination (para. 12), as well

[3] GBV and VAWG are often used as equivalents, because violence against women and girls is the most common form of GBV. In this thesis, the term GBV is preferred, because it also includes gender non-conforming persons, as well as different sexual orientations.

as the fact that GBV affects FLINTA (Female Lesbian Intersex Non-Binary Trans Agender)[4] persons throughout their lifecycle, including girls (para. 14). Additionally, the GR No. 35 also identifies broader contributing factors, such as cultural, political, ideological, and economical factors (para. 14), and stresses that GBV can occur in both public and private spaces (para. 20). Another essential aspect is the acknowledgement of sexual and reproductive rights, recognizing that practices such as the criminalization of abortion and forced sterilization constitute forms of gender based violence (para.18). Moreover, GBV is recognized as a consequence of gender bias (para. 19) and affirms that freedom from GBV is integral to human rights and therefore state parties are obliged to respect, protect, and fulfil those rights (para. 15).

According to UN Women (2024a), GBV includes different forms of violence: intimate-partner violence (IPV), domestic violence (DV), sexual violence (sexual harassment, rape, sexual exploitation), femicide, human trafficking, harmful practices (female genital mutilation, forced marriages, dietary restrictions, corporal punishment, and others), and relatively new online violence (UN Women, 2024a). This thesis does not focus on one specific form of GBV, but IPV and DV are the most prevalent forms and will be referred to the most, particularly in the empirical research in Croatia.

1.2.3 Statistics on GBV against FLINTA Individuals

According to UN Women (2024b) the availability of data on GBV has improved in recent years, and the numbers show drastic evidence of GBV being a major issue in the field of human rights all over the world, through all cultures, societies, ages, and classes. Globally, almost one in three women have been subjected to at least one form of gender-based violence at least once in their lifetime, and most cases refer to IPV (UN Women, 2024b).

Furthermore - according to Statista (2025a) - in 2023, there have been around 84,900 reported cases of femicide, the worst escalation of GBV. And 51,500 women were killed by their husband, partner, or family member worldwide. A global graphic on women subjected to physical and/or sexual violence in the last 12 months in 2024, by age group and level of income shows that physical and sexual violence against women affects all income groups, but low income groups of women are at higher risk of GBV. At the same time, in 2022, worldwide,

[4] In the context of gender-incusivity, this thesis will additionally implement and use the german term FLINTA (Female, Lesbian, Intersex, Non-binary, Agender) for all persons who are not identifying as male, as an inclusive term that goes beyond the rigid cis-binary concept of women and girls.

34,9% of men consider violence against their wives (hitting or beating) to be justified for some reasons, such as e.g. if the wife burns the food, argues with the husband, goes out without telling him, neglect children, or refuse sexual relations (Statista, 2025a).

Statista (2025b) provides data on the rate of reported sexual violence in Europe in 2022, by country and per 100,000 inhabitants. Croatia ranks relatively low, in 20th place, with 18.59 reported cases per 100,000 inhabitants, compared to Sweden in first place, with 200.34 reported cases. But these figures can be misleading, as the number of reported cases also depends on the reporting systems of sexual violence each country has established. Consequently, the dark figures may be significantly higher than the reported cases.

The Gender Equality Index (EIGE, n-d–b) offers data on violence in each EU country and compares national figures to the EU average. The most recent data come from a 2021 survey with women aged 18-74 and is presented through various indicators. A higher score indicates more severe violence against women in a given country. One indicator shows that 25% of women in Croatia have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by any perpetrator since the age of 15, compared to the European average of 31%. Another indicator measures such experiences within the past 12 months: Croatia reaches 5% of women reported violence in the last 12 months, while the EU average lies at 3%.

The survey also highlights the severity of GBV by measuring the percentage of women who have experienced health consequences of physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15. In Croatia, this figure is 48%, which is still lower than the EU average of 57%, yet alarmingly high. These high figures align with a statement from the World Health Organisation (2025), which notes that GBV is a major public health issue with serious consequences on FLINTA's health - physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health.

Furthermore, according to UN Women (n.d.) "less than 40 per cent of the women who experience violence seek help [and] less than 10 per cent of those seeking help appealed to the police." This indicates a high number of unreported cases and points to barriers in reporting procedures. These findings are consistent with the EU survey's indicator on the percentage of women who experienced physical and/or sexual violence in the past 12 months and have not told anyone. In Croatia, 36% of survivors of GBV did not disclose the violence to anyone, compared to the EU average of 31% for this indicator.

It can be concluded that Croatia mostly reflects the EU average on indicators of violence, ranking slightly higher in some areas and slightly lower in others.

When discussing causes of GBV, there is broad consensus that patriarchal power structures, deeply embedded in our societies, are both a cause and a consequence of such violence. Structural power inequalities across all levels of society fuel manifestations of male control and domination, often taking the form of GBV. In some contexts these inequalities are even used to justify acts of violence. Moreover, internalisation of patriarchal norms can lead FLINTA individuals themselves to perceive their social position as subordinate to that of cisgender men, further reinforcing cycles of inequality, harm, and often shame and self-blame (Council of Europe, n.d.-b; Rodríguez-García-de-Cortázar et al., 2025; United Nations, 2015b).

These data and reports from authoritative global institutions underscore the severity of gender-based violence, affirming that it remains one of the most widespread and persistent violations of human rights worldwide. In response to GBV and its high numbers of severe human rights violations, the international organisations have established a range of legal frameworks, and mechanisms, that continue to be developed and updated to effectively address and prevent these violations. The following section will give an overview of the most relevant human rights framework on GBV.

1.2.4 GBV and Human Rights: Legal Frameworks and Monitoring Mechanisms

Today, international law on human rights provides a broad legal framework on GBV, such as various monitoring mechanisms.

International Treaties

The first and most comprehensive international treaty that solely focused on the rights of women as human rights was the (before mentioned) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Convention), which was adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly.

Even though various international human rights conventions addressed gender-based violence indirectly[5] - by protecting against other forms of violence and discrimination - GBV itself was

[5]
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (United Nations, 1948): right to life, security, and freedom from torture and degrading treatment;
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966): protection against torture, violence and inhumane treatment;

not explicitly recognized as a distinct form of violence. It was only in 1992, through General Recommendation No. 19 (along with its general comments and comments on specific articles) of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, that GBV was directly incorporated into human rights legal framework and formally acknowledged as a specific form of violence and gender-based discrimination (CEDAW Committee, 1992). Although the CEDAW Convention had already been adopted in 1979, it did not explicitly mention GBV at that time.

The CEDAW Committee is the monitoring body of the CEDAW Convention. Among other tasks, the Committee formulates the before mentioned general recommendations. It consists of 23 independent experts on women's rights from around the world and through regular reports of state parties and recommendations to the state parties it advances the implementation of the Convention. With the Optional Protocol to the Convention, the Committee can also receive claims of violations of their rights protected under the Convention from individuals or groups of individuals (OHCHR, n.d.-a).

In 1993, the UN adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW), which, for the first time, explicitly defined GBV in a major international document - aligning closely to the definitions outlined earlier in this chapter (United Nations General Assembly, 1993).

The DEVAW was followed by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, in which a comprehensive global framework on ending VAW was elaborated (United Nations, 1995).

With the adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in 1998, sexual and gender-based violence were recognized as crimes against humanity and war crimes (International Criminal Court, 1998).

And finally, the General Recommendation No. 35 of CEDAW (2017) provides a more comprehensive guidance to accelerate the elimination of GBV, highlighting as well the

- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966): right to health, education, and protection from harmful practices;
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979): interpretations included GBV, but it was not specifically mentioned in the treaty;
- General Recommendation No. 25 (2000) of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) can also be indirectly connected to GBV, as it addresses intersectional discrimination of minority and indigenous women and the need to protect these groups from violence.

intersectional nature of violence and its effects. Additionally, it also includes gender-non-conforming persons (FLINTA), as described before in the definition of GBV (CEDAW Committee, 2017).

Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are part of the 2023 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adapted by all UN member states in 2015 and address various topics that have to be addressed in order to achieve the Agenda's goals (United Nations, n.d.-c).

With the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, gender-based violence - one of the most widespread, persistent, and devastating human rights violations - has been recognized as a major barrier to equality and sustainable development. While not legally binding, the SDGs guide national policies and affirm that sustainable development can not be achieved without ending violence against women and achieving gender equality (United Nations, n.d.-c; United Nations, n.d.-a).

Despite the ambitions of the SDGs, violence against FLINTA persons remains one of the most pressing manifestations of gender inequality. Current progress shows that the world is not at all on track to achieve gender equality by 2030 (United Nations, n.d.-b).

Regional treaties

GBV has been implemented in different regional treaties in Africa, the Americas and Europe, while in the Middle East and Asia there is no human rights treaty focusing specifically on the issue. It is important to mention that the first regional treaty that focused solely on GBV was the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, better known as Convention of Belém do Pará, established in 1994 (Organisation of American States, 1994).

The European equivalent – the Istanbul Convention – has not been ratified until 2011 and is lately experiencing a huge backlash and even a withdrawal from Turkey in 2021 (Amnesty International„ 2021).

As this thesis will later conduct research in Croatia, it is necessary to shortly mention the European regional human rights treaties on GBV.

The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, better known as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), adopted in 1950, and the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, better known as the Istanbul Convention (after the city in which it opened for signature), adopted in 2011, are the main legal frameworks on women's rights and GBV for member states of the Council of Europe (CoE) (CoE, 1950; CoE, 2011).

European regional legal frameworks on GBV: ECHR & the Istanbul Convention

While the ECHR (CoE, 1950) does not explicitly mention GBV as a specific violation of human rights, there has been significant case law, in which the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has interpreted certain articles of the ECHR and applied to cases of GBV. There are several significant cases of GBV that have shaped case law of the ECtHR.

Regarding cases of domestic violence the *Factsheet – Domestic Violence* (ECtHR, 2023) provides a number of cases in which the ECtHR has found breaches of several articles of the ECHR:

Article 2 (Right to life)
Article 3 (Prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment),
Article 6 (Right to a fair trial),
Article 8 (Right to respect for private and family life),
Article 14 (Prohibition of discrimination),
and Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 to the Convention (Protection of property).

One of the most important cases of domestic violence is *Opuz v. Turkey* (2009). The ECtHR ruled that Turkey had violated Articles 2, 3 and 14 of the ECHR by failing to protect a woman from domestic violence. This case has become a significant precedent for other cases of domestic violence. In addition to cases of domestic violence the ECtHR has also ruled over cases of violence against women and found violations of several articles of the ECHR, but especially of articles 3 and 8 (ECtHR, 2024).

The Istanbul Convention, a major European human rights treaty and directly addressing VAWG, was adopted in 2011 by the Committee of Ministers of the CoE, and entered into force in 2014. Today, 39 parties out of 46 CoE member states have ratified the Convention, which is legally binding to the state parties (CoE, n.d.-a).
With the Istanbul Convention violence against women is recognized as a human rights violation and a form of discrimination against women, and the Convention responds to multiple forms of gender-based violence, and criminalizes those acts of violence. The Istanbul

Convention uses the term “gender” to highlight that VAWG derives from harmful societal stereotypes, preconceptions and inequalities, and not from biological differences (CoE, 2011).
It is important to point out that the Istanbul Convention does not mention violence against gender non-conforming persons, who do not fit into the binary system of male and female, it refers only to “women” and “girls”, not to persons identifying as female or non-binary. The Istanbul Convention (CoE, 2011) builds upon the principle of non-discrimination of the ECHR (CoE, 1950, Article 14 and Protocol No. 12) and its related case law, and gender non-conforming persons are mentioned solely under the broader principle of non-discrimination (CoE, 2011; CoE, n.d.-a). This is important to highlight as in some states that have ratified the Convention, there has been a backlash driven by misinformation suggesting that the Istanbul Convention protects LGBTQIA+ Rights. While the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ rights in European human rights treaties is undoubtedly necessary, the Istanbul Convention does not address this issue (Amnesty International, 2021).
Nevertheless, it does cover DV, and calls upon states to ensure safety and support to all victims of domestic violence, regardless their martial or non-martial status. Prevention, Protection, Prosecution and (coordinated) Policies against VAWG are the main objectives enshrined in the Convention (CoE, 2011; CoE, n.d.-a). Once a country ratifies the Istanbul Convention, it must implement measures to prevent and combat VAWG. Those implementations are monitored through different mechanisms and two different monitoring bodies.
The Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) is an independent group of experts that evaluates national efforts through reports, on-site visits, and inquiries; it provides guidance and general recommendations. The Committee of the Parties, made up of government representatives, builds on GREVIO’s evaluations to issue implementation recommendations and monitors countries’ follow-up over a three-year period. Both bodies work together and complement each other to ensure effective enforcement and continuous improvement of the Istanbul Convention’s objectives (CoE, n.d.-a).

GREVIO is also part of the Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence against Women (EDVAW Platform), which strengthens institutional cooperation by joint actions and bringing together international and regional mechanisms to combat discrimination and violence against women and girls (OHCHR, n.d.-b).

As previously established, one of the fundamental drivers of GBV - an expression of male dominance over FLINTA individuals - is the persistence of patriarchal norms and structures

across societies worldwide. In response to this systematic oppression, feminism has emerged as a primary force of collective resistance, challenging power imbalances and advocating for the rights and agency of marginalized genders (Marx Ferree & McClurg Mueller, 2007). This chapter emphasizes the dynamic intersection between feminist activism, women's rights as human rights, and the social work profession – highlighting how these three domains interact and potentially reinforce one another in their common and ongoing struggle against gender-based oppression. Feminist activism has played a crucial role in shaping public discourse, influencing legal reforms, and pushing for the recognition of GBV as a violation of human rights (Weldon, 2012). Within this context, the following paragraphs explore feminist activism as a transformative force in advancing legal and societal change, with particular focus on its role in advancing gender equality and combating GBV.

1.2.5 GBV and Feminist Activism

Given the complexity of feminist theory, this thesis adopts a foundational understanding of feminism as a resistance to patriarchal oppression (Weldon, 2012), while incorporating the thoughts of critical feminism, which includes perspectives of intersectional, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, queer, and anti-racist feminist approach and thought (Draper & Chapple, 2023). Draper & Chapple, (2023) highlight that critical feminism understands patriarchy as deeply interconnected with other axes of oppression.

According to Marx Ferree & McClurg Mueller (2007), since the early 1800s, women have mobilized to challenge systematic inequalities of class, status and power. Through collective action, they have resisted patriarchal domination and driven significant social change globally. Women's movements rank among the most enduring and impactful social movements of the modern era (Marx Ferree & McClurg Mueller, 2007). Alongside liberalism, socialism, democratization, and nationalism, they have played a key role in shaping modernity. Their legacy built the foundations and continues to strengthen the ongoing potential for women's collective mobilization[6] (Marx Ferree & McClurg Mueller, 2007).

While not all women's movements are explicitly feminist, their goals often overlap (Weldon, 2012) and a diverse range of civil society actors - including informal, grassroots collectives,

[6] This thesis focuses on political systems, such as democracies, where political conditions generally allow social movements to operate without state suppression and where social workers typically retain the right to engage in activism and protest – an essential prerequisite for meaningful collaboration between social work and civil society activism.

and more formalized organisations such as NGOs and civil society organisations – confront gender-based oppression from various perspectives (Cossyleon & Woolley, 2020). Although their approaches, internal structures and types of collective activities may differ, these actors ultimately share the goal of improving the societal and/or political conditions of FLINTA individuals. Many formal organisations have evolved from informal, grassroots activism and social movements, reflecting a continuum of collective action. What distinguished them is not necessarily their intent or commitment, but rather structural characteristics such as degrees of formalisation, institutionalisation and professionalisation. However, they all represent civil society (Cossyleon & Woolley, 2020).

Furthermore, all these feminist civil society groups are independent of political parties and use collective action to address FLINTA issues in various ways (Cossyleon & Woolley, 2020). Collective action and independence from political parties are two of the main features defining 'social movements', such as the women's movement (Della Porta & Diani, 1999; Noble, 2015; Thompson, 2002; Weldon, 2012).

Accordingly, this thesis uses the term 'feminist activism' and 'feminist movements' to describe this broad field of civil society actors united by the goal of dismantling patriarchal structures and promoting gender equality, recognizing their important contribution to social justice. Even when not explicitly targeting GBV, their actions contribute to addressing one of its root causes: unequal power relations between FLINTA persons and cisgender men. As established earlier, patriarchy and GBV are deeply intertwined; thus, efforts to challenge patriarchal norms inherently undermine the structures that sustain GBV. This connection is as well explicitly pointed out in international legal instruments: the Istanbul convention explicitly links gender equality to the prevention of GBV, and the Gender Equality Strategy highlights a reciprocal relationship between the promotion of gender equality and combating GBV as mutually reinforcing goals (CoE, 2011; CoE, 2024).

As noted by Cossyleon & Woolley (2020), feminist activism addresses GBV through a variety of approaches, such as engaging explicitly in advocacy, prevention and support services, while others tackle structural inequalities that sustain GBV. Their agendas often align with provisions of international legal frameworks on GBV, even if such alignment is not always explicit. The diversity within feminist activism means that different movements focus on different facets of inequality. Nevertheless, many have historically addressed and continue to address, violence against FLINTA persons as either a central or integral part of their work (Cossyleon &

Woolley, 2020). Importantly, the elimination of GBV is not only a human rights imperative itself, but also a precondition for achieving substantive gender equality. And accordingly, every initiative that contributes to the dismantling of patriarchal structures and reconfiguration of gendered power relations can be understood as participating in the broader struggle to end GBV.

Civil society feminist activism has made both direct and indirect contributions to challenging and dismantling oppressive structures. UN Women highlights the important connection between civil society and international efforts to advance women's rights in its working paper *Building Power in Feminist and Women's Movements to End Violence against Women and Girls* (UN Women, 2023). Initiatives like the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UNTF) (UNTF, 2021) and the Spotlight Initiative (Spotlight Initiative, n.d.) actively support and fund civil society actions to combat GBV, recognizing their potential. Moreover, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) frame GBV as both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality, linking it holistically to broader goals of social justice and sustainable development (United Nations, n.d.-c).

Building on the contributions of feminist activism in challenging gender-based oppression and advancing women's rights, this chapter concludes by examining the role of the social work profession in responding to GBV, and, within this context, explores how social work intersects with women's rights and feminist thought.

1.2.6 GBV and Social Work

Social workers, along with health care professionals (World Health Organization, 2013), are at the frontline to encounter survivors of gender-based violence in their daily practice, in public social service institutions as well as in non-state institutions (Keeling & Van Wormer, 2012; UN Women, 2015). Despite significant barriers to disclosure and formal reporting, health care professionals and social service professionals (often but not always social workers) frequently serve as the first institutional contacts for survivors of gender-based violence (Maxwell et al., 2025).

In most literature and guidelines, social work is typically placed preliminarily in its statutory role, thus its mandates of help and control. The dominant narrative of the role of social work often overlooks the profession's activist mandate which is based on human rights and social justice. The statutory mandate of social work obliges professionals to support individuals in

need, often referred to as ‘vulnerable persons’. Survivors of gender-based violence, particularly in the form of domestic or intimate partner violence, are among those considered especially vulnerable (Keeling & Van Wormer, 2012; UN Women, 2015). Direct and immediate actions of help and support through social services, such as women’s shelters, empowerment programs, psychological support, financial support and survivor assistance, are indispensable elements of the profession when it comes to GBV.

According to UN Women’s *Essential Service Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence (Module 4)* (2015), social services are recognized as one of the core components of essential services to address GBV, and the document defines minimum requirements to ensure human rights, safety and well-being of women, girls and children affected by domestic or intimate partner or non-partner violence. For social services these essential services include:

- Crisis information
- Crisis counselling
- Helplines
- Safe accommodations
- Material and financial aid
- Creation, recovery, replacement of identity documents
- Legal and rights information, advice and representation, including in plural legal systems Psycho-social support and counselling
- Women-centred support
- Children’s services for any child affected by violence
- Community information, education and community outreach
- Assistance towards economic independence, recovery and autonomy

(UN Women, 2015)

Additionally, UN Women (2015) and WHO (2024) point out that GBV, particularly IPV, not only harms FLINTA individuals, but also has a profound impact on children who witness such violence or are themselves direct victims of domestic violence. By addressing GBV, social workers are not only supporting adult survivors but also working to protect and advocate for the well-being of affected children (UN Women, 2015).

Despite its statutory mandate to support survivors and their children, social work has been influenced by feminist activism, shaping the profession’s practice within the statutory mandate and adding more rights-based methods.

1.2.7 Feminist Influence on Social Work Responses to GBV

Feminist activism has significantly influenced social work practice – particularly in the field of GBV. The development of feminist social work can be seen as an outcome of feminist movement's influence on social work practice, as it emerged from grassroots activism and has profoundly shaped professional practice by recognizing that women's personal struggles are deeply rooted in their social position, a position defined by patriarchal systems of power (Dominelli & Campling, 2017), this thinking aligns also with the principles of critical social work. A feminist social work approach centres women's lived experiences, promotes egalitarian relationships between practitioners and service users, and addresses structural inequalities - thus adding an activist commitment to social change and advocacy to the statutory responsibilities of social work as a 'helping profession'. Feminist social work adopts a feminist perspective into the mainstream statutory social work practice and seeks to eliminate structural gender inequalities at the centre of its practice, it challenges systematic oppression through collective solidarity, empowerment and advocacy for women's rights (Dominelli & Campling, 2017). Noble (2015) affirms that feminist social work's efforts to challenge male power and dominance have led to policies and services that significantly improved women's lives.

This interrelation of feminism with social work, resulting in feminist social work, shows how those two fields are connected, and consequently requires social workers to address GBV through both, their statutory and their activist role, and apply women's rights in their practice when working with survivors. While providing needs-based, immediate support and ensuring safety for survivors is indispensable, social workers must move beyond a solely needs-based practice and advocate for women's human rights, structural change, gender equality, and social justice for all FLINTA individuals in order to respond holistically to GBV.

Addressing GBV solely through needs-based approach and interventions, is neither sufficient nor sustainable if the root causes of GBV remain unchallenged (UN Women, 2024a). Given that social workers regularly engage with survivors of GBV in their practice, their professional response to GBV is essential - not only for ensuring accurate support to those affected, but also for contributing to a comprehensive and systemic approach to tackling GBV. If social work fails to address patriarchal structures at political, societal and systemic levels (Gatenio Gabel, 2024) - or worse, contributes to preserving the status quo of patriarchal systems and power

structures (Staub-Bernasconi, 2016) - the profession falls short of its mandate as a human rights profession.

1.2.8 From Evidence-Based Knowledge to Advocacy

The UN Manual on Human Rights and Social Work (1994) emphasizes that social workers, through their casework, gain direct knowledge and insights of the living conditions and life realities of vulnerable persons and communities, such as survivors of GBV. Linking this to Androff's (2018) argument that individual suffering must be understood within broader societal and political contexts, highlights how such insights on individual cases can reveal the structural causes of human rights violations, including GBV. In the context of GBV, social work is uniquely positioned to generate evidence-based knowledge about the structural needs of survivors and to advocate for change at local, national and international policy levels. The CEDAW Committee emphasizes the need to understand GBV not as an isolated or individual problem, but as a deeply rooted social issue that demands comprehensive and structural responses (GR No. 19 of the CEDAW Convention, 1992). This aligns with Staub-Bernasconi's (2016) implication for social workers to provide 'counter knowledge' – critical and evidence-based insights that challenge dominant narratives – that equips social workers to resist discriminatory norms and beliefs. Similarly, Keeling & Van Wormer (2012) urge social workers to promote systematic institutional change for survivors, and emphasize the importance of involving survivors in policy decision-making processes – an approach that aligns with the principle of user participation and reflects a rights-based social work practice. Building upon and making use of evidence-based knowledge about the real life situations of survivors, social workers must advocate for systemic change.

Advocacy is one of the core elements of a rights-based approach to social work practice and is closely connected to political action and activism, the fields in which social work practice falls short on realizing a human rights-based approach (Androff, 2018; McPherson & Abell, 2020; Reynaert et al., 2021). According to Gatenio Gabel (2024), advocacy lies within the responsibilities of social workers.

The IFSW Europe (2019) published a statement on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women that underscores the urgent need to prevent and address gender-based violence as a violation of women's human rights. According to this statement, social workers play a vital advocacy role by promoting women's rights, influencing policy, supporting

survivors, and pushing for structural changes to ensure comprehensive protection and equality for all women and girls (IFSW Europe, 2019). Likewise, the UN Manual on Human Rights and Social Work (1994) reinforces the importance of human rights advocacy, accordingly in the case of GBV the advocacy for women's rights.

Through advocacy, social workers can address causes of GBV by promoting systemic change towards gender equality and dismantling patriarchal power structures, which not only underpin societal norms but also influence social service practice.

1.2.9 Conclusion: Social Work, Women's rights and Feminist Activism

This chapter has explored the interface of human rights, civil society activism and social work through the example of GBV - one of the most prevalent human rights violations that highlights how social workers and activists interact with international women's rights frameworks. It can be concluded that social work is deeply connected to both women's rights and feminist activism. Social workers are indispensable in providing support services for survivors, and international human rights bodies such as UN Women recognize these services as essential to address GBV (UN Women, 2015). Feminist activism and social work are strongly connected by their shared values, ethics and goals to dismantle patriarchal power structures and promote women's rights. Feminism has shaped social work practice and both have had significant influence on policies and international legal frameworks.

Despite the fact that social workers do actively participate in international conferences and global forums to advocate for women's rights and contribute to shaping gender equality policies (IFSW, 2012), a lack of political action and activism in daily social work practice with survivors is still evident in the field of GBV (Keeling & Van Wormer, 2012). In order to fill this gap, social workers must apply rights-based interventions and methods in their daily practice. Advocacy, grounded in evidence-based knowledge and service user participation, is one core element to go beyond the currently prevalent needs-based approach.
Therefore, this thesis argues that closer engagement with civil society activism, such as feminist movements, can enhance shared efforts to combat patriarchal oppression and that such cooperation could (re)vitalize the political, activist mandate of social work. Mutual support and cooperation between feminist activism and social work can amplify the voices of survivors and lead to greater achievements in combating GBV. Social workers maintain regular, direct contact with survivors and can provide evidence-based knowledge, while feminist movements

remain politically independent and free from institutional constraints. As a human rights profession with both statutory and activist roles, social work is uniquely positioned to bridge individual support and structural change.

Building on this premise, the following research explores the dynamics of cooperation between feminist movements and social work. It aims to map out how collaboration is currently practiced and experienced, and how it could be further reinforced in practice, complementing social work's statutory responsibilities with the professions activist mandate.

2. Methodology of Combined Research: Systematic Literature Review and Qualitative Research

The theoretical background of social work as a human rights profession, along with the interface of feminist activism, social work and women's rights in addressing GBV, contextualizes the overarching research aim: exploring the dynamics (of cooperation) between feminist activism and social work, with the goal of understanding what meaningful cooperation can look like, to what extent it can advance women's rights and how it can support social work to fulfil its human rights mandate.

To address this aim, the research adopts a combined methodological approach, that links theoretical knowledge with real-world perspectives, through a systematic literature review and qualitative research, each one guided by specific research objectives derived from the main research aim.

First, a systematic literature review was conducted to map existing academic discourse and critically analyse past and present dynamics, relationships, and tensions between feminist activism and social work in addressing GBV and advancing women's rights across different countries and contexts. This review helped identify recurring critiques, gaps, and patterns in the cooperation between activism and social work. It captures the current state of collaboration between the two fields and is guiding the direction of the following qualitative research.

The following qualitative research is designed, informed and scaled upon the systematic review and explores cooperation of feminist movements and social work in the specific context of Croatia. Through key informant interviews with both social workers and feminist activists, it

aims to explore how collaboration is currently experienced, what barriers exist, and how these barriers could be overcome, knowing that tensions have existed in past and present. Furthermore, the empirical research seeks to understand what forms of mutual support and complementary cooperation might strengthen the shared goal of gender equality, improving the societal, political and economic situations of FLINTAs in Croatia and in the light of GBV improving the support systems for survivors of GBV in the country.

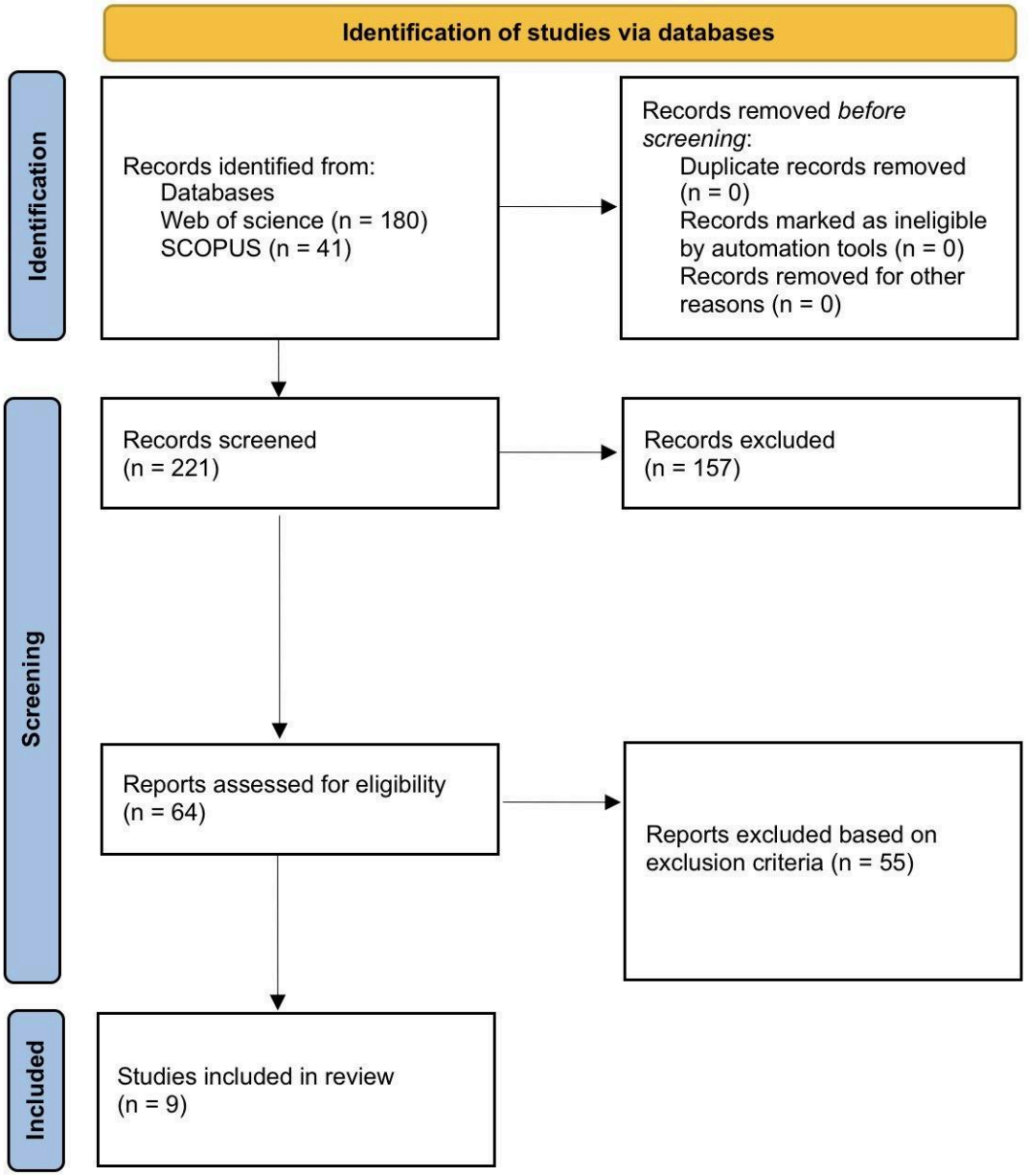
This combined methodological approach follows a structure similar to that used in other interdisciplinary studies, where literature reviews help define analytical categories and guide the development of interview protocols (Miake-Lye et al., 2019). This mixed-methods approach is well-suited to complex social questions like cooperation across sectors, as it allows for triangulation, integrating theoretical insights with empirical knowledge to produce richer and more reliable findings. According to (Miake-Lye et al., 2019), combining qualitative and systematic research methods enhances both internal validity (through theoretical grounding) and external relevance (through lived experiences), providing a fuller picture of the investigated issue. The two data sets - literature and interviews - are analysed separately, then synthesised to compare and contrast findings (Miake-Lye et al., 2019).

In this thesis, such synthesis is useful to develop a nuanced understanding of both critique and potential collaboration, and to generate practical and theoretical insights on possible meaningful alliances between social work and activism in Croatia, addressing shared challenges, including the rise of anti-gender movements in Croatia.

3. The Dynamics Between Feminist Activism and Social Work: A Systematic Review

3.1 Methodology

This systematic review follows a PRISMA protocol and employs a structured approach through an analytical template. This method enables a clear understanding and comparison of the examined feminist movements and their relationship to social work (PRISMA, 2020).



PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for new systematic reviews which included searches of databases and registers only
Source: Page MJ, et al. BMJ 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71.

In the first stage of identification, two international databases - Web of Science and Scopus - were searched.
The initial keyword search on Web of Science used four categories: feminist movement, queer feminism, battered women's movement, and domestic violence movement, all of the four categories were then limited to the field of social work.
This first keyword search brought the following results:

feminist movement AND social work: 99 articles

queer feminism AND social work: 11 articles

battered women's movement AND social work: 12 articles

domestic violence movement AND social work: 58 articles

A similar keyword search has been applied for the database Scopus. The limitation was done on the following keywords: the first formula 'feminist PRE/2 movement' provided 12.197 articles. To narrow down the scope, a set of specific keywords related to social work and feminist movements were applied: feminist PRE/2 movement AND "Social Movements" OR "Social Movement" OR Feminist Movement" OR "Human Rights" OR "Women's Rights" OR "Feminist Movements" OR "Feminist Activism" OR "Women's Movements" OR "#MeeToo". This filtering process reduced the number of articles to 1.066. For the purpose of this review, only articles that explicitly mentioned "social work" in their abstract were retained. Articles without an abstract were also included for screening. After this step a total of 41 articles were included for further screening.

In the second stage of screening, all articles were screened based on their title and abstract, or in cases of ambiguity, additional sections such as introduction, results, discussion or conclusion were reviewed. During this screening process, articles lacking a specific connection between feminist movement(s) or feminist activism and social work were excluded from further analysis. Furthermore, duplicates were removed and articles that were written in languages other than English, were as well removed.

In the third stage, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria for further were defined based on the research aim:

Exclusion criteria are defined as follows:

1. Exclusion of articles that do not elaborate a concrete link between feminist activism and social work practice. As this thesis focuses specifically on the practical area of social work, accordingly articles that discuss the profession in general terms or in relation to education or theoretical frameworks have been excluded from further analysis.
2. Exclusion of articles that have no reference to women's rights broader framework or do not engage with a social work rights-based approach.
3. Exclusion of articles if the issue/problem is not addressed on a structural level (if there is a lack of a societal, political or legal dimension).
4. Exclusion of articles that do not provide implicit or explicit implications for social work practice.
5. Exclusion of articles that discuss gender equity in fields outside of social work practice.
6. Exclusion of articles that are not written in english and again exclusion of duplicates that have not been identified in the previous steps.

Accordingly, articles are included based on their thematic relevance, which provides the following inclusion criteria:

1. Articles that discuss at least one of various feminist movements (e.g. grassroots movement, protest movement, hashtag movement, formal NGOs, intersectional activist movements) **and** social work practice in the context of women's rights, and gender-based-violence (case studies, comparative studies, or theoretical discussions)
2. Articles that focus on cooperation, interaction, influence, or divergence between feminist activism and social work practice
3. Articles that address societal or political change linked to women's rights, GBV, DV or gender justice
4. Articles that include implications (explicit or implicit) for social work practice
5. Articles that have a reference to the women's rights border framework (e.g. legal framework of international law, such as CEDAW, Istanbul Convention)

After applying these criteria, nine articles have been finally selected from two databases for this systematic review.

3.2 Findings of Systematic Review

To align the findings of the systematic review with the research questions of this thesis, a structural framework was used to organize, compare and analyse the articles included in this

review. Therefore key categories were defined to develop an analytical template. This method allows a systematic comparison of the articles content and the identification of potential patterns, gaps, contradictions, and trends. The findings from the selected articles were first organised into an analytical template (included in the appendix), which offers various categories to examine dynamics between feminist activism and social work. The key categories for this research include a classification of the movements, the 'social problems' addressed by the movements, their strategies and approaches, demands and aims, outcomes, and their relationship to social work practice, particularly potential critiques and implications for the profession.

In the first step, this descriptive analysis of the analytical template will give a brief overview over the types of movements, their characteristics and the issues they address. Following that overview, their claims, impacts and implications towards social work practice will be analysed.

3.2.1 Classification of Movements

Among the analysed articles, three refer broadly to the "mainstream" global women's movements (Macnair et al., 2000), and movements that emerged from them, such as the battered women's movement (Danis, 2003) and the reproductive rights movement(Hyatt et al., 2022). Another three studies focus on digital feminism (Castillo De Mesa et al., 2021), investigating hashtag-based movements like #metoo (Maxwell et al., 2025,) and #whyistayed (Storer & Rodriguez, 2020). Within digital feminism, different hashtag-movements have influenced one another and are interconnected. The authors highlight the dynamic flow between digital spaces and real-world activism and experiences. In addition to the global women's movement and digital feminism, two studies address feminist movements connected to decriminalisation. One examines the sex worker's rights movement (Fuentes, 2023), while another links anti-carceral activism with feminist approaches to combatting GBV (Kim, 2013).

The feminist movements explored in the nine selected articles range from protest and awareness raising efforts to political and digital activism and address various aspects of GBV and gender inequality using diverse approaches. Furthermore, the reviews articles demonstrate that feminist movements vary widely in type, strategy, and structure - ranging from traditional protest and institutional activism to digital and decriminalisation-focused efforts - revealing a high degree of heterogeneity in how GBV is addressed.

3.2.2 ‘Social Problems’ Addressed

The feminist movements analysed in this review address various structural inequalities (‘social problems’) rooted in gender oppression. Despite their diverse focus areas and scopes, each engages – either directly or indirectly – with issues related to GBV.

“Mainstream” women’s movements focus broadly on patriarchal oppression (Macnair et al., 2000), while offshoots such as e.g. the battered women’s movement target domestic violence specifically (Danis, 2003), and the reproductive justice movement centres on sexual and reproductive rights (Hyatt et al., 2022).

Digital feminist movements, such as #metoo, address sexual violence broadly raising awareness, creating networks of support, and criticizing the lack of institutional trust and visibility (Castillo De Mesa et al., 2021; Maxwell et al., 2025), as well as the barriers to disclosure and report of violence and the insufficiency and lack of support systems (Maxwell et al., 2025). The #whyistayed movement, emerging from and interconnecting with the #metoo movement, specifically tackles public misconceptions about intimate partner violence (IPV), challenging victim blaming narratives and highlighting systemic and other barriers survivors face in leaving abusive relationships (Storer & Rodriguez, 2020).

Anti-carceral and decriminalization movements address deficits within the mainstream feminist responses to GBV. Kim (2013) highlights community based movements like INCITE!, that reject carceral approaches and link anti-gender-violence work with prison abolition, arguing that criminalization disproportionately affects and harms marginalized groups (especially BiPoC, queer, low-income, and disabled persons). This critique aligns with the sex workers’ rights movement, which stresses that criminalization obstructs solidarity among and with sex workers as well as their access to support systems (Fuentes, 2023).

Seven out of nine of the studied movements engage with intersectionality. Four movements - the reproductive rights movement (Hyatt et al., 2022), the Disability Justice Movement (Goulden et al., 2023), the anti-carceral movements (Kim, 2013) and the sex worker’s movement (Fuentes, 2023) - explicitly link their activist and feminist work to broader social justice struggles and adopt terms like reproductive justice, disability justice, restorative and transformative justice. In contrast, digital feminist movements tend to use more accessible, informal language, while mainstream women’s movements use terminology like “women’s movement” and refer to “women” issues, rather than “feminist” struggles, reflecting the period and context of their emergence; it can be noted that wording has changed over time and is adapted to the contexts of the movements.

Based on the analysis, four movements can be classified as reactive, responding directly to specific forms of GBV - such as the battered women's movement (Danis, 2003), #metoo (Castillo De Mesa et al., 2021; Maxwell et al., 2025), and #whyistayed (Storer & Rodriguez, 2020). Three movements appear more proactive, aiming to restructure systems and expand rights, including the reproductive rights movement (Hyatt et al., 2022), the disability justice movement (Goulden et al., 2023), and the sex workers' rights movement (Fuentes, 2023). Two types of movements can be considered reflective: The anti-carceral movements, such as INCITE! are responding to existing feminist and anti-gender violence approaches while rethinking their foundations and approaches (Kim, 2013). And the disability justice movement emphasizes the leadership of disabled women, and queer people, and challenges traditional feminist spaces to be more inclusive towards disabled persons (Goulden et al., 2023).

3.2.3 Strategies and Demands

Different movements make use of diverse strategies in order to address a variety of demands related to the movement's overarching aims, these findings are presented in the following table.

Table: Movement's Strategies and Demands

Movement	**Strategies / Approaches**	**Demands / Aims**
Global Women's Movements (Macnair et al., 2000)	Strategies and demands have shifted according to emerging issues, reflecting a broad, dynamic and adaptive feminist agenda	Aim: challenge oppressive patriarchal societal, political and institutional structures
Battered Women's Movement (Danis, 2003)	providing safety and sanctuary to battered women and children	Aim: fill gaps left by societal institutions Demands: primarily target systematic oppression and inadequate institutional responses to domestic violence, especially social work's responses are criticized

Reproductive Justice Movement (Hyatt et al., 2022).	- political activism targeting healthcare, social work, and judicial systems - advocacy - emphasizing intersectionality	Demands: - recognition of three core rights - having a child, not having a child, and parenting in a safe environment - moving beyond the right to abortion and the right to choose - constitutional gender equality rights centred on bodily autonomy
Disability Justice Movement (Goulden et al., 2023)	- coalition building across marginalized communities - intersectional framework and social justice - advocacy	- disabled-led leadership - dismantling dominant normative structures - aiming for collective liberation and inclusion (including feminist spaces)
Digital Feminism (Maxwell et al., 2025; Castillo De Mesa et al., 2021; Storer & Rodriguez, 2020)	Digital activism and campaigns: - awareness raising - community building - empowerment linking the digital sphere to the "real-world" context	Aims: challenges patriarchal systems online: - combatting stigma - combating victim-blaming - combating misinformation Demands: - improvement of the support systems - legislative reforms to protect survivors of sexual violence and intimate partner violence

Anti-carceral & sex workers rights movements (Kim, 2013)	- community-based - decentralized - advocacy - awareness raising - empowerment	Aims: combating harms of criminalization, particularly its disproportionate impact on marginalized groups Demands: - restorative and transformative justice alternatives - decriminalization of sex work

The demands articulated by the various feminist movements can be categorized as structural, political/legislative, economic, and narrative and/or societal demands, with some including concrete demands related to the support systems and practical interventions.

While the analysed movements generally exhibit a combination of different types of demands, structural demands are particularly prominent across all movements. All movements include at least some minimal structural demands. The women's movement, for instance, broadly targets oppressive patriarchal structures (Macnair et al., 2000). Aligned with this, the battered women's movement also primarily makes structural claims, demanding improved support and protection systems for survivors. By highlighting the lack of adequate institutional support and systemic, institutional oppression underlying responses to domestic violence, the battered women's movement's demands are framed as structural (Danis, 2003).
The disability justice movement, likewise foregrounds structural concerns, calling for the dismantling of normative, ableist, racist, sexist structures embedded in socio-economic and political systems while advocating for collective liberation (Goulden et al., 2023). Anti-carceral movements as well articulate structural critiques of the criminal justice system, challenging the legitimacy of carceral responses to GBV and promoting community-based restorative and transformative justice as alternatives to the current criminal system (Kim, 2013). By confronting the systemic stigma and marginalization of sex work and advocating for its decriminalization the sex workers' rights movement also raises structural demands (Fuentes, 2023). In digital feminism, collective experiences shared online reveal gaps in existing support and reporting systems, which give rise to demands for improved institutional structures (Maxwell et al., 2025; Castillo De Mesa et al., 2021; Storer & Rodriguez, 2020). Reproductive

rights activism also includes structural aspects, especially when it comes to access and resources for e.g. abortion, but might be more strongly situated within political and legislative domains (Hyatt et al., 2022).

Political and legislative demands are often intertwined with structural demands. These types of demands are made by the reproductive justice movement, digital feminism, sex workers' rights, and anti-carceral movements. The reproductive rights movement, for example, advocates for constitutional guarantees of gender equality rights based on bodily autonomy and self-determination, moving beyond a narrow focus on privacy rights towards broader structural policy reforms (Hyatt et al., 2022). Digital feminism calls for legislative reforms to protect survivors, improved criminal justice measures, and training for authorities (Maxwell et al., 2025). And finally, legislative demands are also present in the sex workers' rights movement, which advocates for the decriminalization of sex work as a means of securing fundamental rights and long-term protection for sex workers (Fuentes, 2023). Similarly, anti-carceral movements demand legislative changes to challenge and dismantle the carceral system, while advocating for alternative approaches and measures to justice (Kim, 2013).

Economic rights are the least frequently articulated by the analysed movements. The reproductive justice movement is an exception, explicitly emphasizing the importance of financial resources and support for marginalized individuals to ensure their reproductive rights (Hyatt et al., 2022). The sex workers' rights movement also implicitly touches on economic rights as decriminalisation would allow sex workers to access labor protections and secure their economic livelihood (Fuentes, 2023).

For systemic change to gain traction and acceptance, dominant narratives that stigmatize and marginalize the affected groups and individuals must first be challenged and transformed. Therefore, structural, political, legislative and economic demands are often grounded in deeper narrative and societal demands. Narrative demands are especially apparent in digital feminism, the sex workers' rights movement, and the disability justice movement. Digital feminism aims to reshape the public discourse on sexual and intimate partner violence by combating victim-blaming, stigma and misinformation, thereby shifting the societal narratives that influence policy and institutional responses (Maxwell et al., 2025; Castillo De Mesa et al., 2021; Storer & Rodriguez, 2020). The sex worker's rights movement similarly seeks to combat stigma and marginalization through discursive strategies (Fuentes, 2023). The disability justice

movement explicitly frames its struggle as narrative one, calling for dismantling the "white cisgender heterosexual non-disabled normativity" (Goulden et al., 2023, p.736).

Demands related to support systems and practical interventions often intersect with structural demands. The battered women's movement, for instance, has highlighted the insufficiency and inadequacy of formal support systems. In response activists created alternative support mechanisms - such as women's shelters - to provide immediate safety for survivors while continuing to push for institutional improvements (Danis, 2003). Anti-carceral movements propose practical interventions by piloting and promoting community-based alternatives to the existing justice system, emphasizing informal, restorative and transformative violence intervention models as scalable/exemplary frameworks for institutional, public systems (Kim, 2013). Similarly, the sex workers' movement critiques the inaccessibility of formal support structures, which has led to the establishment of informal, community-based support systems outside of state institutions (Fuentes, 2023). Digital feminist movements express the need for better support systems, improved access to those systems, and renewed systems for reporting GBV (Maxwell et al., 2025; Castillo De Mesa et al., 2021).

Identification of patterns across the demands

Across the analysed movements, several patterns emerge in how demands are articulated. Structural demands are consistently central, reflecting a shared understanding that systemic oppression - whether patriarchal, ableist, racist, or carceral - underpins the issues these movements confront. Many movements pair these structural critiques with political and legislative demands, aiming to institutionalize change through law and policy reforms. While economic demands are less prominent, they appear implicitly in movements like sex workers' rights and explicitly in reproductive justice, revealing economic inequality as an underlying barrier to rights realization. Notably, narrative and social demands serve as a foundational layer across movements, highlighting the importance of transforming public discourse and challenging stigma to pave the way for broader systemic and political changes. Finally, the reliance on alternative support systems and practical interventions, particularly by the battered women's, anti-carceral, and sex workers' rights movements, underscores a pragmatic orientation toward immediate needs, often in the absence of insufficiency of institutional support - illustrating a recurring strategy of grassroots innovation alongside systemic critique. Intersectionality appears to become more important to many movements, and newer or

intersectional movements incorporate “justice” terminology reflecting broader social justice aims.

3.2.4 Impacts and Outcomes

While the analysed movements often set out with broad structural goals - such as dismantling oppressive systems, reforming institutions, or achieving legislative change - their most tangible impacts are often found at the level of community-based support, empowerment and narrative transformation.

Movements like the battered women’s movement and the sex workers’ movement, despite targeting systemic failures, succeeded primarily in establishing alternative support systems outside formal institutions, offering safety, solidarity, and resources to marginalized communities (Danis, 2023; Fuentes, 2023). Similarly, digital feminism aimed to ignite systemic change, made its greatest impact in raising awareness, reshaping public discourse, and fostering peer-to-peer support among survivors. Yet, the evolution from hashtag campaigns to global movements, such as #metoo, illustrate the transformative potential of digital activism in mobilizing public awareness and coordinated resistance to GBV. These movements not only sparked global demonstrations, but also reshaped public discourse and accountability structures around GBV (Castillo De Mesa et al., 2021).

These outcomes represent powerful forms of mutual empowerment and narrative shift, as these changes in dominant narratives, the greater visibility of the issues, and the revealing of barriers to disclosure or to exit an abusive relationship build the foundation for institutional and legislative reforms. Nonetheless, the outcomes of the movements’ impacts on legislative, institutional, and systemic reforms remain limited. However, a step towards systemic change can be seen in the influence of restorative and transformative justice on social work practices, although these changes have not yet reached dominant systems, they catalysed critical reflection and introduced new frameworks (Kim, 2013). The reproductive justice and disability justice movement have had significant impacts by introducing an intersectional, collective, and interdependent approach to social justice work (Goulden et al., 2023; Hyatt et al., 2022). The disability justice movement thereby also significantly influenced feminist praxis and social work, to centre accessibility, mutual aid and the lived experiences of disabled people (Goulden et al., 2023).

Despite these successes, across movements, a clear pattern emerges: while the demands were largely structural and systemic, the impacts often took shape in community organising, support networks, alternative informal support systems, shifts in public discourse, and resource sharing. However, these achievements are no less important, even if they fall short of the movements' original ambitions.

3.2.5 Feminist Movements and Human Rights

It is notable that while all analysed movements address fundamental human rights and are clearly committed to their promotion, most of the reviewed studies do not explicitly articulate a connection to the broader, international human rights framework. Initially, articles lacking such explicit references were to be excluded from the selection; however, this would have resulted in the exclusion of nearly all relevant studies. Meeting all three inclusion criteria - feminist movement in relation to social work and clear reference to human rights - proved unrealistic; therefore, the focus was placed on the relationship between feminist movement and social work practice. For this reason, this section also considers implicit connections to human rights.

Only two studies - those focusing on disability justice and reproductive justice - explicitly and clearly link the movements' efforts to the broader international human rights and legal framework. Although the disability justice movement primarily focuses on the rights of persons with disabilities, its intersectional approach extends to other key areas of international human rights law, including women's rights and anti-discrimination protection (Goulden et al., 2023). The reproductive justice movement is explicitly founded in human rights framework. Its core pillars - the right to have a child, the right to not have a child, and the right to parent children in safe and healthy environments - reflects a commitment to bodily sovereignty and self-determination. These rights are understood not only as individual entitlements but also as a requiring structural, legislative and financial support, thus positioning states as responsible for creating conditions that allow these rights to be fully realized. The movement highlights how systemic and institutional discrimination in reproductive healthcare constitutes a violation of fundamental human rights (Hyatt et al., 2022).

By contrast, the remaining articles do not explicitly connect the movements they examine to the international human rights or women's rights framework. However, the implicit connection is evident: all movements advocate for the realisation of fundamental rights for marginalized individuals and groups. Their efforts - whether or not framed in legal language - align with

core human rights principles, particularly those related to (gender) equality, non-discrimination, and protection from violence.

3.2.6 Feminist Movements and Social Work

Across the diverse feminist movements analysed, a clear alignment with core social work values - especially around human dignity, equity and social justice - is consistently evident. Movements such as reproductive justice, disability justice, anti-carceral movements, and digital feminism echo and extend these commitments by promoting collective care, community-based solutions, empowerment, and advocacy - principles that resonate deeply with social work's ethical foundations. Although critiques are often directed at the profession's practice and institutional complicity, most of the analysed movements recognize social work as a potential ally in advancing social transformation. Feminist movements offer alternative frameworks, approaches, strategies and viewpoints that can enrich social work practice. However, doing so requires that social workers become more reflexive, and embrace intersectionality, centre marginalized voices, and commit to transformative approaches that challenge institutional oppression rather than reproduce it. These requirements are intertwined with the critiques directed at social work that emerge from the systematic review.

Feminist movements' critiques of social work range from direct and explicit to more implicit or structural. Some feminist movements, (e.g. battered women's movement and reproductive justice movement), voice pointed critiques, while others (e.g digital feminism) offer critique more indirectly or challenge the underlying structures in which social work is embedded (e.g. anti-carceral movements and sex workers rights movement).

A recurring critique from the analysed feminist movements is that social work provides inadequate and insufficient support for marginalized communities, especially emphasized by the reproductive justice movement, battered women's movement, and digital feminism (Castillo De Mesa et al., 2021; Danis, 2003; Hyatt et al., 2022; Maxwell et al., 2025; Storer & Rodriguez, 2020). Another central critique of social works is lack of proactive involvement in transformative change (anti-carceral movements, disability justice movement and reproductive justice movement). Rather than proactively challenging systemic injustice, the profession is often viewed as reactive, bureaucratic, and too closely aligned with oppressive institutions such as the carceral system or patriarchal family structures. Some movements argue that social

work's statutory role, functioning as a state actor, renders it complicit in systems of violence and control; these critiques come primarily from the anti-carceral movements, the broader social justice movements, and the battered women's movement.

The battered women's movement offers a particularly sharp critique, describing social work as re-victimizing, insufficient in support and lacking a feminist perspective (Danis, 2003). Reproductive and disability justice movements criticize the profession's silence and inaction in addressing systemic injustice, urging more active support and solidarity (Hyatt et al., 2022; Goulden et al., 2023). The sex worker movement challenges the persistent "rescue" model in social work, which reinforces a needs-based, top-down logic rather than a rights-based, self-determined approach (Fuentes, 2023). Digital feminism points to the slow institutional response of social work in adopting digital tools and engaging online - spaces that have become central for organizing, support, and activism (Maxwell et al., 2025; Castillo De Mesa et al., 2021; Storer & Rodriguez, 2020).

Overall, across these critiques a pattern emerges: social work is challenged for failing to respond adequately to 'social problems', failing to interrogate its own institutional role, for scarce responses to systemic injustice, for being insufficiently intersectional, and for maintaining hierarchical relationships with the communities it seeks to serve. There is a clear demand for the profession to adopt more reflexive, community aligned and justice-driven practices. Many of these critiques relate to social work's dual and often contradictory roles and mandates, as previously outlined in this thesis, highlighting the challenge of balancing a needs-based practice with a rights-based professional mandate.

The critiques are not merely accusatory but they also carry concrete implications for social work practice. Many feminist movements outline clear pathways for change, ranging from practice-level adjustments to broader political engagement.

Some implications are specific and actionable, such as adopting digital tools for outreach (digital feminism), ensuring accessibility of services (e.g. disability justice, battered women's movement, digital feminism, sex worker's rights movement), expanding confidential reporting mechanisms for survivors of GBV (e.g. #metoo), or implementing survivor-centred and community-based approaches (e.g. battered women's movement, anti-carceral movements). Others (especially the reproductive and disability justice movements) call for deeper shifts: integrating feminist and intersectional frameworks into education, training, and practice,

committing to advocacy and legislative reforms, and developing more collaborative, non-hierarchical relationships with affected communities.

At the core of these implications is the need to change narratives about marginalized communities and the demand that social work becomes more self-aware, critical, reflexive and transformative. Rather than simply responding to needs within existing systems, the profession is urged to challenge those systems, and reimagine its role as an agent of structural change.

3.3 Limitations of the Research

This systematic review has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the majority of the selected literature focuses on feminist movements and social work in the United States, which may limit the applicability of findings to other global contexts. This limitation is partly, though not exclusively, linked to language restrictions, as only English-language publications were included - very likely excluding valuable perspectives published in other languages. Further research is needed to explore how these dynamics unfold in different regions and sociopolitical settings. Finally, the overall scope and size of this review were necessarily limited. Future research drawing from a wider range of databases and including diverse civil society activist movements – not only feminist ones – would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities and evolving dynamics between social work and social movements across different contexts.

3.4 Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter set out to explore the past and present dynamics, interrelationships and cooperation between feminist activism and social work, using GBV as its central point of reference. The findings of this systematic review suggest that, while connections between the two fields exist, the dynamics are largely characterized by a one-directional influence flowing from feminist movements towards social work. Most of the selected articles critically examine how feminist activism has shaped social work practices, discourses and institutional responses. However, there is a striking absence of reciprocal or dialogical engagement. This may point to a broader issue within social work as a profession – its often limited activist orientation – which raises important questions about how more mutual, constructive relationships could be fostered.

While both feminist movements and social work address structural injustices, their approaches diverge in practice. Despite a clear alignment in core values – such as commitment to social justice, equity, and the dismantling of oppressive systems – social work is frequently critiqued for falling short of realizing these commitments in practice. Feminist movements tend to adopt more holistic, community-driven strategies that emphasize empowerment from the bottom up and challenge structural violence more directly. In contrast, social work is frequently critiqued for maintaining hierarchical relationships with service users and for insufficiently interrogating or challenging the institutional systems in which practitioners operate – systems that may themselves reproduce oppression.

Although the review uncovered some examples of complementary roles – such as feminist movements filling institutional gaps by offering community-based support for survivors of GBV – these efforts often tend to arise out of necessity rather than structured collaboration. The lack of documented mutual influence suggests a missed opportunity: Rather than remaining a target of critique, social work could engage more actively and deliberately in these grassroots efforts. At the same time, also feminist movements need to move away from solely criticizing social work and towards dialogue and joint strategies. This shift could lay the groundwork for alliances that more effectively bridge civil society and formal support systems.

The influence of feminist activism on social work is nonetheless clear and historically rooted. From the early establishment of women's shelters inspired by the battered women's movement to recent calls for digital engagement and alternative approaches, activism continues to shape social work practice. Yet, this influence remains largely critical rather than collaborative.

The review also revealed a gap between the movements' stated structural goals and their actual structural impacts. This gap presents a potential space for social work to contribute, leveraging its institutional access and professional legitimacy to help translate grassroots visions into systemic change – provided it confronts its own role in sustaining oppressive structures. The dual role of social work – simultaneously statutory and potentially activist, as discussed earlier in this thesis – remains a core tension. Social work often finds itself balancing conflicting responsibilities, tasked with supporting individuals while operating within state frameworks that may themselves be sources of harm.

Finally, one of the aims of this chapter was to help lay the groundwork for the development of the following qualitative research in Croatia. The review's findings highlight the importance of understanding perspectives from both fields. While feminist movements are often deeply

engaged in human rights advocacy, even if not always explicitly, the review revealed little reflection on how social work positions itself as a human rights profession in practice. This represents both a limitation of this review and an important point of departure for the empirical research into how these two fields might complement each other's efforts.

4. Qualitative Research in Croatia

4.1 Croatian Context

4.1.1 Statistics on GBV in Croatia

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) collects data from all European countries and reports about gender equality and violence against women. The country profile for Croatia provides a comprehensive overview of EIGE's findings in recent years (EIGE, n.d.-a). It is important to note that in Croatia, police data is collected and provided only for domestic violence (DV), and not for intimate partner violence (IPV). According to EIGE, women are disproportionately affected by DV, with 79% of survivors reported to police being female. A notable difference is observed when comparing DV to violence occurring in 'any relationship', where women make only 54% of the total reported cases (data from 2022). Furthermore, the number of recorded DV survivors in Croatia has significantly increased between 2014 and 2022. This is likely due to improvements in data collection, the impact of awareness raising campaigns, and better access to support and reporting services. EIGE also provides data on femicides and rape in Croatia. In 2022 police recorded 18 femicides, which are often the culmination of prolonged violence and abuse. The same year, 467 cases of rape were reported to the Croatian police. In Croatia, rape is criminalised under Article 188 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Croatia (1998, Narodne Novine, OG 110/97), and available data shows that 95% of rape survivors are female. However, shortcomings in the reporting system are evident, as only 18% of survivors of IPV in Croatia report to the police. EIGE's 2023-2024 data collection in Croatia highlights the ongoing threat that GBV poses to the safety and well-being of FLINTS individuals. Reliable administrative data on GBV is crucial for shaping effective policies and support systems. To address underreporting, authorities should increase awareness of femicide warning signs and improve access to victim support systems (EIGE ,n.d.-a).

4.1.2 Legal Framework on GBV in Croatia

Earlier in this thesis, the most important international legal frameworks addressing GBV were discussed. This section will now provide an overview of the international conventions that Croatia has ratified. Croatia has incorporated the principles of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) into national policies. Following Croatia's independence, the country also adopted Yugoslavia's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Convention), originally ratified by Yugoslavia in 1981.

The CEDAW Committee provides recommendations and monitors the measures countries take to end VAWG. The most recent available data on Croatia's country report and the Committee's related recommendations dates back to 2015. Since then, Croatia has introduced several measures - particularly from 2018 onward - aimed at improving legislation, service provisions and funding to combat GBV. However, significant gaps remain in the area of policy implementation, survivor protection, and access to services. These are especially evident in support for migrant and refugee women, education, financial assistance to promote survivors' independence, and national legal frameworks (UN Women, n.d.-b; United Nations, 2015a)

As part of its commitment to advancing gender equality, Croatia submitted its national report for the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (BDPA) in June 2024, which covers the period from May of 2019 to June of 2024 (Office for Gender Equality of the Government of Croatia, 2024). The report outlined the country's progress over this period in implementing the BDPA, and highlights key achievements, such as legislative reforms to align with international standards like CEDAW and Istanbul Convention, as well as improvements in institutional coordination and data collection on GBV. The report also notes efforts to mainstream gender perspectives across various sectors, including labour, health and environmental policy. However it identifies ongoing challenges, particularly in addressing data gaps related to unpaid care work, the gender pay gap, and GBV monitoring. Overall, the review acknowledges Croatia's progress while emphasizing the need for continued efforts to ensure substantive gender equality (Office for Gender Equality of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2024).

Croatia has ratified the Istanbul Convention (2011) only in 2018, but since then significant improvements in addressing GBV in Croatia have been made. As previously discussed, the Istanbul Convention (2011) is the most comprehensive and legally binding European

instrument for preventing and combating GBV, protecting survivors, and prosecuting perpetrators. Although Croatia ratified the Convention relatively late its ratification marked a significant step forward in aligning national legislation with international human rights standards. While challenges remain, the ratification has undeniably positively impacted the situation for women and girls in Croatia (EIGE, n.d.-a). As previously noted, data collection is essential to assess the effectiveness of legislation and measures taken to combat violence against FLINTA persons. In recognition of this, the EU adopted Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council, in May 2024, addressing the fight against violence against women and domestic violence. Article 44 of the directive requires member states to cooperate with the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) in collecting data on these forms of violence and comply with common data collection standards (Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, 2024).

The principles of gender equality and prohibition of discrimination against women are enshrined in Croatia's national legislation: in the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia and in the Act on Gender Equality (Government of the Republic of Croatia & Office for Gender Equality, 2017). First of all, the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia contains several provisions that form the constitutional basis for protecting individuals from GBV by protection of the integrity, dignity and safety of any person. These provisions include the right to life (Article 21), the right to liberty and personality (Article 22), the protection from any form of ill-treatment (Article 23), and the protection of personal and family life, and dignity (Article 35). These rights can be applied in case law related to GBV and form a foundation for further legal protections (THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA, 2014).

Furthermore, Croatia has implemented specific legislation addressing GBV, especially DV: With the 'Protection against Domestic Violence' (OG 126/2019) (Courts of the Republic of Croatia, n.d.), Croatia has adopted a specific legislation addressing DV. It defines DV as "any act of physical, psychological, economic violence or neglect that violates a person's dignity and causes distress, physical or mental suffering"(EIGE, n.d.-a). According to Article 8, the law applies to current and former spouses and partners, persons who have a common child (and their children), persons living in a joint household, and a child who has not reached the age of eighteen. And Article 6 outlines survivors' rights and the obligations of authorities to inform them of these rights. While serious violations of this legislation fall under the criminal code,

lesser infractions are treated as misdemeanour (EIGE, n.d.-a; Courts of the Republic of Croatia, n.d.).

Additionally, Croatia introduced a legal definition of femicide through amendments to the Criminal Code in 2024. Article 111a outlines penalties for the murder of women when motivated by GBV (EIGE, n.d.-a). Complementing the legislative framework, the 'Protocol for Handling Cases of Domestic Violence', issued by the Ministry of Demographics, Family, Youth and Social Policy, was first adopted in 2005 and most recently revised in 2019 (Sabolić, 2000). The Protocol defines responsibilities and procedures of relevant institutions - including police, healthcare providers, judiciary, social welfare services, educational institutions, and civil society organisations - in handling cases of DV. It outlines the structures of the support system for survivors. Although partner violence is not explicitly addressed in Croatian legislation, it can be encompassed under the provisions of DV, as IPV is considered one form of DV (Sabolić, 2000).

4.1.3 Support Services for Survivors of GBV in Croatia

According to Eurostat, 85,7% or survivors of GBV in Croatia are aware of support services - significantly higher than the European average of 74.3% (Eurostat, 2024). Similarly, awareness of the right to free legal aid is also above the EU average: 47.9% of survivors in Croatia are informed about this support, compared to only 31.7% across the EU (Eurostat, 2024). Access to free legal aid plays a crucial role for survivors because it helps them overcome financial barriers and navigate legal processes, and thereby empowering survivors (EIGE, n.d.-a).

As outlined in the Protocol for Handling Cases of Domestic Violence, multiple actors are responsible for implementing support mechanisms on cases of DV. This section will briefly focus on Social Welfare Services and Civil Society organisations, as these are the two key stakeholders examined in the empirical part of this research, which aims to explore whether meaningful cooperation exists in practice and how such collaboration could be strengthened in future.

The support offered to survivors in Croatia generally aligns with the seven main forms of assistance recommended by the WHO in 2009 (Bašić et al., 2019).

Social Welfare Centres play a central role in responding to DV cases. Upon becoming aware of cases, they are required to promptly initiate contact with the victim, assess the situation, and, where necessary, notify the police. Their responsibilities include facilitating access to

healthcare, developing individualized safety plans, evaluating the survivor's specific needs, and offering possibilities to refer to other professionals for psychological, legal and financial support. Additionally, they coordinate referrals to relevant services, such as shelters and specialized assistance providers (Sabolić, 2000). Social workers are acting as case managers, especially when children are involved. Many cases of DV intersect with divorce and guardianship of minors. As case managers they follow the case through its entity process, and they are obliged to ensure coordination, support, and monitoring until a final solution is reached.

According to Bašić et al. (2019), the first women's shelter in Croatia was established by feminist organisations in Zagreb in 1990. Since their inception, tensions have persisted between feminist civil society actors and social workers embedded within the social welfare system. These tensions relate not only to organizational structures and service methods but also to broader issues of approaches, ideology and funding mechanisms. Moreover, the capacity of shelters remains insufficient, with limited availability of spaces, particularly in rural areas, continuing to pose a serious barrier to survivor protection and access to comprehensive care and support (Bašić et al., 2019).

Civil Society Organisations act as informal support providers by informing survivors of their rights and offering a range of services, including legal advice, psychological support, and counseling. Organisations that operate shelters are responsible for providing safe accommodation when necessary and, with the survivor's consent, may report incidents of violence to the police or prosecutorial authorities if such a report has not yet been made (Sabolić, 2000).

Feminism in Croatia aligns with traditional waves of global feminist developments, from the early post World War II women's movement to today's dynamic and more diverse forms of feminism, including also online activism (enciklopedija, 2013; Ograjšek Gorenjak, 2022). The issues addressed by feminist movements in Croatia have evolved over time, reflecting global developments. Early women's rights movements focused on education for girls and political rights for women, such as the right to vote (enciklopedija, 2013). Later, the focus shifted to political representation, legislation and a broader range of topics related to gender equality (enciklopedija, 2013).

The rise and diversity of feminism in Croatia is also reflected in the rising number of feminist civil society organisations in the 1990s. Organisations such as Autonomous Women's House,

Women's Infoteka, B.a.B.e., CESI (Center for Education, Counseling and Research), the Women's Network of Croatia, the Lesbian Association Kontra, Ženska Soba (Women's Room), and many more emerged during that time (enciklopedija, 2013; Ograjšek Gorenjak, 2022). The Center for Women's Studies has offered feminist educational programs and publications since 1995 (Ograjšek Gorenjak, 2022).

During the 1990s, Croatia was undergoing a transition from Yugoslav Republic towards an independent state. In this post-socialist period of change, feminist movements offered important support for Croatian women, helping them to navigate in the new social, political and technological landscapes. More importantly, feminist civil society organisations played a crucial role in promoting women's rights in Croatia at the societal, political, and legislative level (enciklopedija, 2013; Ograjšek Gorenjak, 2022). Feminism has had significant impacts in influencing the public discourse and narratives by increasing media visibility of women's issues, encouraging civic engagement, and especially challenging the limited presence of women in politics (Ograjšek Gorenjak, 2022). With Croatia's accession to the EU, feminist movements opened up for cooperation with governmental institutions and gained opportunities to request EU fundings; this influenced the organisational structures of civil society organisations (Ograjšek Gorenjak, 2022).

Contemporary feminism has expanded its demands and aims to promote gender equality by combating traditional gender roles and societal norms, addressing gender-based and sexual violence, as well as advocating for the recognition of sexual and reproductive rights (Ograjšek Gorenjak, 2022). Since the 2000s, the rise of social media has contributed to the growth of digital feminism in Croatia. Movements such as fAKTIV, organising the Night March, #Prekinimosutnju (#EndtheSilence), #Pravdazadjevojcice (#JusticeForGirls), and #SpasiMe (#SaveMe) became key players in the field of feminism in Croatia (enciklopedija, 2013; Ograjšek Gorenjak, 2022).

Croatia has also experienced the emergence of radical feminist groups that support TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminism) ideologies, but queer-inclusive feminist movements have actively opposed these trends (Ograjšek Gorenjak, 2022). However, at the same time anti-gender and anti-feminist movements are rising in Croatia, representing dangerous threats to women's rights in the country (enciklopedija, 2013)

4.2 Methodology

4.2.1 Key Informant Interviews

Interviews are among the most commonly used methods in qualitative research, offering rich, in-depth insights into participants' experiences and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For this thesis, interviews were chosen as the method for empirical data collection. Braun & Clarke (2013) describe qualitative interviews as a form of "professional conversation" (p. 77), aimed at exploring how participants understand and experience a particular (and often complex) phenomenon, the topic selected by the researcher.

This method is particularly appropriate for this thesis research, as it seeks to investigate the real-world dynamics between social work and feminist activism, through the lens of efforts to address GBV in Croatia.

The primary aim of the interviews was to explore the perspectives and experiences of two key groups - social workers and feminist civil society actors - regarding their cooperation or lack thereof, and to understand the perceived limitations, critiques, and potential for meaningful collaboration between them.

In qualitative research, interviews not only deepen the understanding of a theoretical framework but also to transpose it into a specific real-world context (Von Soest, 2023). In this case, the interviews help contextualize the theoretical research on the relationship between social work and feminist activism within the Croatian setting. As Von Soest (2023) notes, interviews can help to reflect on, test or further develop a research hypothesis. At this point, it is necessary to link the empirical research questions to the overall questions guiding this thesis: How can cooperation between civil society activism and social work strengthen efforts to promote social justice and human rights and contribute to the realization of the human rights mandate of the social work profession? Investigating such cooperation in a specific context, GBV in Croatia, helps inform this thesis to answer its overarching question.

As Braun & Clarke (2013) point out, interviews are particularly effective when the research focuses on lived experiences and nuanced dynamics. This is especially relevant in this study, where the goal is to gain insights into how social workers and feminist activists perceive each other, how they engage or fail to engage in collaborative efforts, and what challenges or opportunities they identify in that process.

4.2.2 Sampling and Participants

To inform the research questions in the specific context of Croatia and GBV, participants were drawn from two groups: social workers and feminist activists, who address GBV in their work

More specifically:

1. Social workers employed in the public welfare system
2. Social workers employed in non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
3. Professionals and/or activists working in feminist civil society organisations, including NGOs and grassroots movements

The sampling strategy followed a "snowballing or friendship pyramiding" method, where participants were recruited through existing networks (Braun & Clarke, 2013), facilitated mainly by the thesis supervisor. The thesis supervisor played a key role in reaching out to colleagues at the Faculty of Law and their extended networks. These initial contacts enabled the researcher to reach prominent figures and organisations, such as the former president of a major feminist NGO, as well as a representative of the Croatian Association of Social Work and a former professor of social work education at the University of Zagreb. Furthermore, the thesis supervisor also initiated contact with social workers in the field, who make an important part of the sample for this study, representing the social workers and their daily practice.

This snowballing effect extended the sample to include well-known NGOs such as BaBe and Solidarna Foundation, and important civil society organisations like the #spasime Movement, and additional smaller feminist collectives like fAKTIV.

In total 10 interviews were conducted. Two of these were group interviews with two participants from the same organisations who have complementary roles and experiences. Seven interviews were conducted in English, while three were held in Croatian with the help of translators. The translators included the thesis supervisor, two social work students, and one employee of a participating organisation.

Eight Interviews were conducted in person and some of them took place in informal environments such as cafés or bars, based on the participants' preferences. While these settings may not be ideal due to potential background noise and distractions (Braun & Clarke, 2013),

this flexibility allowed for a participant-centred approach. Other interviews were conducted in formal settings, such as the participants' workplaces.

Two interviews were conducted virtually on zoom due to organisational reasons.

Stratification was applied to ensure a diversity of perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2013) across the public welfare system and civil society organisations; the final sample was balanced between:

Five interviews reflect the social work field, including representatives from education, from the Croatian Association of Social Work, Dom Duga (a main actor in working with survivors of GBV in Zagreb) and from social workers in the field.

Five interviews reflect the field of feminist civil society actors, including important organisations such as Ženska Soba (Women's Room), fAKTIV, Solidarna Foundation, BaBe, and #spasime.

Notably, one participant uniquely bridged both fields, working as a social worker in the public system while actively involved in queer feminist activism. Her dual perspective was particularly valuable for this study. Additionally, another participant worked previously in the public sector and is now employed in an NGO, thus also enriched the study significantly by providing dual perspectives.

All interview participants identified as FLINTA individuals, which is justified in this context given the gendered nature of both fields and of the topic of GBV. Social work is a predominantly female profession, especially in the field of GBV, and feminist activism is typically FLINTA-led.

4.2.3 Ethics and Research Regulations

The study adhered to the core ethical principles of respect, competence, responsibility, and integrity, as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2013) and based on the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2009). Special emphasis was placed on the principle of respect, which includes maintaining confidentiality, securing informed consent, and protecting participants' autonomy.

Participants were fully informed about the research aims and objectives, the background of the thesis and personal background of the researcher. For those who wished, the research

questionnaire was shared in advance of the interview. Regarding written consent to the interview, there were no requirements from the University of Zagreb nor from the Global Campus of Human Rights. Consequently, oral consent before the interview or consent via mail was considered sufficient.

All participants agreed to the audio recording of their interviews for transcription purposes. Transcripts were stored in a password-protected folder, and participants were anonymized using codes. Participants were also informed about the data management procedures and securing confidentiality.

4.2.4 Interview Design and Procedure

The empirical research was developed to directly address the main research question of this thesis: '*how can social work in practice become more political and realize its activist, human rights-based mandate?'*, with a specific focus on the hypothesis that cooperation with civil society could offer a pathway to this transformation. Using the example of GBV, an interface of the three domains (human rights, social work, and activism) in question, the guide was shaped from the findings of the prior systematic literature review on the relationship between social work and feminist activism, especially in the context of GBV.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing flexibility and the flow of conversations while ensuring all key themes were covered (Braun & Clarke, 2013). While the guide included predefined themes and questions, the interviewer was free to adapt questions based on the participants' backgrounds, experiences and responses. This flexibility allowed for deeper responsiveness to unexpected but relevant topics. Each interview contained about seven main questions, organized under the below listed themes. The interview questionnaire contained more questions than the ones that were ultimately asked, with different questions prepared for each key theme, but always ensuring that every theme was addressed by at least one question.

The themes covered in the research questionnaire included:

1. Professional background and relation to GBV, which served as introductory question (Braun & Clarke, 2013)
2. **Relation to human rights and women's rights in their work**
3. **Mutual Perceptions (i.e., social work vs. activism), including critiques**

4. **Experiences of Cooperation (i.e., social work vs. activism), including critiques**
5. **Barriers and limitations to cooperation**
6. **Visions for future collaboration and change: potential and conditions**
7. Change most needed to address GBV
8. Optional follow-up questions
9. A concluding "clean-up" question (Braun & Clarke, 2013): "*Is there anything you would like to add?"*

The themes, number 2-6, are considered the key themes that had to be addressed in each interview with at least one question, while the other themes allowed for more flexibility, depending on the participants background, interview setting, and length of the interview.

While the exact wording and order of the questions were adjusted to fit each participant, the core categories were consistently addressed. This approach allowed for compatibility across interviews while respecting the individuality of each participant's experience.

Interviews typically began with an informal rapport-building phase, often including small talk. In many cases, relevant insights emerged even before the formal interview began, highlighting the importance of a non-hierarchical, conversational atmosphere.

4.2.5 Qualitative Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed using an AI assisted tool (Turboscribe) with anonymized names, and then analysed using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA. Participants were categorized into three groups for analytical clarity: feminist activists, social workers, and a unique subgroup representing both fields due to overlapping professional roles. This allowed for nuanced comparison of perspectives from each group. The analysis followed a qualitative content analysis approach, which is both systematic and flexible (Schreier, 2012; Mayring, 2014). This method facilitates a structured coding process while allowing for emergence of new themes.

Initially a deductive coding scheme was applied based on the research questionnaire's nine themes, described before. Following the deductive coding of these themes, an inductive process was applied to identify sub-themes that emerged directly from the data. Although the interview included nine themes, in this second step of inductive coding of sub-themes, the

analytical focus prioritized the most relevant themes related to the core research question on cooperation between feminist civil society activism and social work in Croatia; these key themes are:

- relation to human rights and women's rights in their work
- mutual perceptions (i.e., social work vs. activism), including critiques
- experiences of cooperation (i.e., social work vs. activism), including critiques
- barriers and limitations to cooperation
- visions for future collaboration and change: potential and conditions

This decision was made in order to maintain clear focus on the interaction between the two fields. However, the other key themes were essential for gaining a deeper understanding of the context and background of interviewees. For example, questions on the (professional) backgrounds of the interviewees served as introductory prompts, but also offered valuable insights into participants' pathways into activism or social work, thereby enriching the interpretation of their responses. Similarly questions about "change needed" served as concluding, summary questions that helped contextualize and interpret the significance and weight of previous answers or give the participants the chance to add aspects that have not been addressed before.

This two-step procedure - deductive coding to frame the analysis, followed by inductive coding to refine and expand it - aligns with common methods of qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012; Mayring, 2014).

To systematically analyse the coded data the MAXQDA's group comparison tool was used. This tool helped to analyze differences and similarities between participant groups, ensuring that findings consistently highlight comparative insights across feminist activists, social workers, and those with dual roles.

This mixed deductive-inductive approach, supported by systematic use of MAXQDA, enabled a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how feminist activists and social workers are related to human rights, perceive each other, cooperate, and encounter barriers in collaboration. Furthermore it sheds light on the potential and necessary conditions of such cooperation between these actors in Croatia. The findings of the qualitative data analysis will be described in the next Chapter.

4.3 Findings

4.3.1 Relation to Human Rights

The sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of the theme ‘Relation to Human Rights’ are: *shared commitment to human rights*, *but diverging forms of expression* and *discrepancy of theory and practice in social work.*
The codes that emerged from these sub-themes are: *workload & lack of resources in social work,* leading to *frustration among social workers*. In both groups the ‘*activist identity’ is a personal component. Lacks in social work education* have been identified, yet there is hope for change with a *generational shift of social workers*.

Interview questions about the relation to human rights revealed both shared commitments, yet diverging strategies between feminist organisations and public social work institutions.

Feminist activists tend to refer explicitly to international conventions such as CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention as legal obligations binding for the Croatian state and its public institutions and employees. Feminist organisations see their mandate in holding institutions accountable and acting as external watchdogs.

In contrast, one interview participant, representing social workers, describes a more institutionalized approach to human rights in social work. Following Croatia's independence, the Croatian Association of Social Work (CASW) translated the ‘UN Manual on Human Rights and Social Work’ and initiated educational programmes to integrate these principles into social work practice. According to the same participant, this marked a shift in the profession - fostering collaboration and aligning social work with human rights norms.

Yet, field social workers often refer more to social work ethics and values, including professional confidentiality, than human rights per se. One field social worker expresses her deep belief in those values, when asked about human rights in social work:

> “*The main goal should be in the core of our work to preserve the dignity, the trust and the safety of the people in need that we are working with and keeping in mind the*

sensitive approach [and] the professional secrets [...]. This is something that I deeply, deeply believe in, to have this in the core" (Field Social Worker).

These views suggest that although social work values align with human rights, they are framed more in terms of professional responsibility than in political or legal obligation.

Education emerged as a key site of divergence. While social work in Croatia has begun incorporating human rights into its curricula, this shift is still in its early stages. Participants from social work highlighted generational differences - younger professionals are more likely to adopt a rights-based lens, but full integration into practice remains limited. Several interviewed social workers emphasized that it will still take some time until new approaches will be fully realized in practice.

Feminist activists, however, express concerns about a fundamental lack of human rights literacy among social workers. One activist described a situation, in which she and a colleague were giving legal education to social workers:

"*She [colleague] asked them, please, how many of you have read the Istanbul Convention? In a room of 14 people, two or three raised hands, I think just in courtesy. So they didn't read it, they don't have it on their desks. But they knew it existed. Some of them, they didn't even know that it exists"* (Feminist Activist).

Limitations to implement a human-rights approach into social work practice were primarily raised by field professionals. These limitations include heavy caseload, lack of resources, and rigid institutional structures that prevent more proactive or specialised rights-based practice. One field social worker, working in a rural area, explained these issues in detail:

"*Everyone who is studying social work is driven by the need to help other people and we realise that social work is a human rights-based practise. But when you start to work in a formal institution, you actually see that all of those possibilities or things that you have thought that you will do, that's not really the reality because you are often cut by the resources. You don't have the resources that you need"* (Field Social Worker).

Others noted that Croatian social work is reactive, focused more on crisis management than prevention or structural change. Discrepancies between theory and practice were a common frustration.

> "*And the whole point of social work is humanity, human rights, all that. But yes, theory, it's much different than practical work. And I was very confused and surprised when I got my first job. Because in college I had all kinds of practice work, but it's not even similar"* (Social Worker; previously working in public social welfare system, now working in an NGO).

Feminist Activists echoed these observations, often questioning whether social work, in practice, aligns with international standards like the Istanbul Convention.

Both sectors engage in advocacy and have had tangible influence on legislation, but through different channels and strategies. Feminist organisations tend to foreground visible forms of advocacy, such as protests, petitions, and public campaigns. They have significantly contributed to legal reforms in Croatia, such as in the implementation of the Istanbul convention, femicide recognition and changes to domestic violence law. Activists also point to historical feminist contributions to abortion rights and gender equality legislation.

Social workers, particularly through CASW and the Chamber of Social Work, have influenced policies more through institutional participation, such as working groups during Croatia's EU accession.

Interestingly, some social workers hesitate to label their efforts as "advocacy" despite engaging in activities that fit the definition, such as media work, multi-sectoral meetings, and legislative input, implementing professional social work perspectives into legislation.

Yet, some social workers actively and deliberately engage in advocacy, particularly through educational programs - both for social work students and employees of other public institutions - demonstrating clear purpose and professional integrity.

> "*I'm not here to tell you how are you going to do your job. I'm here to be the voice of my community. I'm here to be the voice of this. This is real. You cannot silence this because I'm just transferring information and the voice"*(Activist and Social Worker).

Finally, the question of activism revealed a complex relationship between professional identity and political engagement. While feminist organisations are inherently activist spaces, some members hesitate to self-identify as 'activists' or 'human rights defenders', often because they compare themselves to others they perceive as having done more.

In social work, activist identity varies significantly by background and generation. Some practitioners see activism and professional social work as mutually reinforcing; one participant active in queer-feminist circles and employed in the public welfare system, viewed her activism as inseparable from her work. Others take a more cautious stance, separating personal beliefs from professional roles. Nonetheless, strong identification with human rights, especially among young social workers, is evident:

> *"I'm a social worker because I believe in justice and I believe in human rights with all my heart. And yeah, I consider myself a human rights defender"* (Social Worker: previously working in public social welfare system, now working in an NGO).

This illustrates the deep connection and commitment to human rights and activism within social work practice, highlighting a shared ethical foundation across both fields - even if their forms of expression may differ.

4.3.2 Mutual Perceptions

Relating to the theme of 'Mutual Perceptions' the interviews revealed two sub-themes: *complex interplay of mutual perceptions* between feminist activists and social workers, and *tension and recognition*.

Mutual perception is described through the codes: *perception of the others as closed-off and uncooperative*, *practical approaches to GBV represent the main point of divergencies.* The sub-theme tension and recognition is described through the codes: *dissatisfaction and frustration on both sides*, *gaps in education*, *emotionally charged critiques*, *empathy and understanding*, *a shared desire for effective responses to GBV,* and *positive cases of collaboration.*

Feminist activists expressed deep dissatisfaction and concerns about the responses to GBV of public social workers, particularly in cases involving parental custody and domestic violence. They cited cases of children being wrongfully removed from their mothers based on the argument of "parental alienation"[7], even when fathers were abusive. Activists also accused social workers of being manipulated by perpetrators, minimizing domestic violence, treating it

[7] 'Parental Alienation' is a theory, often referred to in 'high-conflict separation' or divorce, suggesting that a child rejects one parent without legitimate justification. It explicitly does not apply to cases involving child abuse, such as sexual or physical violence. The concept is discussed very controversially and has faced strong criticism. Several arguments are evidently questioning the theory of parental alienation, for example, to mention just a few arguments, because it is lacking empirical validity or because it is not recognized in clinical classification systems. (Kruk & Harman, 2025)

merely as “high-conflict-divorce”, and failing to act in accordance with the Istanbul Convention.

> “*They minorize the domestic violence. They do not have equal procedures with fathers and mothers. They also, their practise is not united. In one case they do this and in other, like the same they do”* (Feminist Activist).

> “*And the first point was that they were always saying that the child has a right to both parents. Never mind that this other parent is violent and abusive. Abusive, sexual abusive. But the child must have two parents. It's the... The highest law”* (Feminist Activist).

In contrast, social workers expressed concern that certain feminist organisations focus too exclusively on survivors, without sufficient attention to the needs and perspectives of children. They also noted a perceived reluctance to acknowledge that women can be perpetrators as well, and that the victim - often assumed to be a woman - is not always unequivocally right. Additionally, a few social workers criticized feminist service providers for lacking consistent standards, regulation or unified guidance, suggesting that practices vary too widely between organisations.

Social workers described feeling unfairly criticized, particularly when activists publicly condemned their actions without understanding the institutional constraints under which they operate. Some felt feminists held unrealistic expectations or failed to grasp the limited power and status that social workers hold - especially as a largely female profession situated lower in the professional hierarchy.

From the activist side, frustration was linked to perceived impunity for social workers, as well as the belief that they lacked the training to adequately support survivors. Still, some feminists clearly recognised these constraints:

> “*They don't have so much power like NGOs and especially independent let's say feminists who can swear and to show their faces directly and point the fingers and to the president, prime minister etc”* (Feminist Activist).

Despite these tensions, many participants expressed mutual respect and understanding. Feminist activists acknowledged the emotional burden, immense workload, and institutional

constraints faced by social workers. The also recognised the complexity of the work and the fact that not all criticism could be directed at individuals.

> "*I think social workers are in a very bad situation, there are good social workers, and bad social workers, it's also something like in every profession, but I know some of them really do try a lot"* (Feminist Activist and Artist).

> "*I understand that they are overwhelmed and I think that their anger needs to be focused on the state, not on the other NGOs"* (Feminist Activist).

Similarly, social workers were aware of activists' frustrations and sometimes even shared them. One former public sector worker describes the struggle and frustration to maintain professional ideals in a system that makes in-depth work with service users nearly impossible:

> "*And especially when you are young, you have like some different point of view of the world and how things should be. And then you are a little bit disappointed and you just realise that you need to organise your time and that you can do what you can do. But you always know that it's not enough and that you don't have time to go deep. Maybe you go deep, but those are some cases. Because when you have 400 people, it's not manageable. And that's the reality"* (Social Worker, previously employed in the public social welfare system, now working in a NGO).

Both sides also identify gaps in education as a core issue. Feminist activists criticized the way domestic violence and concepts like parental alienation and high-conflict-divorce are taught in university, with some professors reportedly promoting problematic views - one being described as openly affiliated with Opus Dei. Activists argued that many social workers lack training in the psychology of trauma and victimization ("psychology of the victim"), making it harder for them to recognize abusive dynamics and approach survivors in a sensitive way.

On the other hand, some social workers themselves admitted that they did not feel adequately prepared by their formal education, and that opportunities for further (specialised) training are limited once they enter the field. Interestingly, two participants challenged this view, suggesting that social work education is adequate, but the failure to address GBV holistically derives only from limited resources or the lack of personal willingness.

A striking commonality between the two groups is their mutual perception of the others as closed-off and uncooperative. Both feminist activists and social workers express frustration

that the other side is unwilling to engage in dialogue and collaboration. This sentiment is accompanied by a shared sense of mistrust and defensiveness - each side feels unfairly criticised and positions itself as misunderstood. There is a noticeable mirroring in how both sides describe feeling seen as "enemies". In effect, both groups reflect similar concerns and grievances, yet direct them at each other, reinforcing a cycle of suspicion and distance rather than fostering understanding or solidarity.

It became clear that many of these tensions are shaped by structural and systemic limitations of the social work profession. However, some interviewees pointed out that mutual understanding and collaboration depends very much on individuals, on both sides. Despite broader conflicts, mutual understanding and collaboration is not only possible, but it already exists. Experiences of existing cooperation will be analysed in the following section.

4.3.3 Experiences of Cooperation

The theme of 'Experiences in Cooperation' revealed that cooperation is experienced not only between social work and feminist movements, but also with *other public institutions*, *within social work institutions*, and *across feminist movements*. These three areas of cooperation represent the sub-themes.
Cooperation with other public institutions was described with codes: *structural hierarchies and top-down decision-making processes, insufficient communication across sectors.*
Cooperation between feminist movements and social work was described with codes: *'mixed feelings' and experience, often highly person-dependent, significant improvement compared to the past, examples of meaningful cooperation, social work practice is not changing, feminist organisations remain critical and closed off.*

While the primary research aim was to investigate experiences of cooperation between feminist activism and social work in Croatia, the interviews revealed that these discussions naturally expanded to include cooperation with other key actors - particularly state institutions such as the police, the judiciary, and health care system. These dynamics are important for understanding the broader context in which cooperation between feminist activists and social workers unfolds.

Feminist activists reported frequent use of social and mainstream media to support advocacy efforts, especially for public campaigns, petitions, and protest mobilisations. One organisation in particular was cited as highly successful in cooperating with media outlets to gain visibility.

In contrast, media engagement is less common in social work. However, one social worker explained her intention behind using media to raise public awareness about GBV and provide survivors with information about accessing help.

At the international level, some feminist organisations collaborate with European institutions, especially through grants and funding programmes. These transnational connections allow a degree of autonomy from Croatian national or local government funding, which in turn enables more independent advocacy work.

> "*We do not take funding from either local government or the national government. It gives us this leverage for the advocacy work, of course. Even though, in many ways, we are filling in the gaps of the public system"* (Feminist Activist).

For social workers, international cooperation usually takes place on an institutional level, through participation in European projects and policy harmonisation efforts, especially during Croatia's accession to the EU, but also in joint European projects, also together with NGOs.

Feminist activists frequently engage with public institutions at the educational or political level, providing training for police officers or legal professionals and holding meetings with politicians. Several interviewees highlight the importance of taking an educational rather than patronising approach when interacting with these institutions. Still, cooperation is often highly person-dependent and thus inconsistent. Some Activists described successful collaboration with individual politicians, while also noting that institutional change remains limited.

Social workers, especially those in leadership roles, reported closer institutional collaboration with state bodies. One social worker emphasised the value of trust-based relationship with city authorities, which enable autonomy and credibility. She also described routine contact with ministries, although she noted that communication is often one-sided, with social workers providing information rather than shaping policy.

While several participants noted strong cooperation in joint training efforts with the police, criticism was also expressed - particularly concerning breaches of survivor confidentiality by the judiciary and police. Two social work institutions described non-hierarchical, productive

cooperation with law enforcement, particularly in education initiatives. However, structural hierarchies and top-down decision-making processes were described as major obstacles by field social workers, especially in implementing policies created without input from practitioners:

> "*You know, we could be screaming at some point, what are you doing? This is completely... Doesn't have any sense in real world. And then you have the absurdity that you need to implement it. Can you imagine, then, the professionals that need to implement something that is completely absurd, that was being taken down from this kind of political systemic kind of level? Then you have to live it"* (Social Worker and Activist).

Activists similarly expressed concerns about being treated as symbolic participants rather than equal partners in official meetings with governmental institutions and policymaking processes.

While both social workers and activists acknowledged some successful collaborations, they agreed that better communication across all sectors is essential.

Cooperation within social work institutions was less frequently mentioned. Some participants identified professional bodies such as the CASW or the Chamber of social workers as possible channels for advocacy. One interviewee emphasized the importance of professional courage in accordance with the profession's ethical code.

Within the feminist movement, cooperation was generally described as strong and mutually supportive. However, one activist highlighted generational tensions, with older feminist groups sometimes feeling threatened by new, queer-inclusive initiatives. She advocated for mutual learning and solidarity rather than division, emphasizing that feminism today must be adaptable and inclusive.

Experiences of direct cooperation between social work and feminist activism were mixed. Several participants reported that collaboration has significantly improved over time, especially compared to earlier periods when NGOs were less recognized and social work was still more closed-up. Older social workers particularly noted that the general opening of state institutions to civil society has enabled better joint work.

> "*But today, it seems like the situation is different. Things are improving and the collaboration is better. [...] So, today things are getting better, but it's a long process, not with a good beginning"* (Social Worker).

A notable example of successful cooperation was the multidisciplinary teams established during Croatia's EU accession, which brought together social work, health services, the judiciary, police, and NGOs to address various topics, including violence against women. Although these teams were effective they eventually stopped meeting. Another example includes coordinated advocacy by both public and non-public shelters in response to privacy violations by the judiciary and police. Their joint plea resulted in a new decree issued by the Supreme Court, strengthening protocols for handling sensitive survivor information. Feminist NGOs also reported good cooperation in providing training for social workers, sometimes mandated, yet ultimately perceived positively. One activist explained:

> "*If we are looking at it as a pilot program, let's say it worked, let's continue it [...] let's try to find two hours to learn something more that will help our common target group, our women in this society"* (Feminist Activist, talking about an educational programme for social workers issued by the NGO she was working for).

Almost all interviewees described productive cooperation when addressing concrete survivor needs, such as securing safe shelter placements. Relating to advocacy efforts, in some cases, social workers and feminist activists mutually exchanged knowledge and advice, especially when social workers could contribute anonymously - highlighting concerns about fear of speaking out within institutional contexts. There is notable overlap between the two sectors: social workers often work in feminist organisations and vice versa. One interviewee, embodying both roles emphasized how activism and professional practice enrich one another.

However, barriers remain. Some feminist activists felt they are often the ones initiating cooperation and that social workers, even after participating in training sessions, fail to change their practices.

> "*Sometimes when we had education, then they would come, but it was very difficult to see change in their perspective or in their opinions [...] they were listening, they participated, but then in the end you saw that they're not going to change their way of work"* (Feminist Activist).

Other activists saw corporations as limited to a few progressive and open minded individuals. On the other hand social workers expressed frustration that feminist organisations remain critical and closed off towards them and especially towards the public system, hindering constructive collaboration. These critiques closely connect to the limitations and barriers to cooperation, which will be examined in the following section.

4.3.4 Limitations to Cooperation

The sub-themes of 'Limitations to Cooperation' are: *lack of trust, mutual blaming, divergent approaches, structural constraints* and *poor communication.*
Mutual blaming is described with codes: *misunderstandings, prejudices, interpersonal dynamics* and *mismatched expectations.*
Divergent approaches are described with codes: *deficiencies in social work education*
Structural constraints are described with codes: *overwhelming workload, feelings of powerlessness, lack of (financial) resources* and *rural-urban disparities.*

The interviews revealed a range of limitations to cooperation between feminist activists and social workers. Many of these barriers are linked to previously discussed critiques and experiences, including divergent approaches, lack of trust, insufficient education, interpersonal dynamics, and, most notably, overwhelming workloads.

Among the most persistent challenges are divergencies in approaches, particularly concerning custody decisions, the concept of so-called 'parental alienation' and 'high-conflict-divorces'. These areas continue to impede collaboration. Some feminist activists further highlight that frequent reports of re-vicimization and institutional violence from survivors reduce the willingness to cooperate with state institutions.

Deficiencies in social work education - previously discussed - resurface here as well. Participants across both groups criticize insufficient focus on feminism, critical social work, and human rights in social work training. These educational gaps also contribute to differing approaches and insufficient understanding of domestic violence, further straining cooperation.

Lack of trust emerges as a central theme on both sides. Both sides claim that "the others" have no trust in them, in a way victimizing themselves. Especially from the perspective of social

workers, lack of trust of feminist activists towards them is described as a major barrier to initiating collaboration.

Both sides also accuse the other of being closed off or reluctant to collaborate, resulting in a cycle that reinforces distance. As several participants noted, cooperation often depends on the presence of particularly open-minded and progressive individuals rather than systematic or institutional effort. Social workers across various roles - from fieldworkers to those in leadership - stress that excessive workload is among the most significant structural barriers to cooperation. Feminist activists are also keenly aware of this issue:

> "*Another, more problematic, I would say, obstacle is that they are overwhelmed with their job."* (Feminist Activist)

> "*Too much workload. Here, specifically in Croatia, it's crazy. At some point you can have one social worker that has the constituency of, I don't know, 100 people, not 20, not 30, 100, 20 families, 30 families. I mean, it's crazy. So how can we expect for them to keep in mind, to have everything this at place in heart, and to find cracks in the system and everything that I can tell you now here. I really need to, you know, have this kind of perspective and remember myself that it's not possible, not in this kind of system"* (Social Worker and Activist).

The interviews also revealed limitations that are not directly linked to the previously described critiques, including poor communication, mismatched expectations, feelings of powerlessness, lack of financial resources, and rural-urban disparities.

Participants across both groups describe a severe lack of spaces to engage with one another and poor inter-institutional communication.

> "*And then, you know, it's, yeah, still many things to be done, especially on the part of the implementation of the laws and also regarding the monitoring of what's being done, how it's being done, connection between the institutions, police, law, Justice system, health system, educational system. It all has to be much better connected"* (Feminist Activist).

Some social workers also report feeling misunderstood by feminist actors, particularly around accusations of prejudice. On the other hand, on the activist side there is frustration about being expected to perform tasks that should be the state's responsibility.

Both sides express feelings of powerlessness and of not being taken seriously - either by each other or by the wider system. Feminist actors describe being invited to state meetings merely as a formality:

> *"members of the NGO scene of the civil society organizations are invited to take part in different kind of working groups of ministries and so on, like public bodies, governmental bodies. But, you know, so very often we are like alibi. Yeah, we have them, but, you know, you actually can't do anything. Your hands are tied"* (Feminist Activist).

Similarly, social workers describe feeling marginalized and without the power to enact meaningful change:

> *"So I think that very often they are really in such situation that they are experiencing moral injury and not feeling [...] that they have a strength of power to change. [...] Like, yeah, feeling powerless and that especially within the social welfare system. [...] Of course, if they are powerless, how can they empower clients? If they are as a female professionals marginalized, how can they recognize female needs and empower females? So I think this is a really very catchy situation"* (Representative of Social Work Perspective).

Additionally, one field social worker, unlike the other interviewees, based in a rural area, cites geographic isolation as a major barrier to cooperation:

> "*So, we know about those organisations, however, there is no cooperation in this field. We are too far away and it is simply not feasible. [...] I am interested in some feminist associations, but how to apply it in my work, it is almost impossible, especially in the area where I work"* (Social Worker, rural area).

Despite all these structural barriers and professional divides, the most persistent issue may be a mutual culture of blaming and shaming, which feeds mutual mistrust and inhibits real dialogue. While social workers often feel more frequently blamed, frustration is present across both groups. This is sharply summarized by a participant who navigates in both fields:

> "*Because they're pointing fingers. It's a westside story, you know? Pointing fingers, putting the blame. maybe out It's a lot about, you know, the radical, in quotes, the radical feminists are pointing fingers into the bureaucratic, systemic, cold approach*

towards the public institution workers and the public institution workers are pointing fingers at, oh, you're too radical [...] But the main impression here for me is constant fight. Constant fight and not hearing each other" (Social Worker and Activist).

Ultimately, the interviews underscore that meaningful cooperation cannot take root in a climate dominated by blame and defensiveness. As the next section will explore, overcoming these narratives and fostering conditions for mutual understanding and trust is essential for future collaboration between feminist activism and social work in Croatia.

5.4.5 Potential and Necessary Conditions for Cooperation

Potential and necessary conditions for Cooperation are described through sub-themes: *inevitability of cooperation* and *communication as the foundation of cooperation*.
Inevitability of cooperation is argued through codes: *shared goals and complementary strengths, higher effectiveness of collective efforts, cooperation benefits survivors* and *added value from both sides*.

The sub-theme *communication as the foundation of cooperation* includes codes: *dialogue and trust building*, *knowledge exchange, favorable political and institutional conditions* (stable system with sufficient and transparent funding, feminist friendly political climate), and *defined structures for cooperation* (time, location, organisation).

Both activists and social workers recognize a significant potential in collaboration. Across the interviews, there is strong agreement that advocacy efforts are more effective when they are collective and that complementary contributions from each side can lead to better outcomes for survivors of GBV.

"*I would have to say we cannot work without each other. We are needed to each other [...] we are all in the same picture but just different parts of this puzzle"* (Feminist Activist).

"*The NGO sector is actually very important for this statutory social work, because they are eager to do and have skills to do some action and activism that social workers don't know or don't feel freedom to do. So, they are a very important asset in social welfare, because of the things that they promote, and these are the same things that social*

workers also work for, but not in the advocacy part. So, they are a very valuable asset" (Social Worker).

There is also a shared understanding that, ultimately, it is the survivors who benefit most from meaningful cooperation. Therefore participants frequently emphasized that both groups work towards the same goal: improving the lives and safety of GBV survivors, and reducing GBV through prevention.

Social workers often described the feminist sector as an indispensable complement to their own efforts. They highlighted the freedom activists have to speak out, to challenge systems, and to push for structural changes - roles that social workers, often embedded in state institutions, find difficult to assume.

"*I do believe it's [feminist activism] a supporting hand towards social work practices, generally and in institutions"* (Social Worker).

Feminist organisations were also acknowledged for their preventive work, but especially for the support services they provide to survivors, as public services are often not sufficient for the number of GBV survivors and social services often lack time and resources.

While not all feminist activists seem to recognize what they might gain from cooperating with social workers, some acknowledged valuable contributions from the profession. In particular, they pointed to the institutional legitimacy that social workers bring - especially in court cases, where judges are more likely to take social workers seriously. Activists also recognized the role of social work in understanding what state resources exist and where gaps need to be filled by NGOs, allowing for more holistic, effective, and sustainable support.

Both sides highlighted that favorable political and institutional conditions are essential conditions for cooperation. Participants stressed the importance of a stable system with sufficient and transparent funding and a political climate that supports feminist and social justice work. Some activists voiced hope that, in a less hostile political environment, social workers could become more involved in activism and advocacy.

Furthermore some interviewees argue that structural support is needed to enable collaboration: foreseen and scheduled time for cooperation meetings, appropriate staffing, and institutional mandates to engage in cooperative work. Resource availability was also framed as a condition.

Without proper funding and staffing, both NGOs and public services are too overwhelmed to prioritize cooperation.

For meaningful cooperation, it is also fundamental to move from mistrust to dialogue, enabling trust and finally alliance.

> "*And if we are blaming each other, we are really failing"* (Representative for Social Work).

Across all interviews, the most consistently expressed condition for cooperation was dialogue. Building trust through open communication and direct encounters was seen as a necessary basis for sustained collaboration. Participants repeatedly stressed the need for mutual understanding, facilitated through dialogue and concrete joint activities.

> "*It needs direct collaboration and direct getting together and working on something"* (Social Worker).

> "*I try to give perspective to each side. Creating a dialogue"* (Social Worker and Activist).

> "*I know that when social workers had the chance to meet persons who are working in NGOs and who are directly involved in feminist movement in Croatia that they changed their opinions, they changed their view of us in a way that okay we are really working on the same topic, on the same page"* (Feminist Activist).

Knowledge exchange - especially understanding what services and support each side offers - was mentioned as a practical benefit of these encounters. Roundtables, workshops, and protest collaboration were seen as useful formats to build mutual recognition.

> "*NGOs see this problem and are creating projects and activities and roundtables and protests that are focused also on social workers with the message let's cooperate, we have the knowledge, we have the experience, we will share that with you and you will give us your insight from the inside of the institution, what can we ask you, what we [cannot] ask you, [...] that kind of cooperation is needed"* (Feminist Activist).

Some interviewees acknowledged that progress may be slow and tied to broader societal changes. A generational shift among social workers and activists was noted as promising, with younger professionals often more open to feminist ideas and interdisciplinary collaboration. At

the same time, participants noted ongoing societal resistance, especially in rural areas, which makes the process of transformational change more complex and requires more patience.

A new theme that emerged during the first phase of coding - but could not be further explored due to the scope and word count of this thesis - was the perception of recent threats to women's rights. Several participants expressed concern about growing backlash, not only globally but also in Croatia, where women's rights are increasingly challenged by conservative politics and society. These developments have led some activists to emphasize the urgency of renewed resistance and collective action.

> *"I think that regarding to everything that is happening not just in Croatia but in the world also it's really fucking time that we start to make some changes from the day one, from the beginning of our lives"* (Feminist Activist).

One interviewee highlighted the power of art as a medium of activism for its accessibility and reach. Art, she explained, is not only a tool for visibility and disruption, but also a way to translate complex messages into a language that resonates across different social and geographic contexts in Croatia.

> "*And being an artist makes me visible, especially since I'm mostly a performance artist. [...] Everyone can use art. Art gives you a powerful tool kit. You don't have to be an artist to fight with art. [...] It's visible. It's loud. It can create good content and transform it into a language which I think is the key. Because academic language, language of people who live in Zagreb is very very much different from language that can be understood in other parts of Croatia. So you need the right language to transmit your message"* (Artist and Activist).

In light of these challenges, some participants envisioned a future of collaboration and resistance that is not only determined and urgent, but also grounded in joy, creativity, and community. As one activist poignantly put it:

> "*I always would say I don't want to participate in a revolution where we don't sing and dance, you know"*(Feminist Activist).

4.4 Limitations

This research has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The sample is small and may reflect a selection bias - particularly among social workers, as those who agreed to participate are likely already engaged with human rights, critical social work and reflective practice. As a result, more critical or disengaged voices may be underrepresented. While the systematic review indicated that questions related to intersectionality would be important to explore further, the scheduled timeframes for interviews did not allow for focused discussion on this topic. Although many interviews exceeded their planned duration, time constraints still limited the opportunity for follow-up and deeper exploration of certain responses. Moreover, the limited scope of this thesis did not permit a thorough analysis of newly emerging issues beyond the initially defined key themes, including topics such as recent threats to women's rights and self-perception. My position as a non-Croatian researcher presents both advantages and drawbacks. While my outsider perspective may offer some distance from local biases, it also limits my contextual understanding. Moreover, my own professional background as a social worker with advocacy experience and a solution-oriented mindset inevitably influenced my interpretation of the data. Finally, linguistic factors also posed challenges. Interviews were conducted in English or translated from Croatian, which may have affected nuance and clarity.

4.5 Discussion

The findings indicate complex dynamics of cooperation, not only between social workers and activists, but also with other actors. Collaborations with public institutions such as the police and judicial system, political bodies, or (social) media are experienced in different ways, depending on context and perspective. Cooperation between social workers and feminist activists is marked by evident tensions, but also by promising common ground. Experiences of collaboration between the two fields vary widely across both groups, influenced by the specific settings, institutional contexts, and notably also by the individuals involved.

The qualitative research identified several factors that hinder cooperation. The most important ones include: lack of trust and dialogue, divergent approaches, and the overwhelming workload of social workers. Contrasting opinions on strategies and approaches can be attributed to the professional cultures of both groups. These tensions not only hinder cooperation but also provoke heavy unconstructive criticism, further reinforcing mistrust and a lack of constructive

dialogue, which again ultimately deepens the barriers of cooperation. However, from an external perspective, these challenges do not seem impossible to address and overcome. Another notable barrier is attributed to structural obstacles, which appears to be more difficult to resolve: under-resourcing and overwhelming workload in social work represents a key challenge for closer cooperation of social workers with activists. Without reducing their workload, social workers are unlikely to have the capacity to engage in broader advocacy or any other efforts related to activist activities. Therefore, to effectively advocate for service users, social workers must first be empowered and supported to advocate for themselves.

One theme that emerged as more significant than initially expected was education. While this thesis primarily focuses on social work practice, it became clear that education forms the crucial baseline for implementing a human rights based approach. The research found that human rights and feminist perspectives are insufficiently integrated into social work education in Croatia. This gap significantly impacts practice, as social workers lacking human rights training are less equipped to apply these principles effectively. Strengthening education and training is therefore essential for improving cooperation and advancing a rights-based approach.

Notably, when it comes to mutual perceptions of one another and barriers to collaboration, both sides essentially mirror each other's frustrations: each perceives the other as closed-minded and adversarial. This mutual attribution of defensiveness and mistrust highlights the depth of relational challenges that need to be addressed. Despite these tensions, a hopeful and constructive threat runs through the interviews. Both feminist activists and social workers also express a genuine willingness and openness to overcome blame and mistrust, recognizing that their goals are fundamentally aligned. They are aware that addressing GBV holistically and advancing women's rights require joint efforts. Importantly, there is awareness among both sides that meaningful cooperation will be a gradual process requiring patience and sustained engagement. Still, the foundation for broad collaboration already exists, evidenced by some existing partnerships and individual actors who successfully bridge the divide. These existing collaborations offer valuable models that could be scaled up to broader levels.

4.6 Conclusion

This qualitative research explored the landscape of cooperation between feminist activism and social work in addressing GBV in Croatia, using semi-structured key informant interviews with both groups and qualitative data analysis. Beyond examining the dynamics and mutual perceptions between feminist activists and social workers, the overarching aim was to identify common ground, as well as factors and conditions that could strengthen collaboration between the two fields - ultimately with the goal of improving support for survivors of GBV.

Despite a clear recognition of common ground, a shared commitment for change, and willingness to cooperate between the two groups, limitations to cooperation have been diverse and evident. The key recommendations to overcome these barriers and strengthen meaningful cooperation are presented below.

The heavy workload and lack of resources in social work represent a complex and persistent challenge for cooperation that requires deeper reflection, creative solutions, and concrete efforts. As previously discussed, addressing this issue begins with social workers advocating for themselves. That could in a first step happen within their own professional structures. Several participants from the field of social work emphasized the potential role of institutions such as the Croatian Association of Social Work and the Chamber of Social Workers in supporting advocacy and cooperation efforts. These bodies, embedded within the social welfare system, could serve as important platforms for raising these concerns and initiating change. Therefore, social workers should consider collectively, with colleagues, to engage with these institutions in a first step - before expanding their self-advocacy to the broader social welfare system, public institutions, and political decision-making structures.

The interviews revealed concrete pathways for mutual support, grounded in dialogue and mutual recognition. Feminist activists, drawing on their advocacy expertise, could support social workers in their efforts by e.g. offering innovative tools - such as anonymous channels - to help them safely raise concerns within their institutions. This would strengthen social workers' capacity for activist actions. In turn, social workers, given their formal recognition and position within the public system, could raise demands at the institutional level to support the efforts of feminist organisations.

Developing stronger pathways for mutual support, complementary efforts and meaningful cooperation between social workers and feminist activists, will ultimately build sustainable alliances that positively impact the lives of survivors and advance women’s rights. In order to reach this goal, the most important recommendation is to begin with building trust through

open and respectful dialogue. Trust and respectful dialogue foster deeper understanding of each other's positions, helps clarify differing opinions and approaches, and facilitates knowledge exchange, as well as mutual learning and growth. Importantly, such understanding does not mean avoiding critique, quite the opposite, both sides need to remain open to constructive critique rather than responding defensively. Social workers and feminist activists should create space for dialogue, discussion, and constructive, respectful criticism grounded in the shared commitment of change towards gender equality and ending GBV.

In summary, the research paints a nuanced picture to answer the research questions: while conflicts and divergent perspectives persist, there is a recognition of common goals and the necessity of working together to sustainably and holistically address GBV and women's rights. Building on existing cooperation, addressing educational shortcomings, and fostering trust through open dialogue are essential steps forward. The process will be long and demanding, but the mutual willingness for change and the identification of practical conditions for collaboration provide a hopeful foundation for progress.

5. Discussion

Despite alignment in core values and aims between feminist activism and social work, a gap in social work theory and practice is evident

The findings from both qualitative research and systematic review demonstrate that the social work profession and feminist movements are deeply aligned in their core values, particularly in their shared commitment to human rights and social justice. However, these values are expressed and pursued through notably different approaches. Feminist movements tend to more visible and confrontational actions of advocacy - such as public campaigning, protests, and petitions - positioning themselves as watchdogs that challenge systems of oppression and shift societal norms. These strategies and their structural focus was consistently observed in both research strands.

In contrast, social workers are primarily engaged in institutionalized care, and their advocacy is mostly confined to formal, bureaucratic systems. Their engagement with human rights often remains at the institutional level, is limited by their roles, professional frameworks, and systematic constraints. These findings about social work derive primarily from qualitative research.

While social work, in theory, is grounded in a human rights framework, both research methods clearly support the critique outlined at the beginning of this thesis: that social workers struggle to fully implement a rights-based approach in everyday practice.The gap between social work' theoretical commitments to human rights and practical realities is evident and a critical concern (Androff, 2018; Carvalho et al., 2025; Gatenio Gabel, 2024; Ife et al., 2022; McPherson & Abell, 2020; Reynaert et al., 2021; Staub-Bernasconi, 2016).

This theory-practice discrepancy emerged as a central theme in the qualitative interviews, while the systematic review highlighted a similar recurring pattern: social workers rarely address broader societal injustices on a structural level. This divergence underscores the need for stronger alignment with human rights, not only in values, but in practice.

Feminist critiques further underscore social work's failure to implement a genuine rights-based approach

Two main criticisms emerge clearly from both research strands. First, feminist movements criticise the hierarchical relationships between social workers and service users. Secondly, they claim that the profession remains silent and inactive in addressing 'social problems' at structural and political levels.

The first critique echoes the principle of user-participation, one of the core ideas for a rights-based approach to social work practice (Ife et al., 2022; Reynaert et al., 2021). Ife et al. (2022) and Reynaert et al. (2021) urge social workers to move away from viewing service users solely as passive recipients of care and to instead recognise them as active participants and rights holders.

The second critique aligns with arguments in critical social work, which frame 'social problems' as structural inequalities and injustices that often arise from systemic rights violations (Ife et al., 2022; Reynaert et al., 2021). This understanding of systematic inequalities forms the basis for addressing problems on structural levels, as according to the research findings feminist movements expect from social work. Scholars such as Androff (2018) and Reynaert (2021) stress the importance of collectivizing individual experiences to expose patterns of structural injustice and to advocate for systemic change. The research findings on feminist critiques of social work practice from both research strands demonstrate and confirm that social workers are not sufficiently applying these principles of critical social work and rights based approach.

Research shows how tensions of social work mandates are reflected in practice

A third key critique from feminist movements towards social work, evident in qualitative research and systematic review, concerns social work's "complicity" with state systems, which feminist activists often argue uphold oppressive systems. This criticism is closely tied to social work's statutory role. The tensions between social work mandates - statutory and activist - emerged as a recurring theme, especially in qualitative research.

The challenges that come with these dual roles are also widely discussed in literature on social work theory and practice, a point also raised in the introduction of this thesis. Scholars such as Staub-Bernasconi (2016) and Gatenio Gabel (2024) argue that the activist or 'third mandate' of social work needs to be taken seriously and not be overlooked. That social workers must make use of the professional autonomy that allows them to challenge even the system they work in. At the same time, they also acknowledge the conflicts and tensions that come with those two mandates (Blok and Hartman, 2016; Gatenio Gabel, 2024).

The conflicts within the social work profession that arise from its different mandates are not solvable - they will persist as they are inherent to the profession. Social workers must learn how to balance them and understand when to embody which role.

Addressing the theory-practice gap through cooperation with civil society activism

This thesis argues that these critiques, which clearly mirror the gap between theory and practice in social work, could be addressed through meaningful cooperation between activism and social work, strengthening social work's advocacy and political engagement. Therefore, the research of this thesis aimed to understand whether cooperation with activist movements can strengthen social works activist mandate. This question is reflected in the theme of 'potential of cooperation', which emerged primarily from qualitative research but was also evident in the systematic review.

The systematic review showed that despite heavy critiques, most feminist movements recognize social work as a potential ally in promoting and advancing women's rights, gender equality and social justice. Likewise, in the qualitative research, a shared understanding between feminist activists and social workers of the potential of cooperation was found: participants from both groups agreed that the two fields have complementary strengths and acknowledged the effectiveness of collective efforts that will ultimately benefit survivors of gender-based violence.

The recognition of the potential of cooperation aligns with the work of Noble (2015) and Thompson (2002), who call for re-politicization of social work through renewed engagement with contemporary social protest movements that pursue shared objectives. They argue that cooperation with social movements, such as feminist movements, is not only promising but urgently needed to strengthen social work's advocacy efforts.

When analysing the 'potential of cooperation', the qualitative research indicated that feminist movements contribute political independence, advocacy strategies and experience - again reflecting arguments of Noble (2015) and Thompson (2002), as well as aligning with findings of the systematic review. When comparing the strategies of feminist movements identified in both research strands, it becomes evident that similar strategies are used by feminist activists in Croatia and those analysed in the systematic review. In Croatia, feminist movements primarily emphasize advocacy, political activism, empowerment and the creation of support systems that are either alternative to or complement the public support systems. These are also among the most prevalent strategies observed in the feminist movements analysed in the systematic review. Additionally, the use of social media is a common tool for both Croatian feminist movements and those included in the review. In terms of contributions to collaboration, findings from qualitative research also suggest that social work, on the other hand, can play an important role by contributing its institutional and professional legitimacy when addressing issues at systemic and political levels.

Based on Thompson (2002) and Nobles (2015) ideas about the necessary collaboration between social work and activist movements, the research investigated in the dynamics and relationships between these two fields to understand how such cooperation can be strengthened. Since the systematic review revealed that influence mostly flows from feminist movements towards social work, it primarily captured critique, perspectives and influence coming from feminist side. Therefore, the qualitative research aimed to give voice to both sides in order to gain an understanding of the dynamics. Including perspectives from both groups created an indirect dialogue and provided in-depth insights into the professional realities on each side.

The complexity of these dynamics is evident in both research strands. While the qualitative research, through its focus on mutual perspectives, highlighted a complex interplay of how feminist activists and social workers perceive each other, mutuality was largely absent in the

systematic review. Still, similar patterns in the described dynamics can be recognized, especially the fact that the relationships are marked by both tension and recognition. Although recognition of social work was less evident in the systematic review, in the qualitative research mutual recognition emerged as a clear theme.

In both research findings, divergencies in approaches emerged as one of the main themes influencing the relationship between feminist activists and social workers, consequently impacting cooperation. In qualitative research, practical approaches to GBV represent the primary point of divergence as well as a key point of criticism from both sides.
Additionally, the qualitative research - which aimed to capture both sides - revealed that social workers feel that feminist activists criticize them in a deconstructive way and are not open to cooperation, often because activists tend to be more distanced from the public system.
This finding from the qualitative research can be interpretively connected to the systematic review, where criticism of social work is frequent and harsh: had the social work perspective been included there, it might have confirmed what social workers expressed in the qualitative research.

Referring to experiences of cooperation and its limitations, only the qualitative research provides deeper insights, particularly given the goal of understanding dynamics in a bi-direcitonal way. The findings on cooperation between social work and feminist activism in Croatia are very context-specific and therefore cannot be directly compared or aligned with the findings of the systematic review. However, it is important to highlight that both groups identified structural hierarchies and top-down decision-making processes within state institutions and insufficient communication across different public sectors as problematic.The interviews revealed very personal experiences of cooperation that often depended on individual relationships.
The identification of limiting factors to cooperation is also restricted to the qualitative research findings, due to the reason that the systematic review predominantly presents a one-directional critical perspective of social work, along with implications aimed at social work rather than collaborative approaches. To strengthen cooperation, it is crucial first to understand what limits it, and this understanding must come from both sides. The main limiting factors - recognized by both social workers and feminist activists - include lack of trust; mutual blaming, misunderstandings, and prejudices, divergent approaches, overwhelming workload, poor communication, and deficiencies in social work education. These limitations are also rooted in

conceptual differences in how certain social work phenomena - such as parental alienation - are constructed and understood. Disagreements over whose interpretation is accepted reflect forms of epistemic injustice, both testimonial or hermeneutical, where experiences are either dismissed or lack shared meaning (Anyango et al., 2025).

Besides mistrust, blaming and lack of communication, one of the most outstanding limitations to cooperation recognized by both groups is the immense and overwhelming workload of social workers. This theme recurs throughout all interviews and clearly must be addressed.

Furthermore, although the research focused on social work practice, insufficient education and training for social workers also emerged as a recurrent topic in the qualitative research. This contributes to conflicting approaches in practice and limits cooperation between social workers and feminist activists. While these issues are not reflected in the systematic review, they are important findings that should not be overlooked.

Despite these limitations, evidence for positive cases of cooperation can be found in both systematic review and qualitative research. Findings from both research methods demonstrate that successful cases of collaboration exist, and especially in qualitative research participants emphasized the need for more of such positive cooperation. This leads to the final question: identifying necessary conditions for meaningful cooperation. This question was addressed primarily through the qualitative research, although the systematic review also indicated some relevant conditions for cooperation.

The qualitative research identified key conditions such as dialogue and trust building, knowledge exchange, favorable political and institutional conditions, and defined structures for cooperation. Among these dialog and trust building emerged as the most crucial condition. This emphasis on dialogue and trust is also reflected in the findings of the systematic review. While the systematic review expressed the need for constructive and respectful dialogue between the two groups more implicitly, it clearly showed that the absence of such dialogue negatively impacts the dynamics between feminist movements and social work.

The research findings provided insights into how dialogue and openness for developing joint strategies can be realized.

Findings from the qualitative research show that social workers expect feminist activists to address critique constructively and respectfully to foster discussions with useful outcomes. Interpreting the findings of the systematic review, this expectation can be confirmed: feminist movements should move beyond solely criticising and engage in dialogue and joint efforts. At the same time social work must be open to dialogue and cooperation, moving away from a defensive attitude.

Overall, the findings from both systematic review and the qualitative research reveal overlapping patterns. However, the qualitative research offered deeper insights into dynamics between social workers and feminist activists by shedding light on both sides and revealing additional themes. Yet, the systematic review provided important understanding of the broader dynamics between feminist movements and social work, highlighting the strong, albeit mostly one-directional, influence that feminist movements have had and still have on social work theory and practice - reflecting Thompson's (2002) theories on social movements and social work.

The Research findings suggest that meaningful cooperation between feminist movements and social work is both possible and necessary and it holds strong potential to advance women's rights and support social work in fulfilling its human rights mandate. Feminist movements bring political independence, and effective advocacy strategies, while social work can contribute institutional and professional legitimacy and practical experience within public systems. Cooperation becomes meaningful when rooted in trust-building, open dialogue, mutual respect, and a shared understanding of each other's roles and constraints. Such cooperation can lead to more impactful efforts, combining grassroots activism with institutional engagement to challenge structural inequalities and advocate for systemic change. In doing so, cooperation not only strengthens feminist advocacy but also re-politicizes social work, reinforcing its activist mandate and enabling the profession to implement a more rights-based approach in practice.

Limitations of the combined research

One of the key limitations of the combined research lies in the geographical scope of the systematic review, which focused primarily on feminist movements within the United States. A focus on European movements, or even Croatian movements would have created a stronger

link and more direct comparability with the findings of the qualitative research conducted in Croatia.

Additionally the research design could have benefited from combining other research methods, for example, by applying Jane McPherson's & Abell's (2020) model for measuring human rights in social work to the Croatian context prior to conducting the qualitative research. This model includes four index scales - Human Rights Exposure in Social Work, Human Rights Engagement in Social Work, Human Rights Lens in Social Work, and Human Rights Methods in Social Work. It has been discussed in the introduction of this thesis and also served as an evidence that activist and advocacy methods often fall short in daily social work practice across various national contexts. However, it has not yet been applied in Croatia, and the results for Croatia might have differed from those in countries where it has been used. Applying this model could have provided more precise insights into where the theory-practice gap in Croatian social work lies - perhaps within education or another scale of the model.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that cooperation between feminist movements and social work holds strong potential to strengthen advocacy, foster bottom-up strategies, and increase the effectiveness and holistic nature of daily interventions aimed at supporting survivors of gender-based violence. The research revealed that when social workers and feminist activists engage in collective efforts, both fields benefit from their complementary strengths, creating more impactful support systems and advocacy outcomes.

Importantly, this form of collaboration is not limited to feminist movements or to the issue of gender-based violence. Around the world, many marginalized communities - whether defined by race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, ability, or other discriminatory factors - have developed their own social protest movements or grassroots civil society initiatives. These movements are often already active in political advocacy and community-based resistance. Social workers must recognize and approach these actors, especially those embedded in the communities they serve. By listening to lived experiences, identifying their root causes in systemic injustice, and amplifying them social workers can holistically support these communities - therefore also the individual service users who are part of those communities - in addressing their demands on institutional, structural and political levels. This is one way how social work can follow a

bottom-up, participatory, and rights-based approach. However, cooperation with social protest movements is only one possible pathway to fulfil the profession's ethical commitment to human rights in practice. Social workers are called to be creative in finding additional possibilities to become a more activist profession and address systemic inequalities holistically, with the ultimate aim of achieving social justice.

The research further showed that limitations to cooperation - such as mistrust, divergent approaches or structural barriers - can be addressed if conditions such as open dialogue, mutual respect, and trust building are actively cultivated. If these conditions are met, cooperation with activist movements can serve as a powerful tool to re-politicize social work, bridge the theory-practice gap, and enable the profession to more effectively realize its human rights mandate.

The realisation of a rights-based approach is especially relevant in today's context, where human rights are increasingly under threat, in the face of the global rise of far-right ideologies, backlash against queer-feminist progress, ongoing violations of refugee rights, and the devastating impacts of war and displacement. In light of these realities, social work's ethical and professional mandate to protect and promote human rights becomes more urgent than ever, requiring renewed political engagement and stronger alliances with civil society.

Given the research findings and the challenges identified throughout this thesis, several recommendations can be made to strengthen the role of social work as a human rights profession and promote meaningful cooperation with activist movements.

1. Strengthening the practical and theoretical foundations for human rights in social work: The gap between the human rights mandate of social work and its practical implementation is not only rooted in practice, but also reveals underlying theoretical weaknesses. It is crucial to invest in practice-based research that investigates the reasons why human rights are not effectively applied in everyday social work. Especially international social work associations must take responsibility and initiative. This includes initiating and supporting research grounded in real-world practice, followed by collective action within the profession itself. While cooperation with activist movements has been identified as one promising pathway to strengthen the activist potential of social work, additional pathways must be explored to ensure that the profession can live up to its ethical commitment to social justice and human rights.

2. Acknowledge and address the structural limitations faced by social workers: Despite justified critiques regarding the insufficient implementation of human rights mandate in social work, it is essential to recognize the structural constraints that limit social workers' ability to act according to their ethical values, most notably the overwhelming workload and lack of resources. These limitations must not be overlooked in any discussion about enhancing social work's role in human rights advocacy. In order to advocate effectively for others, social workers must first be empowered themselves.
3. Implement rights-based approaches in daily practice: For social workers operating in the field, meaningful change begins with everyday action. Numerous frameworks and action plans for a rights-based approach in social work already exist and provide concrete guidance for implementation. It is a professional responsibility to engage with this knowledge, study the theoretical foundations, and apply them consistently in daily interventions and methods. Rights-based social work must not remain an abstract principle - it should be actively integrated into support services, casework, and community engagement. Especially in contexts marked by systemic injustice and human rights violations, adopting a rights-based lens is both a necessary and immediate step toward upholding the profession's ethical and political mandate.

This thesis is a call to social workers to take action, now and always!

- for the people we serve!

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		Methodology	Methodology	Methodology	Results		Results	Results	Results	Results	Results	Results		Results	Results
Author(s), Year, publisher, scientific field	**Keywords**	**Main Research Question or Research Aim**	**Methodology: Review / Empirical**	**If Empirical: research approach and sample**	**Name and Type/Characteristics of Movement**	**Location of movement**	**Social Problem Addressed by Movement**	**Strategies to Address the Problem**	**Demands (societal / political / legal)** **or Aims**	**Outcomes / Success**	**Reference to Human Rights / Women's Rights (legal) Framework**	**Relationship to Social Work**	**Critique of SW practice**	**Implications for Social Work Practice**	**Is, and if so how, is Social Work Addressing the Social Problem in Question?**

Hyatt, EG; McCoyd, JLM; Diaz, MF From Abortion Rights to Reproductive Justice: A Call to Action 2022 Feminist Inquiry in Social Work 2022, Vol. 37(2) 194-203	Reproductive Justice (RJ) Intersectionality 3 pillars of RJ Social Work (SW): indirect critique clear implications for practice	Role of SW in response to attacks on abortion care and RJ How can RJ inform SW Practice And why and how SW should implement a RJ framework into its practice	Review	no	RJ Movement developed from birth control to right to abortion movement into reproductive justice movement strong intersectional approach (esp. influence of BiPoC women, and women with disabilities) reproductive movement as broader social justice movement	U.S.	recent and current (2022) attacks on reproductive rights in the U. S. - violation of reproductive rights - abortion bans and restrictions - restrictions to self-determination of women - violations of HR because of no/limited access to abortion, and systematic, institutional discrimination RJ problem addressed: "isolation of abortion from other social justice issues" Intersectionality social justice for women of color across systems --> addressing systematic discrimination in the field of reproductive rights problem: only judicially protecting the right to choose hinders the expansion of access to abortion and other health care concerning reproductive rights	political activism and claims addressed at the health care system, social work, and judicial system	3 pillars of RJ have to be realised by different public actors, esp. health care system, but that is related to state financing pillars = rights - right to have a child - right to not have a child - right to parent children in safe and healthy environment --> reproductive rights have to go beyond the right to abortion / right to choose --> RJ is intersectional and addresses those three rights with the same importance Right to abortion has to be constitutional (again) but not in the field of privacy but as a right to gender equality, self-determination, body sovereignty --> aim: "moving away from individual "choice" about contraception and abortion and "rights" as the end game in reproductive health." Instead **focus on access, resources and the centering of collective experiences of marginalized peopl**e (eg. BiPoC, LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, people living in poverty)	realising an intersectional approach to reproductive rights	Pillars of RJ / Reprod. Rights - right to have a child - right to not have a child - right to parent children in safe and healthy environment structural and legislative policies enhance rights to body sovereignty and ability to make choices states responsibility to ensure these rights can be realised systematic, institutional discrimination in the field of reproductive rights	"RJ framework, rooted in feminist theories, is essential to social work's social justice ethics and praxis aims" (p. 195) all topics addressed by RJ are SW Topics SW Code of Ethics --> self-determination, dignity, worth, equity RJ essential to SW social justice ethics and praxis aims --> "RJ's core framework aligns with social work's ethical foundations"	"Profession is relatively silent" "few social workers are on the front lines advocating for RJ" (p. 195) indirect critique is that social work is not positioning itself (enough) for RJ and not advocating for it (enough) - Lack of response to attacks on reproductive rights - Lack of advocacy from Social Work --> Social workers should support RJ	"social workers have to respond to the systematic and ideological injustices found in reproductive health care" (p. 195) very clear implications (There is a list of implications for social workers, touching different areas of the profession - p. 199) very clear call for political action of social workers --> "social workers must advocate for legislative policies that support families	"Profession is relatively silent" "few social workers are on the front lines advocating for RJ" (p. 195)

Goulden, A; Kattari, SK; Slayter, EM; Norris, SE 2023 Feminist Inquiry in Social Work 2023, Vol. 38(4) 732-741	Disability justice Intersectionality --> interdependence of DJ and Feminism --> SW - implications learn from DJ and implement critical feminism in practice grounded in intersectional activism led by disabled people of color, queer and trans individuals, and working-class community	Disability Justice principles and critical feminism intersect and have to be be integrated in social work theory, research, education, and practice Aim: promote anti-ableist, inclusive, and intersectional social work praxis by aligning these two frameworks	Review (not empirical)	no	Disability Justice Movement in connection with feminism second wave disability movement: led by activists; varying social identities (including disabled ppl, queer, racializes, working-class) --> interlocking communities (Intersectionality!)	U.S. and Canada references to global implications	systems of power and oppression (parallels of Fem. and DJ) intersectional discrimination	Disability justice framework - 10 principles --> 4 principles are especially connected to feminism disability justice as a form of critical feminism	intersectional lens; combine feminism and disability movement recognizing the interdependence of complex realities away from care idea but to disabled ppl leading and mutual support "DISMANTLING WHITE CIS-GENDER HETEROSEXUAL NON-DISABLED NORMATIVITY" (p. 736) --> Collective Liberation!!!	evaluation of intersectional, anti-capitalist, and anti-ableist frameworks in social work raising awareness of intersectionality of ableism, racism, gender, and class Promotion of values of interdependence, mutual aid, and collective liberation Practical examples of community care	References to: reproductive justice, climate justice Emphasizes intersectionality as essential for true disability justice	Encourages social work to adopt disability justice as a praxis in alignment with social work values (e.g. person-in-environment, self-determination) Argues that disability justice and critical feminism are crucial for inclusive and equitable practice Social workers are called to center leadership of disabled communities in policy and service design	social work is pathologizing disability and maintaining deficit-based models social work is silent and complicit in upholding systems that marginalize disabled people social work failed to embrace intersectionality and anti-ableist frameworks	SW must consider interdependence of DJ and Feminism in order to make a pathway towards inclusive anti-ableist professional praxis "practice of disability justice offers a way to implement critical feminism in practice contexts" (p. 733) several implications for social work can be summed up as follows: social workers have to adopt interdependence, collective care and mutual aid as core values; social workers have to rethink binaries (abled/disabled; male/female); social work need to develop inclusive curriculum development; social work must embrace critical feminist and anti-racist principles in disability-focused work	--> criticism

Maxwell et al. 2024 Power Through Autonomy: Exploring Barriers to Reporting Sexual Assault Through Analysis of Reddit Data	#movement #meetoo Reddit Probelms/Bourdens in reporting Sexual Violence --> implications for SW implement new and diverse ways and opportunities to report learn from social media movements	What are the barriers reported anonymously to Reddit, to reporting sexual trauma? (Data from Reddit #metoo, July 2018)	empirical	qualitative data extraction from Reddit; capture immediate reactions to protests around #metoo on July 7, 20218; Data Analysis: Inductive Qualitative Analysis, addition of feminst theory to social control theory --> themes about the questions why survivors of sexual violence do not report.	#metoo hashtag movement hashtag feminism	started as local grassroot movement and became a global feminist movement and discourse	Social Problem addressed by movement is sexual violence, lack of support, lack of trust in systems to report and accuse; lack of awareness and visibilit about sexual violence Barriers to disclosure and reporting	Social Media / hashtag	societal: - away from victim blaming, shame and stigma - away from male suppremacy - education and prevention - societal awareness about the problem - focus on perpetrators not on "victims" structural: - away from victim blaming, shame and stigma - take survivors of sexual violence serious and create real support - avoid retraumatization - create better structures to disclose and report (and accuse) - focus on perpetrators not on "victims" political: - legislation reforms - better protection of survivors - better measures within the criminal system - trainings for police officers, and other persons in power positions	local grassroot movement - "just be Inc." - T. Burke / not hashtag yet; - validation of experience - collective liberation - empowerment - provision of informaiton and resources - creating space for discussion by using 'me too' - "empowerment through empathy" - intersectionality (got lost later in #metoo) #metoo - starting off 2017/2018 - Start of Hashtag Feminism (all positive impacts through Social Media) - raising awareness about sexual violence - revealing barriers in disclosure and reports - ignite systemic change - connect with other survivors of sexual violence --> peer-to-peer support --> subvert traditional power dynamics & support without fear of stigma - fight against victim-blaming, shaming and stigma - empowerment to tell stories about experiences with sexual violence --> positive feedback loop - realisation and validation that the act has been sexual violence and is qualified for support systems and legal action - social media	not in the study, but underlying: Sexual violence as form of GBV itself as violation of HR; discrimination of women in legal system and supporting system; Intersectional structural discrimination when reporting	Results of the study provide implications to social work practice: 6 themes have been identified by the researchers about why survivors of sex. viol. do not report - "I need my people" - "This person is part of my life" - "Disrupting my trajectory" - "male supremacy and societal blame" - "I didn't know it was sexual assault" - "but nothing was done" --> need of multifaceted approaches to make the reporting of sexual assault easier to survivors, and social work can contribute to that.	no direct critique of social work practice	SW has to respond to sexual assalt. Social workers are at the frontline for reporting --> needed: a range of different options for reporting --> establishment of "confidential and safe channels for survivors to report ... (e.g. partnerships with community organisations, hotlines, online reporting systems), ensure privacy and reduce fear of retribution" Social workers have to avoid retraumatization through the reporting process --> being aware of the risk, being sensitive, minimizing the rist by "advocating for survivor-centered practices in all interations with institutions and authorities" social workers can address survivors mental health --> public awareness campaigns and educaitonal programs --> clarity about the definition of sexual violence (and all forms of it) and fighting victim-blaming and stigma by challenging societal attitutes psychoeducation by social workers --> provide information for survivors and promote culture of support and understanding - Prevention! legislative reforms	not mentioned in the study

Mimi E. Kim 2018 From carceral feminism to transformative justice: Women-of-color feminism and alternatives to incarceration	Responses to GBV & carceral system Restorative Justice Transformative Justice community based responses to GBV INTERSECTIONALITY	Investigating alternative responses to GBV, NOT criminalization within the punitive, retributive system but RJ and TJ solutions	Review but related to previous empirical studies	no	mentions various community based movements emerging out of the mainstream anti-violence movement Critiques about mainstream feminist anti-violence movement approach to respond to GBV INCITE! = Women and Trans People of Color against Violence (2000) = anti-gender violence AND anti-criminalization coincide with prison abolition movements community-based responses --> Philly Stands Up & Creative Interventions	U.S.	Problems within the anti-violence movements response to GBV --> carceral system, criminalization of GBV --> mass incarceration --> disproportionately affects marginalized groups --> new alternative responses (driven by BLACK FEMINISTS, LGBTQI, abolish prison, disabled, poor/stigmatized communities) Intersectional approaches to respond to GBV anti-carceral approaches to respond to GBV --> alternatives to criminal justice system	Strategies: raising awareness, confrontation, and criticism community-based informal, decentralized, deinstitutionalized anti-oppression pilot project --> by Creative Interventions --> development of a community-based violence intervention model --> all different community-based alternatives to respond to gbv: - common principles - expand accessibility among marginalized communities	Awareness of problems within the punitive carceral system and mass incarceration; awareness within anti-violence movement on negative consequences of criminalization of gbv reflect and consider alternative forms of responding to gbv	- awareness of the problem - development of new forms of interventions, practices, responses to gbv Models of RJ and TJ have: - have led to reflections and shifting the focus to alternatives --> provide frameworks to guide a new set of practices and policies - reflection within the mainstream feminist movements - some small successes in applying new approaches - some social workers started to apply RJ and TJ practices	no specific reference to human / women's rights implicit reference: GBV as violation of women's rights and very strong focus on anti-discrimination practices in state systems / institutional and structural violence	Social Work Relation mostly implicit SW as supportive system for survivors of gbv but also as part of the system criticised	no direct reference	Implications for Social Work Practice --> reflect on responses to gbv --> adapt a intersectional approach --> think critically about the current practices --> support communities most marginalized and most affected by criminalization --> Learn from communities --> Communities as "evidence, inspiration, and future trajectories"	no reference

Kimberly Fuentes 2023 Sex Worker Collectives Within the Whorearchy: Intersectional Inquiry with Sex Workers in Los Angeles, CA	Sexwork criminalisation hinders support intersectionality	How criminalization of sexwork operates within larger intersecting systems of oppression? And how it hinders solidarity among sexworkers and support for sexworkers?	Empirical	PAR & collective knowledge production semi-structured dialogues with 13 sexworkers in CA, Los Angeles	sexworker rights movement collective care systems out of the affected community (community-based; bottom-up approaches for support) solidarity among sexworkers --> community building	U.S.	Marginalization, Stigma against sexworkers intersectionality of different oppressive systems --> criminalization of sexwork hinders systems of support and solidarity among sexworkers --> no access to formal systems of support	--> demands for decriminalization of sexwork --> supportive systems within the sexwork-community itself (deinstitutionalized support)	Fighting Stigma, Marginalization and intersectional discrimination --> anti-discriminatory approach --> multidimensional pursuit of justice demand for decriminalization of sexwork --> protection and rights for sexworkers, instead of stigma and "rescue" --> access to formal systems of support	awareness of intersectionality of oppressive systems community-based support systems	not explicit, but - anti-discrimination - sexual violence within the field of sexwork - protection of workers rights (for sexworkers not possible bc of criminalization)	Criminalization and state hinder social workers to truly support sexworkers	Criminalization and state hinder social workers to truly support sexworkers critique of "rescue" instead of rights (related to needs-based vs. rights-based approach to social work practice)	p. 237, 238 social work must - move away from its complicity with the carceral system and adopt an anti-carceral model --> decriminalizing poverty, resisting surveillance, affirming lived experiences of sex workers - move beyond rescue narratives - honor and support sex worker-les mutual aid systems - dismantle structural oppression - reject moralism (which is underlying the criminalization of sex work) - affirm services without conditions --> client self-determination and dignity - ally with sex worker movements - resist silencing and pathologizing - education: disability theory and Black feminist thought must be included	not explicitly mentioned in the paper

De Mesa et al. 2021 Social Work and Digital Activism: Sorority, Intersectionality, Homophily and Polarisation in #metoo	#metoo digital activism cyberfeminism and sorority intersectionality (how ppl. are impacted differently by systems of oppression)	Analyse digital activism around oppression and social justice --> topic of sexual harassment and abuse	empirical netnography	Examining trends in digital communication patterns --> most popular hashtag on sexual harassment and abuse = #metoo longitudinal analysis #metoo on Twitter 2018 - 2019 **social network analysis and netnography** --> data collection and social analysis Analyse digital activism events (from a social work perspective) --> understand demands and global discourse Analyse the connectivity and interaction around #metoo	Cyberfeminism --> interface of digital activism and feminism "social movement, spread over the internet and uses information and communication technologies" Social Media as "spaces of encounter, resistance and medication against patriarchy" (p. 353)	Started in the U. S. but through characteristics of #movement it became a global movement	#metoo addreses: Sexual violence (esp, sexual harassment and sexual assault)	digital content can challenge conventional structures and promote empowerment digital activism, cyberfeminism - sharing experiences --> visibility and awareness --> public discourse "give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem" (p. 354) Sorority through cyberfeminism: - alliance of women --> to fight oppression - sorority goes beyond differences of race, class, status, etc. --> sorority function: "survival within the patriarchal system" --> digital dimension has reinforced the power of interconnection and increased alliances	fighting the patriarchy online aimed at eliminating oppression in the social and political environment --> more just balance of power --> socio-economic, political and structural changes challenge conventional structures and promote empowerment But another problem comes with digital activism: Homophily that leads to polarisation & risk of manipulation	Impacts: #metoo --> empowering feminism & transnational sorority --> mobilizing power Potential of translating online activism into offline actions social media as a complementary medium --> catalyse complaints about sexual violence --> gain support among affected community --> visibility and accessibility Awareness raising and empowerment social action, political awareness & RIGHT TO SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE --> EMPOWERMENT = Liberation from "voicelessness" - Right to speak and Right to be heard! --> facilitaiton of new social media movements through online communication	not explicitly referenced implicitly: Sexual Violence as violation of Women's rights fight against oppressive and discriminatory structures in society, institutions and politics --> anti-discrimination	digitalisation is a challenge but also an opportunity for social work practice catalyst for social change idea of sorority and building alliances lies within the principles of social work of "building relationships and overcome adversities" (p. 354)	no explicit critique	Social Work has to be aware of the **opportunities**, as well as of the **challenges that come with digitisation and digital activism** **social workers have to understand and investigate in digital activism** - risk of manipulation and disinformation --> work against this - awareness and critical reflection, adapt and use digital tools to support demands of digital social movements Social Workers have to be **proactive** in using digital space to fight for social justice concretely: - **Learn from movements and transpose the demands from the digital sphere to real world action** - **improve digital skills** --> digital diagnosis, awareness, digital pedagogy --> promote digital empowerment from a social work approach use **Social Media as a tool to promote Social justice** - demand & share data/information /digital content, detect false information --> reliability - knowhow for interactions on digital platforms - protect personal privacy - use appropriate	

Mcnair et al 2008 The Diversity Functions of Organizations That Confront Oppression	Women's movement (generally & over time) - developments, strategies, funcitons analysis of social movements generally --> Women's movement systems of oppression (broadly, and generally)	Analysis of Social Movements regarding their Diversity Functions	Theoretical / Review	no	Women's movement (generally, broad movement / mainstream women's movement)	North America	not specifically referring to one social problem, but generally to the oppression of women and oppressive systems **--> Problem addressed: all consequences of oppression on the oppressed class/people** oppression grounded in cultural and religious beliefs --> 1. recognize --> 2. confront Confrontation of oppression and its consequences are complex, and so is the understanding of the attendant social movements Analysis of the movement and it's demand and development over time	demands and strategies have changed over time, based on specific topics/problems addressed by the generall women's movement The described "Diversity Functions" can be seen as a movement's approaches and strategies (they do change over time, development of the movement, and based on different problems addressed within the bigger problem) 6 diversity functions: - Assimilation - Normative Anti-Discrimination - Militant Direct Action - Separatism - Introspective Self-Help - Pluralistic Integration	Fighting oppressive structures in society, politics, institution, etc.	different outcomes over whole period and process of women's movement, different strategies and different impacts, but this article focuses on the diversity functions of the women's movement and how that informs social work practice	not specifically mentioned	the understanding of diversity functions of a movement allow social work to contribute to the social change in question	no explicit critique	What Social workers can take from the analysis of social movements and their diversity functions: 1. Organisational styles mus commensurate with personal responses to oppression (accountability) 2. individual's responses to oppression change --> organisational styles have to change as well (flexibility) 3. Focus on distinctive attributes of each movement (awareness & understanding) 4. Future potential in: introspective self-help and pluralistic integration --> social workers may have skills and should apply them concrete: (p. 86 - mostly direct citations from there) Social work organizers: need to consider which diversity functions best match their individual skills as professionals in organisations that work primarily towards assimilation: provide leadership regarding the positive and negative impacts of assimilation on the individuals within them. anti-discrimination work: their knowledge of social policy to fight for social justice within each of	

Storer und Rodriguez 2020 #Mapping a movement: social media, feminist hashtags, and movement building in the digital age	#movements #whyistayed	examining how the tools and tactics used in virtual social movements are contributing to larger GBV movement building. specifically, mapping one movement --> #whyistayed - how this campaign framed contemporary experiences of intimate partner abuse - served as a foundation for the global, on- and offline #MeToo movement. - Examining the use of issue frames in social media campaigns has the potential to shed light on the impact of digital technology on movement building.	data analysis examine use of collective action frames in the #whiistayed movement	tweets that contained #whyistayed --> random sample of 5% exclusion criteria --> described, check p.6 if needed --> in-depth qualitative analysis --> content analysis --> patterns and themes	#movement Cyberfeminism / digital feminism #whyistayed time: emerged in sept. 2014 Beverly Gooden tweet	U.S. then global online movement	Generally GBV, but specifically focused on why survivors stay in abusive relationships, barriers to exit abusive relationships contrasting the public discourse about GBV and why survivors stay in abusive relationships --> oppose the wrong narrative in ... ... media -> political and societal narrative = - minimizing seriousness of GBV - contextualizing GBV from societal foundations - victim-blaming contrasting/opposing misinformation on IPV	online awareness raising - tell stories - provide information (contrasting misinformation) - share experiences - support within and from survivors	- change the wrong narratives about IPV / GBV and why survivors stay in relationships - changing the public debate and changing social norms implicitly: demanding better support systems for survivors to exit abusive relationships	- highlight lived experiences of survivors - increase public debate & change narratives in it "flipping the script" --> Reclaim power and control over dialogue! - awareness raising - provide plattform to talk about experiences and be heard - public critique of oppressive systems - resistance --> critizising and challenging existing sturctures and systems that reinforce exclusion - #whyistayed provoced other GBV relates hashtag movements, such as #metoo and #maybehedoesnthityou - explain barriers of leaving abusive relaitonship (educational impact) - awareness to stop victim-blaming - support and solidarity among survivors - more participants in movements & --> alliance building - raising solidarity for survivors & empowerment of those main impacts on: Awareness raising, learning from survivors and Creation of social transformation little impact on advocacy and addressing policies from social media to broader Anti-	not very specifically, but implicitly Women's Rights in general	not specifically described, more for implications	Gap in agency use: Social service organizations, especially domestic violence agencies, have been slow to adopt social media for systemic change.	Virtual organizing power: Online platforms enable a global commons that **democratized knowledge creation and fosters bottom-up social change.** **Social media as a tool:** Virtual movements allow for **public engagement in discussions on complex social issues** like gender-based violence (GBV), sometimes leading to **meaningful dialogue.** **Challenging dominant narratives:** Social media can both reinforce and disrupt prevailing discourses around GBV (e.g., #WhyIStayed). **Gap in agency use:** **Social service organizations, especially domestic violence agencies, have been slow to adopt social media for systemic change.** Campaign potential: **Feminist-driven digital campaigns can align with and support prevention goals of social service agencies** (e.g., raising GBV awareness, changing social norms). Future research needs: There's a need to further study how agencies	not mentioned in the paper

Danis 2003 Social Work Response to Domestic Violence: Encouraging News From a New Look	battered women's movement critiques about social work practice in response to DV betterments and remaining challenges	Investigate the extent to which social workers identify DV , as well as their assessment and intervention practices	survey	random sample of licenced social workers (U.S.) total of 146 usable, completed surveys	battered women movement second wave of feminist movement (1970s)	U.S. and globally	GBV, particularly domestic violence	not explicitly mentioned in the study presented	Aim: "providing safety and sanctuary to women and their children when society's institutions would not" (p. 177)	not specifically mentioned in the presented study	not specifically mentioned in the presented study --> generally women's rights, as it emerged from the second wave of the global feminism / Women's movement	very critical of social work Relationship between BWM and SW has been antagonist this paper shows this antagony by presenting numerous critiques against the social work profession from the battered women's movement another relationship factor is that social workers are the profession that is most likely to encounter battered women --> has to be aware!	main critique: social works inability to respond adequately to battered women - social workers failing to identify abuse - social work has not embraced the issue of DV and not given it a priority - critique that social work was uncaring, uninformed and unhelpful to battered women - early BWM advocates: social work is too bureaucratic, has little interest in helping battered women - social workers fail to understand DV and intervene properly - social workers are re victimizing battered women - sw are not taking DV seriously enough --> fail to recognize abuse as a problem - social workers lack a feminist perspective - double bind from sw to BW --> blaming for staying and blaming for exiting an abusive relationship - often giving the message that abuse is normal and family has to be kept together at all costs ("for the children") - even threats of taking children away if BW leave husband - interviews of couples together - inconsistent information about services provided by community-based programs	Implications for social work professionals as well as educators and the organisational system of the social work profession --> no focus on education in this systematic review --> not gonna mention it here - social work need to apply a feminist analysis of DV on a micro and macro level - Screening protocols have to be availabe and have to be easy to use, reliable, quick to administer, and valid --> improve identification - recognition of the prevalence of DV (among social workers, there has to be a safe space where social workers can reflect on their own experiences of DV) --> improve assessment - continuing educational programs regarding DV --> better trainings for assessment; training in identifying risk factors for homocide, suicide, and escalation of violence, presence of weapons, and background characteristics of abusers; --> improve assessment - social workers need a better understanding of the criminal justice system & knowledge about legal options and protective orders --> improve	There has been great improvement in how social work is addressing DV improvement in Identification of DV - today more social workers seem to be safer in using screening methods for DV . common to interview partners separately Improvement in assessment, when DV has been identified, but still needs way more improvement Improvement in intervention of DV: - 90 % of the social workers in the survey refer their clients to specialized community services - most social workers tell their clients that the abuse is not their fault and that they do not deserve abuse

Sophia Adolf – Master's Thesis (Global Campus of Human Rights & University of Zagreb, Faculty of Law; Thesis Supervisor Ana Opačić)

20.05.2025

Qualitative Research: Interviews with Members of Feminist Movements / Feminist Activists and Social Workers in Croatia

1. (Professional) Background & Relation to GBV:

Key Words	Feminist Movement	Social Work
Personal Background; Organisation; Mission; Activities	Could you please shortly describe your (professional) background? Could you please describe the core mission and work of your organisation (also how it started) and how it addresses gender-based-violence?	Could you please describe your (current) work? How does your (current) work relate to GBV / DV?
Strategies; Approaches	What strategies or approaches do you primarily use in your work for women's rights (e.g protests, social media campaigns / campaigns, awareness-raising, advocacy, political engagement, …)? Based on your experience, which of these have been most effective, and why?	Can you describe the main methods or interventions you use in your everyday social work practice in relation to GBV/DV? Which approaches are most central to your work?

2. Relation to Human Rights and Women's Rights:

Key Words	Feminist Movement	Social Work
Reference to Human Rights / Women's Rights	What role do human rights / women's rights play in your activism in everyday work and in activities of your organisation? Would you describe yourself as an activist or human rights defender? Why or why not?	How do you understand the role of social work as a human rights profession, and how does this shape your practice? Would you describe yourself as an activist or human rights defender? Why or why not? In your view, why is social work often perceived as apolitical / non-activist or hesitant to take stronger stances in feminist and human rights struggles?

3. Mutual Perceptions:

Key Words	Feminist Movement	Social Work
Perception of the other (Fem. Mov. / SW)	What is your experience or perception of social work as a profession in relation to GBV / your activism?	What is your perception, (from the perspective of a social worker) of feminist activism against GBV?
Critiques (mutual)	From your perspective as an activist, are there any approaches / practices of social work that you see problematic or challenging in relation to the fight against GBV?	From your perspective as a social worker, are there any aspects of feminist movements or their approaches that you view critically or see as challenging in your professional context?
Mutual Influence (Fem. Mov. < > SW)	Does Social Work have any influence on your activism? If so, how does it look like?	What do you see as the influence or relevance of feminist movements for social work (services / daily practice / policies)?

4. Experiences of Cooperation (i.e., social work vs. activism), Including Critiques:

Key Words	Feminist Movement	Social Work
Experience in Collaboration (Fem. Mov & SW)	Have you (in previous activities of your organisation) had any form of collaboration or contact with social workers or social work institutions? If so, how did it look like?	In your work, have you had any experience or collaboration with feminist movements or organisations? If so, how did that look like?

5. Barriers and Limitations to Cooperation:

Key Words	Feminist Movement	Social Work
Barriers / Pitfalls in Collaboration	What do you see as the main barriers or pitfalls that limit collaboration between feminist activist movements and social work (institutions & practitioners)?	What do you see as the main barriers or pitfalls that limit collaboration between feminist activist movements and social work (institutions & practitioners)?

6. Visions for Future Collaboration and Change: Potential and Conditions:

Key Words	Feminist Movement	Social Work
Potential	In your view, how could social work meaningfully support your activism and the fight against GBV?	In your view, how could feminist activism contribute to or strengthen social work interventions in your field of

		practice, particularly in addressing gender-based violence?
Collaboration / Mutual Support	What would meaningful cooperation between feminist movements and social work look like to you? What could both sides gain from such collaboration / from mutual support?	What would meaningful cooperation between feminist movements and social work look like to you? What could both sides gain from such collaboration / from mutual support?
Conditions	What does it need to strengthen such cooperation?	What does it need to strengthen such cooperation?

7. Change Most Needed:

Key Words	Feminist Movement	Social Work
Change	What kind of structural or societal change do you believe is most needed to effectively combat GBV and how can different actors (including social work) contribute to that?	What kind of structural or societal change do you believe is most needed to effectively combat GBV and how can different actors (including social work) contribute to that?

8. Optional Questions:

Optional	What has been your organisations biggest success in recent years in relation to GBV/DV, and in your opinion what factors made it possible? Do you see potential in alliances with other social justice movements, such as anti-racism, LGBTQI+, disability, environmental, …)? How do you in your activism / your organisation approach intersectionality in your work?	What has been your organisations biggest success in recent years in relation to GBV/DV, and in your opinion what factors made it possible? Do you see potential in alliances with other social justice movements, such as anti-racism, LGBTQI+, disability, environmental, …)? How do you in your daily practice approach intersectionality in your work?

9. Concluding "clean-up" question: "*Is there anything you would like to add?"*