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by Colette Zunk 147
The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, MN and is conducted within a nine-month timeframe to demonstrate facility with basic social research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.
Attitudes toward Religion and Spirituality in Social Work Practice

by David M. Allick

Research Chair: Katherine Hill, Ph.D,
Members: Stacy Husebo, MSW, LICSW; Kevin Hanke, LMFT Student

What are the attitudes that social workers have toward religion and spirituality and how does it affect their practice? What affect does religion and spirituality have on clients in therapy and how big of an impact is it making in their lives? How much education are social workers receiving in their undergraduate and graduate curriculum? These questions and a few others are all addressed in this research. In this qualitative study the researcher interviewed seven Licensed Independent Clinical social workers (LICSWs) with at least seven years of experience, serving in diverse areas of social work. Social workers attitudes toward religion and spirituality do affect the way they practice. Those social workers who are more educated are also more comfortable when dealing with clients who are practicing some type of religion and or spirituality. Clients are being positively affected by workers ability to engage in religious and spiritual conversations in area such as but not limited to depression and end of life issues.
Early parenthood is a topic of concern for social workers, researchers and policy makers due to the consequences for both young parents and their children. Despite declining rates of teen parenthood in the United States, teen birthrates remain high compared to other developed nations. Teen fathers have received less attention than teen mothers, but are an important component in the area of study. This study examines how five young fathers handled the transition from child to adult when faced with an off-time developmental event. Young fathers experienced drastically altered life paths, need for financial resources, complicated romantic relationships, and rapidly changing demands to fulfill new roles. They were motivated to grow into their new status by the support of others, including social services, and by a sense of duty to become good fathers. The fathers in this study are remarkably positive about their experiences, despite challenges, a range of situations with the mothers of their children. The findings of this study are limited by a non-representative population, non-probability sampling method and small sample size. Implications for social work practice, policy and research are outlined.
Parents of an Adult Child Living with a Traumatic Brain Injury: Parental Involvement and Service Needs

by Bethany Beil

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Michelle Gricus, MSW, LICSW; Sara Seward, MSW, LGSW

The purpose of this study was to examine experiences of parents who have an adult child living with a traumatic brain injury through the perspective of practitioners who work in the field of traumatic brain injury. The study uses the conceptual framework of Erik Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development and family systems theory. This study used qualitative research methods and consists of three interviews with practitioners who work in the field of traumatic brain injury. Four themes emerged from the data that was collected through the interviews with practitioners. The themes include parental stress, parental support, grief/loss, and parental involvement. The findings examine parental involvement and support services that can assist parents of an adult child living with a TBI. The study discusses implications for the field of social work and examines possibilities for further research.
Motivations to Volunteer: Factors that promote longevity

by Daniel Bubna

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Rob Kistler, MA, LAMFT; Kevin Callaghan, MSW, LICSW

Qualitative data was obtained to better understand the motivations and experiences of volunteer counselors. The procedural method of this study utilized exploratory interviews of six volunteer counselors. The participants are non-professionals who are actively engaged in individual counseling of members of the community who don't have insurance. Participants reflected on their motivations, experiences, and level of satisfaction with their service as a volunteer counselor. Results indicated high levels of satisfaction due to intrinsic motivations of the individual participants as well as organizational competencies in regards to training and supervision. The study highlights both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that can contribute to increased longevity and higher retention rates amongst volunteer counselors. Implications and limitations associated with the research are considered.
Stress and Loss Experiences of Families of Survivors of Traumatic Brain Injury

by Tracy J. Ketzeback

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D, LISW
Committee Members: Sue Bewley, LSW; Rena Sespene-Hinz MSW, LISW

The purpose of this research study was to explore how traumatic brain injuries affected families in which there was a survivor. It was the researcher’s desire to learn what stress and loss looked like in families with a traumatic brain injury survivor. Data was gathered in a qualitative study in which nine individual family members of survivors of traumatic brain injury were interviewed. The family members were asked 13 questions in a semi-structured interview style. The qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis. Emerging findings indicated that stress and loss is very different for each family. Another emerging finding was financial assistance, discharge assistance, and mental health services were difficult to obtain in rural areas. Future research should consider the effects of the gender of the survivor on how the family system adapts, as well as whether the relationship of the caregiver to the survivor affects the family system. This study also highlights a potential need for a professional association concerning traumatic brain injury in order for better training and collaboration of social workers who work with survivors of traumatic brain injury and their families.
Burnout Among Mental Health Workers in a Nonprofit Organizational Setting

by Danielle A. Fox

Research Chair: Valandra Ph.D Candidate
Committee Members: Joan Stauffer, MSW, LICSW; Tawnie Langenfeld

This research paper focuses on the tendencies of burnout among mental health workers. Survey results from 98 mental health care providers in a nonprofit setting located in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota are compared to previous findings from historical research. The paper focuses on how many professionals in the field are experiencing burnout and what these professionals perceive to be the causes. Findings indicated that professionals in this setting had lower than average levels of burnout. It also outlines that mental health professionals that took part in the study believed that excessive paperwork, high caseloads, and rate of pay were the largest contributors to experiencing burnout.
“I Became Proud of Being Gay and Proud of Being Christian”: Faith Experiences of Queer Christian Women

by Rachel Murr

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Rebecca Spartz, LICSW; Rev. Eily Marlow, M. Div.

Members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community have faced significant barriers to the benefits of involvement in faith communities. While involvement in religious community has been associated with positive health outcomes all over the world, religiously oriented LGBTQ people have been found to have more negative mental health outcomes than their non-religious peers. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of lesbian and bisexual women in their Christian Churches, and to question if religious and spiritual involvement can have positive results for queer women of faith. This study involved eight qualitative, semi-structured interviews of lesbian and bisexual women who grew up in non-affirming (teaching that homosexuality is a sin) environments, and currently describe their spiritual practice as meaningful and affirming. Participants all shared very negative experiences within their churches and/or Christian families. Participants also experienced spiritual transformation towards a rich and meaningful spirituality. Participants were split as to whether or not their current practice includes religious community. Spirituality is proposed as a possible avenue towards resilience against anti-gay messages from religious institutions. Social workers may be uniquely suited to assist LGBTQ clients in navigating spiritual questions and conflict.
What do Spouses of Current Service Members Consider Risks and Protective Factors for Suicidal Ideation?

by Nicole M. Oman

Research Chair: Kari L. Fletcher, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Brianna Loop, LICSW; Iva Joan Stauffer, LICSW

This quantitative study investigates what current service members’ spouses identify as risk and protective factors for suicidal ideation, for themselves and for other military spouses. Online surveys were used to obtain demographic information, place of residence, impact of deployment, and identify risk and protective factors for suicidal ideation for military spouses. Respondents (n=55) were military spouses, recruited through Facebook “Military Spouse” pages. Findings identified immediate family, peers, and resilience as protective factors for suicidal ideation in themselves and legal issues, financial issues, and thoughts of ending one’s own life as risk factors in other military spouses. Respondents were more likely to identify risk factors for suicidal ideation for other military spouses and protective factors for suicidal ideation for themselves. Implications for practice and research are provided.
Thyroid Autoimmunity: Lived Experiences of Identity and Community through Word and Image

by Ivy C. Wagner

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Barbara Brower, RD, LD, CTC; Carol Geisler, Ph.D., RN; Jodi Greenstein, MSW, LICSW; Mary Beth Tracy, RN, CTC

Internal and external environments influence holistic well-being as humans live in a constant cycle of self and other regulation. When this process is misguided and the body does not distinguish between what is self and what is not self, it begins to destroy its own bodies' healthy tissue. Autoimmune diseases affect 5-10% of the developed world's populations. When the 80+ autoimmune diseases are combined together, they are the one of the 10 leading causes of death of women under the age of 65. There is no known cure for any autoimmune disease and few studies have been conducted on the emotional and spiritual energetic underpinnings of autoimmune disease. The purpose of this research was to explore the connections between identity, community and thyroid autoimmunity, adding to the emerging and growing understanding of the current epidemic of autoimmunity. The original creation of an arts-based, phenomenological research methodology was presented. Eight participants provided their lived experience in photographs using modified PhotoVoice methods and written reflections through open ended questions in project notebooks. Data was analyzed and represented though narrative methods. Findings support further exploration of mental autoimmunity, the inability to emotionally and spiritually recognize and voice the story of self, and its role in a person's susceptibility to physical autoimmune illness. Implications for clinical practice and future research recommendations were discussed.
Agents’ Perceptions of What Makes an Offender Successful in Intensive Supervised Release

by Sarah Becker

Research Chair: Philip AuClaire, Ph.D
Committee Members: Lynn Schaefer, MSW, LISCW; Hilary Stoffel, PsyD, CPRP

The current study addresses what makes an offender successful in the Intensive Supervised Release program (ISR) by looking at agents’ perceptions based on past success and failures and focusing on counseling strategies that are implemented in this correctional field. The participants of this study are made up of ten ISR agents between age 35 and 50 years old, consisting of two female and eight male agents. This study is qualitative in nature and the data obtained was assessed by using a semi-standardized interview. Each interview was transcribed in order to identify salient themes regarding agent’s perceptions of what makes an offender successful in the ISR program. The offender’s internal motivation for success was identified as the biggest indicator for success. The implications of this study indicate that further training regarding working with a client with mental illness may be beneficial for the agents, as well as developing interventions that help the offender achieve motivation for success.
Parental Involvement in Early Intervention Programs for Children with Autism

by Alexis M. Bennett

Research Chair: Dr. Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, Ph.D., LICSW;
Committee Members: Rae Jean Karel, LISW; Kathryn Schoepner, LGSW

This qualitative study explored the perceptions of mental health professionals and practitioners of parental involvement in early intervention programs for children with autism. Interviews were completed with eight mental health professionals and practitioners to better understand the importance of parental involvement, the role parents play within an early intervention program, and the impact parental involvement or lack thereof can have on the child’s success developmentally and their success in the early intervention program. The objective of this study was to gain insight into mental health professionals and practitioners perceptions in order to learn ways for social workers and professionals alike to be more effective in supporting children with autism and their parental figures. The content of the interviews were analyzed to identify categories and subsequent themes expressed by the participants. The findings indicated lack of parental involvement is detrimental to the child’s development and progress within an early intervention program. There is ample research on the positive effects of children with autism who have parental involvement, such as increased developmental skills and progress in an autism early intervention program. The effects lack of parental involvement could have on a child are the inability to support the child’s needs, the child’s ability to generalize skills across environments, and lack of developmental progress. The findings also present several implications that can be taken from this study, including the need for both the social work profession and parents to have an understanding of the benefits parental involvement provide as well as the harmful effects it could have on a child with autism. Other implications include the need to be culturally aware of the parents, and the need to provide a variety of services to reach each individual family.
Recovery Mentorship Programs and Recovery from Addiction

by Carmen Berzinski

Research Chair: Valandra, MBA, MSW, ABD
Committee Members: Megan Reis, LPCC; Kelly Teachout, LICSW

New roles in service grow from an unmet need. In the current world of addiction treatment and addiction recovery, a new role is emerging to bridge the gap between professional treatment and sustainable recovery within a client’s natural environment. This role has been identified as many different titles: recovery coach, recovery mentor, peer recovery, and specialist. Peer-to-peer recovery support services are designed and delivered by peers in recovery. A review of the literature has found that recent growth in peer-based recovery support services as an addition and alternative to addiction treatment has created some uncertainty about the separation of responsibilities across three roles: 1) sponsors in 12-step programs, 2) addiction counselors, and 3) volunteer or paid peer based recovery support roles. By studying the barriers of a person’s success to maintain a program of recovery from addiction, we can identify new ways to give support to an ever growing population. Sponsors in 12-step programs, addiction counselors, recovery coaches, and person’s in recovery were invited to fill out an online survey of 32 open-ended and closed-ended questions regarding the differences across these three roles and to identify barriers that may enhance a person’s recovery from addiction. Results show there is a need for increased support for someone to be able to maintain a program of recovery. Implications from this study indicate a need to develop a more formal role for the recovery coach as well as informing people of what a recovery coach can do for them in supporting their recovery.
Homeless and Highly Mobile Students: What is the Situation 25 Years after McKinney-Vento Legislation?

by Megan Betters

Research Chair: Kendra J. Garrett, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Larisa Breid, MSW; Sarah Olson, MSW

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which was passed in the late 1980’s, set provisions to help remove the barriers to receiving an education for the more than 1.35 million children living in homeless today. In the 25 years that have passed since the enactment of this legislation McKinney-Vento continues to define the educational rights afforded to homeless and highly mobile students. The purpose of this research paper was to determine if this legislation continues to meet the needs of homeless and highly mobile students. In this qualitative study, four district liaisons to homeless and highly mobile students were interviewed. The school districts that these liaisons served represented rural, suburban and urban districts within Minnesota. After analyzing the data, six main themes and multiple subthemes emerged. The six main themes were: district liaison role, collaboration, economic climate, funding, unmet student needs, and needed changes to McKinney-Vento Legislation. While McKinney-Vento Legislation provides an important framework for the educational rights of homeless and highly mobile students, more work needs to be done to provide the same educational experience as housed students. While this could include many recommendations, the most important is providing equitable funding for all school districts with homeless and highly mobile students.
Nursing Home Social Workers’ Preparedness to Serve BGL&T Residents

by Rachel M. Bialostosky

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, Ph.D., LICSW
Research Committee: Abel Knochel Ph.D., LICSW; Christopher Bargeron, MSW, LICSW

Current census data indicates that there are over 38 million Americans over the age of 65 at this time. (U.S. Census, 2010). It is estimated that as many as 3.8 million older adults in the United States identify as bisexual, gay, lesbian, or transgender. Though there is a growing body of literature on the needs and concerns of BGL&T older adults with regards to accessing health care services as they age, there is very little literature on how prepared providers feel to provide culturally competent care to BGL&T people. In an attempt to address this gap, this researcher conducted a survey with nursing home social workers in the state of Minnesota. Items on the survey addressed issues including: comfort working with bisexual, gay, lesbian and transgender residents, feelings about the importance of targeted outreach, and any outreach that was being done by the facility. The data collected indicated that though nursing home social workers feel comfortable working with BGL&T residents and feel that awareness of the unique needs and concerns of BGL&T older adults is important, there is a lack of consensus on the importance of targeted services and outreach. Key findings and recommendations for future research are also discussed.
Support Groups with Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth in Schools

by Marisa A. Biolo

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D, LICSW
Committee Members: Diane Bauer, MSW, LICSW; Christy McCoy, MSW, LICSW

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) youth are in need of school support groups given their higher risk for mental health issues, sexual risk taking behaviors, eating disorders, substance use, victimization, and more. The current study examined the use of school support groups with GLBT youth. The researcher gathered qualitative data about GLBT school support groups from the Twin Cities metro in the state of Minnesota. Data were collected from four school social workers and one teacher, who all have experience facilitating GLBT support groups. The major themes that emerged from this study were risk factors, group effectiveness, sense of community, sense of trust, honesty, and group safety, and personal growth and confidence. Risk factors seen in students identifying as GLBT were greatly discussed in the interviews. Overall, participants felt that support groups for GLBT youth are effective, and that trust, honesty, and group safety helps a group be effective. Additionally, being a part of a GLBT support group provides students with a sense of community and helps them grow emotionally, socially, and personally. Therefore, school support professionals should consider implementing GLBT support groups in their schools and social workers around the nation should advocate for safe school laws. Future studies should strive to examine this topic more extensively with the use of a larger sample from urban and rural communities, as well as student input.
Youth Workers' Perceptions of Their Career Choice and Helping Ability in Relationship with Their Own Lived Experiences

by Kristina Stewart Bonello

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D.
Committee Members: T.C. Largaespada, LICSW; Nikki Beasley, MA

This research endeavor examined youth workers' perspectives of their own helping ability in relationship to their lived experience. The intent of the project was to determine what extent youth workers’ lived experiences, especially experiences in their families of origin, impacted their career choice, helping ability, and ability to maintain boundaries with the youth they served. Limited research exists regarding the field of youth work. Youth workers of interest in this study work primarily with vulnerable populations of youth in crisis between the ages of ten to twenty-three. Qualitative semi-standardized interviews were conducted in an exploratory study of 10 voluntary participants who identified themselves as youth workers, working in the Twin Cities metro and surrounding areas of Minnesota. Several themes emerged from the analysis of data including: youth workers’ perception that helping is a way of life; youth work is more than a job; youth work provides a connection to something greater; youth workers describe the influence of lived experience including experience in the family of origin; youth workers identify as caretakers; and the importance of boundaries in youth work. Findings support the hypothesis that youth workers’ lived experience impacts their career choice; youth workers have a high tendency to take on caretaking roles in both their personal and professional lives; the maintenance of boundaries is difficult but important in the field of youth work. Implications for further research and professional training are discussed.
Scholarly research demonstrates that community perceptions of child protection practice often center on stigma and family well-being (Belsky, 1993; Sykes, 2010). Postmus (2011) shared that understanding community and professional attitudes held toward child protection workers remains important in upholding child welfare procedures throughout various communities. This study aims to examine whether or not undergraduate education and social work students from two private Minnesotan institutions differed in their views of child protection caseworkers. A quantitative sample of 36 participants was gathered to analyze undergraduate student perceptions of child protection casework with involuntary families. Various descriptive and inferential statistics including two t-tests did not find a statistical difference between the responses of education and social work students on The Undergraduate Student Perceptions of Child Protection Workers Survey. Nevertheless, statistically weak differences were present between education and social work respondents. Therefore, future social work research might explore perceptions of child protection workers with a larger sample size in different geographic locations or with different academic majors in order to determine if statistically significant differences exist throughout communities.
Best Practices of Hospice Social Workers who work with Families Experiencing Grief and Loss

by Bethany L. Butzow

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, Ph.D., LICSW  
Committee Members: Michael Justin, M.A.L.P., LICSW; Jeffrey Wigren, MPH; Deborah Goulet, MSW, LICSW

This qualitative study examined the best practices of hospice social workers who work with patients and families during their hospice journey. Data was collected through semi-structured standardized interviews with hospice social workers currently working in the area. Open coding methods were used to inductively analyze codes in the data and to find common themes from the interviews. Themes that emerged from this study were separated into three categories: family roles and functioning, collaboration among the interdisciplinary team, and the hospice social worker role. Additionally, sub themes that correlated with these three major findings were discussed. The majority of the findings of this study were consistent with previous research. Other themes that were not congruent with previous research were also found, including the physician’s lack of education on hospice and the quality of communication among the interdisciplinary team. Implications for this study suggest ideas for future research in this area, with hopes to enhance hospice education, research, and training. Ongoing research in this area has the potential to strengthen an understanding of the hospice philosophy for patients, families, and professionals.
Practitioners’ Perspectives on the Impact of Migratory Separation on Attachment Among Southeast Asian Clients: An Exploratory Study

by Diem Cao

Research Chair: Pa Der Vang, Ph.D.
Committee Members: David Schuchman, MSW, LICSW; Krista Nelson, LMFT, LICSW

Evidenced by the multitude of literature across disciplines, attachment theory has ignited one of today’s most prolific lines of research. Attachment Theory’s core themes of security, separation, and loss apply well into the common experience of immigrants and refugees who have dealt these issues in their immigration journey. Consistently, studies have shown that separation and traumas before, during, and after the migration journey have been identified as potential predictors for serious psychological distress and mental health problems among immigrants and refugees. Given the profound implications from recent studies, there exists limited research on how migratory separation affects attachment. Thus, the goal of this exploratory research was to examine the variables of separation and attachment by using both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to examine mental health professionals’ perspectives on the impact of separation due to immigration on attachment related issues among Southeast Asian clients. Further, to gather mental health implications and recommendations on culturally sensitive practices. The sample was comprised of fourteen mental health professionals who work predominantly with Southeast Asian immigrant and refugee populations. The participants provided insightful observations on the complex relationship between attachment and separation due to immigration among Southeast Asian diaspora populations. Most notably, they described common challenges, Eastern cultural lens of attachment, and offered intervention recommendations for working with this client populations. This study brings awareness to mental health professionals everywhere of the multifaceted effects separation can have on immigrant and refugees’ well-being and to call for appropriate interventions to assure effective, ethical, and adequate service for this growing populations in our nations and in the Twin Cities metro area.
Workers’ Perception of Challenges for People of Color Utilizing Hospice Services

by Carol J. Carter

Research Chair: Valandra, MSW, Phd. Candidate
Committee Members: Sheila Sweeney, LICSW, MSW; Roymayne Hauth, Hospice RN

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to look at social workers perceptions of the challenges and opportunities for people of color utilizing hospice services. Data was collected using a qualitative survey distributed through Qualtrics, a web based software system. Eleven social workers completed the online survey. Data was analyzed using open coding resulting in several themes including social barriers, awareness of Hospice care, mistrust by social workers and medical professionals, and cultural competency. The responses confirm more research is needed to help the general public, social workers, other medical professionals, patients and their caregivers’ understand the benefits that hospice care services can offer to change the end of life care for people of color.
The Effect of Interpersonal Dynamics on Quality of Supervision from a Correctional Client’s Perspective

by G. Anne Cartman

Research Chair: Valandra, PhD Candidate
Committee Members: Tom Petta, MSW; Michael Felton, MA-Criminal Justice

This study assessed the perception of interpersonal relationships between staff member and clients at a halfway house facility from the client’s perspective. The relationship quality was divided into three major constructs: Trust, Caring-Fairness and Toughness. Eighty surveys were sent out to five halfway houses in northwestern Wisconsin with 47 of them being returned. The literature reviewed examined the evolution and philosophy of halfway houses, the principles of effective correctional treatment and therapeutic alliances and dual role relationships. The findings indicated that respondents valued the relationship quality with halfway house staff although did not report this as a main factor in contributing to their success.
What is the Correlation between a Positive Ethnic Identity and Self-Worth in African American Adolescents?

by Natalie Casemore

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Mari Anne Graham, Ph. D; William Allen, LMFT

Racial and ethnic differences that exist within our society are discovered by children at a very young age (Derman-Sparks, Higa, Sparks, 1980). The development of ethnic identity is an important part of overall identity development and is an indispensable human need that fosters a sense of belonging and a sense of historical continuity (Smith, 1991). Therefore, this paper examined if there was a correlation between a positive ethnic identity and self-worth in African American adolescents. In order to examine this correlation, the researcher surveyed 30 African American adolescents between the ages of 18 to 25-years-old and asked them about their ethnic identity development as well as how they valued themselves based on their self-esteem. The findings demonstrate that there were no statistically significant correlations between an African American adolescents’ ethnic identity and his/her self-worth, nor were there statistical differences based on gender. However, the researcher did find a statistical significant between participants’ age and their ethnic identity. In addition, the researcher found a statistically significant relationship between age and the About Me survey that was issued, which focused on the combination of ethnic identity and self-esteem. There are several implications for social work practice, policy and research that resulted from this study. Identity formation and is a pivoting task of adolescence and if individuals are not able to arrive at a stable sense of self then interpersonal areas and psychological effects may affect the individual (Phinney, 1992). As a whole, society needs to take a stance against racism and exclusion and encourage differing ethnic groups to take pride in where they come from rather than promoting a melting pot ideology. Future research needs to focus on adolescents are acquiring a sense of ethnic identity in the 21st century and how this is affects their self-esteem.
In 1996, the *Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood* was published to address the paucity of options for addressing infant and toddler mental health. Currently in its revised version and referred to as DC: 0-3R, it is designed to help professionals formulate a comprehensive assessment of infant and toddler mental health and relational issues. This paper addresses current research on infant and toddler mental health, the importance of prevention and early intervention, and the role of DC: 0-3R in these areas. Since professional perspective can ultimately influence the diagnostic process, this study focuses on the views and uses of professionals using DC: 0-3R. This is accomplished through the use of a qualitative study during which ten professionals were asked interview questions focusing on their training and experience, how they use the tool, and their thoughts of the tool. The data collected from these interviews is described and compared to other research on DC: 0-3R and infant and toddler mental health.
Rural Professionals’ Perceptions of Minority Disparity within the School-to-Prison Pipeline

by Jessica L. Christenson

Research Chair: Keith DeRaad, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Tiffany Sandbo, MSW, LGSW; Margo Engel, LSW

Overrepresentation is defined as a specific racial or ethnic group being overrepresented in comparison to their representation in the general population. In the case of racial minorities, this overrepresentation has been documented specifically with African American populations and focusing on urban environments throughout a system known as the “school-to-prison pipeline”. This pipeline includes social welfare, special education, school disciplinary referrals, the juvenile justice system, and the adult justice system. This study looked at rural professionals’ perceptions of the overrepresentation phenomenon specifically within their rural community with a focus on that area’s primary racial minority, Hispanics. Using a quantitative design in survey format, 120 rural professionals including mainstream teachers, special education teachers, parole officers, county attorneys, judges, social services employees, and policemen and women were surveyed. Data was analyzed by running descriptive statistics on all responses and again breaking them out into three categories: education professionals, social services professionals, and justice system professionals. Findings indicate that the degree to which rural professionals believe overrepresentation exists in their community varies. Their perceptions also vary in regards to what contributes to overrepresentation as well. These findings point to a potential lack of communication among professionals in regards to their specific roles when working with members in their community, specifically those of a racial minority group and a need for further research to better understand if a perception gap exists between professionals and the racial minority population itself.
Social Work Practitioners and the Identification of Human Trafficking Victims

by Kirsten B. Christenson

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, PhD, LISW, BSW
Committee Members: Jeanette Zaczkowski, MSW, LICSW; Sarah Bauer

Human trafficking is a growing problem in the United States, specifically in Minnesota. Victims of human trafficking are difficult to locate and identify. The purpose of this study was to gather information about the knowledge level of social work practitioners when faced with the identification of human trafficking victims in a hospital setting. Using a convenience sample, 16 hospital social work practitioners were surveyed regarding their knowledge of human trafficking and trafficking victim identification. The data obtained was analyzed using descriptive analysis, frequency counts, and content analysis. This data was then compared to previous related literature. The findings indicated that although the social work practitioners had a general working knowledge of human trafficking, they would benefit from additional training regarding victim intervention strategies.
LICSWs’ Perspectives on the Causes of Community Violence

by Krista Churness

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Rosemary Froehle, LICSW; Marcus Pope, M.Ed.

Research has suggested that there are many causes of community violence. This study was conducted to examine LICSWs perspectives on the causes of community violence. All of the participants reported several causes of violence that converge to make a community more susceptible. Some of the causes include poverty, racism, drug use, violence in the home, and lack of police response. Roles identified by the LICSWs to address community violence included: trauma informed care, teaching non-violence, advocating for policy changes, and reporting community violence as a way of sending a message that it is not acceptable. This study has implications for social work practice. LICSWs reported many causes of community violence, but provided fewer concrete solutions. Because LICSWs identified many causes of violence in communities, it is clear that it will take a united effort to combat it. In order to stop violence from happening in communities, many stakeholders need to work together to address the causes of violence. Further research should be conducted to better understand the role of LICSWs in addressing community violence. Research in the future should include a larger sample size to better determine how to end violence in our communities.
Graduate Social Workers’ Perceived Level of Competency in Working with Couples

by Melanie L. Cicmil

Research Chair: Lance Peterson, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Carol Schreier; Kelsey Starrs, MSW, LICSW

This research study explores graduate social workers’ self-perceived competency in couples work. While literature on this topic is sparse, previous studies have indicated that graduate social work programs lack adequate incorporation of couples work material into their curricula. As a result, social work students are graduating with little confidence in their ability to be couples therapists. The current study consisted of an online survey, which was emailed to licensed graduate social workers in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota. Information collected by the survey included demographic characteristics of respondents and their graduate school experiences, such as coursework and internship(s). Results showed that respondents believed their graduate training could have better prepared them for couples work, and that the majority of their couples work experience was gained after graduating with their MSWs. Implications for future research based on these results include closer analysis of how graduate social work programs can be improved to provide students with more couples work experience, comparing graduate curricula and students’ competency ratings over time to assess programs’ progress in incorporating more couples work material, and investigating specific reasons why graduate social workers do not feel competent in couples work and how they believe these reasons should be addressed.
Caring Confrontation with Involuntary Chemical Dependency Clients

by Faith M. Clark LSW, MHP, LADC

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D
Committee Members: Natalie Soliga MSW, LGSW; Phoenix Lyn Walker, LADC

The purpose of this study was to research the benefits of caring confrontation with 24 involuntary chemically dependent clients. The researcher created a survey which contained 11 variables that measured the benefits of caring confrontation and type of caring confrontation with the demographics of age, gender, and amount of time in treatment. The survey was distributed at a Midwestern chemical dependency facility. The results of the survey showed a positive mean score in the area of perceived benefits of caring confrontation for the entire sample and when factoring in the demographics of age, gender, and amount of time in treatment. The results of the survey also showed a positive mean score in the area of type of caring confrontation for the entire sample, and when controlling for the demographics of age, gender, and amount of time in treatment. Although there were positive results regardless of demographics measured, the research yielded the most positive results for benefits of caring confrontation for individuals in treatment from one to two months with a mean score of 18.44 (on a scale of 4 to 20) versus individuals in treatment from three months to aftercare with a mean score of 14.56. The conclusions of this research are that caring confrontation is perceived as beneficial to involuntary, chemically dependent clients in this sample in the areas of relapse, recidivism, and bio-psycho-social health, while in treatment, regardless of demographics included in this study. The results of this research find that incorporating caring confrontation in the treatment process with involuntary chemically dependent clients is beneficial and practitioners should consider receiving training and supervision in the correct practice of this treatment modality.
Supervision and Training Needs of Practitioners Working in Batterer Intervention Programs

By Heather D. Conley

Research Chair: Dr. Michael Chovanec, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Darcy Westermann, LICSW; Dan Porter, LICSW

Batterer intervention programs (BIPs) seek to address violence in families by working with perpetrators in developing skills to remain nonviolent. The purpose of this study was to explore the supervision and training needs of practitioners who work in batterer intervention programs (BIPs). This study utilized qualitative data collected from hour-long, audio-recorded interviews with three BIP practitioners (one male and two female). Interviews were conducted in a large, Midwestern metro area over a period of three weeks, were transcribed verbatim, and coded for themes by the researcher. Major findings included: Participants were overall satisfied with quality of supervision, which was in contrast with previous research. Participants felt more supervised (even over-supervised) than participants in previous research. Finally, specific training and education in batterer intervention, even the field of domestic violence in general appears to be lacking. Social work implications were also discussed. This study is a beginning effort to more closely examine the supervision and training needs of BIP practitioners. Quality training and supervision supports BIP practitioners in their effort to help reduce violence and abuse in families in the community.
Assertive Community Treatment Teams

by Barb Cooley

Research Chair: Valandra, LICSW PhD Candidate
Committee Members: Mary Larson, MSW; Jennifer Kempenich, MA

This exploratory qualitative study focused on the perceptions of the social worker role on Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams. Four professional ACT team members participated in a Qualtrics survey. The four themes that emerged from the surveys follow: 1) interpretation of the social worker role; 2) role clarification of the different ACT team members; 3) overlapping roles of the ACT team members; and 4) actions of help role clarification. Research is needed to further clarify the different roles that the social worker plays on the ACT teams. Implications for social work practice include the importance of understanding the role that the social worker plays on the ACT teams and how this role is coordinated with other ACT team members. This description of the social worker role, as described by the survey participants, can be evaluated by social workers in a variety of settings. This serves as a valuable tool to help clarify their roles within their agencies.
Deathbed Visions: Social Workers’ Experiences, Perspectives, and Therapeutic Responses

by Leslee Curtis

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, PhD, LCSW
Committee Members: Carey Winkler, LICSW; Janet Westlund, LGSW

Deathbed Visions (DBVs) are intensely personal, powerful, comforting and even reassuring experiences the dying may encounter just before death occurs. The term DBV is a general label for the broad category of spiritual, mystical, or unexplainable experiences or coincidental occurrences that take place in the arena of death. The dying have reported seeing angels, religious figures, spiritual guides, or deceased loved ones. They may even have control over the timing of their death. Death-related sensory experience (DRSE), end-of-life experience (ELE), and nearing death awareness (NDA) are several terms commonly used to describe the many different experiences people have reported around the time of their death or nearing death experience. DBVs are a neglected source of peace and comfort for the patients and their loved ones. Fear of societal judgments and lack of validation may keep many silent and create confusion. This research explored the experiences, perspectives, and therapeutic responses of social workers and other professional caregivers who work with the terminally ill in the hospice setting.
Support After Loss: Straight Talk From Young Widowed Parents

by Korie DeBruin

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, MPP, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Ted Bowman; Chris Dooley-Harrington, LICSW

Young widowed parents frequently report challenges with their social environment after the deaths of their partners. The purpose of this study was to have young widowed parents identify helpful ways they have been supported since the deaths of their partners. A total of 42 young widowed parents (6 male, 36 female) participated in this study. A mixed method approach was used to answer the following research question: What are helpful ways that people have supported you since the death of your partner? In order to gain this information, participants were asked to complete an online survey that contained both qualitative and quantitative questions. Young widowed parents were recruited from the following sources: 1. An online support group for young widows and widowers, 2. A loss of spouse support group, 3. Young Widowed Support Group on meetup.com, a local informal support group for young widows and widowers in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, 4. Acquaintances of the researcher and 5. Snowball sampling. A grounded theory approach was used to analyze the qualitative data from the survey. The main findings that emerged from this study include: 1. Seven types of support seen as helpful, 2. Identification of four main community groups that have provided the most helpful support to young widowed parents since the deaths of their partners, 3. Identification of professional services that have been helpful to young widowed parents, 4. Suggestions for professionals who work with young widowed parents, 5. Things that young widowed parents know now that they wish they had known at the time of their partners’ deaths, and 6. Appropriate things to say to young widowed parents after the deaths of their partners. Findings are directly applied to the social challenges that are commonly reported by this population and suggestions to improve services are given.
Adoptive Parents’ Experience with International Adoption: Children with Attachment or Behavior Challenges

by Heather Deveny-Leggitt

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, PHD, LICSW
Committee Members: Colleen Mens, MSW, LICSW; Sara Smit, MSW, LISW

The research project is a qualitative study that explored parents’ experience of international adoption of children who had emotional, behavioral, and/or attachment challenges, as well as parents’ corresponding emotions with such experiences. The data was analyzed using content analysis, or grounded theory, approach as described by Berg (2009). The conceptual framework used to construct and interpret meaning of participants interviews included both ecosystems and psychodynamic theories. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from different mid-west cities who had adopted children internationally and identified their children as having emotional, behavioral, and/or attachment challenges. The following themes were found: a) primary care arrangement before adoption, b) children’s challenges identified by parents, c) parents’ emotional experiences, d) differences in siblings’ experiences, and e) support/resources, f) issues with the adoption process, g) becoming a family, h) adoption expectations and i) similarities and differences compared to biological families. The findings from this research have implication for professionals in the adoption field, as well as clinicians.
This paper examines the available literature on the correlation between quality of life and type of living arrangement for adults with a developmental or learning disability. The purpose was to examine whether or not adults living semi-independently experienced better outcomes than peers in traditional group homes. In general, outcomes in semi-independent living were equal to or better than the outcomes achieved in traditional group homes, and typically cost the same or less. Impacts on the provision of services and areas for future research are discussed.
Drawing on previous research establishing the effects poverty on children's mental health and behavioral problems, exposure to violence and aggression, and lower school achievement, this research sought to examine whether any differences exist in the challenges faced by students living in poverty in urban settings versus students in rural settings from the perspective of school social workers. A survey with a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative questions was sent via e-mail to school social workers in Minnesota through the Minnesota School Social Workers Association (MSSWA). A total of 20 responses from both urban and rural settings were collected. Findings supported previous research in that mental health, violence and aggression, and low school achievement were problems faced by students in both rural and urban community settings. The findings did not indicate a statistically significant difference between challenges faced by students living in poverty in rural settings and those living in poverty in urban settings. Community collaboration and working with students on resiliency factors were noted as essential to intervention by school social workers in both community settings. Qualitative responses indicated an understanding of challenges unique to each community setting, including a lack of available resources in rural settings and limited resources due to high demand in urban settings. Suggestions for future research include a greater look at how to effectively integrate community collaboration in impoverished communities. Implications for social work practice include a greater demand for policy practice among school social workers and advocacy for programs designed to empower students living in poverty to greater levels of academic, psychological, and social functioning.
The Impact of Social Networking on Communication and Conflict Resolution Skills among College Freshmen

by John Drussell

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: David Stoos, LICSW; Jennifer Whetstone, LICSW

Social networking is a current phenomenon that consists of both web-based communication with Internet users through websites and interaction with others via cellular phones. A survey conducted on 2,277 American adults found that 18-24 year olds sent or received an average of 109.5 text messages per day, which works out to be more than 3,200 text messages per month. Further, it was estimated that 713 million people ages 15 or older, which was 14% of the global population, used the Internet in June 2006, with 153 million being in the United States. The purpose of this study at social networking, specifically the activities of texting and use of the social network site (SNS) Facebook, and its impact on communication and conflict resolution skills. Twenty two college freshmen responded to an anonymous survey addressing their daily activities in social networking as well as general attitudes regarding communication and conflict resolution. The findings of this research suggest that individuals consider face-to-face interaction the most effective and preferred means to communicate and resolve conflict with others. However, the results also indicate that individuals participate in daily social networking activities at a higher rate than what has been found in previous studies. Further, participants reported using texting and Facebook to communicate and resolve conflicts in their in everyday life. Future research is necessary and encouraged to examine how social networking relates to the skills of communication and conflict resolution and its impact on interpersonal functioning.
School Social Workers’ Perspectives on Working with Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

by Marnie Eveslage

Research Chair: Carol Kuechler, Ph.D. LISW
Committee Members: Becky Wood, MSW, LICSW; Rachel Green, MSW, LGSW

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are complex neurodevelopmental disorders that include deficits in social interaction, communication, and the presence of repetitive and restricted behaviors. The number of children with autism spectrum disorder has increased significantly over time, resulting in more children with autism in public schools. School social workers are members of the educational team who help support children and families and are often the first professional to whom families turn to in crisis. There is a paucity of literature and research studies on the perspectives’ of social workers who work with this population. School social workers, who are members of the Minnesota School Social Workers Association (MSSWA), participated in a survey about their perspectives on working with children who have a diagnosis on the autism spectrum. They reported confidence in understanding the disorders and characteristics of autism spectrum disorders and indicated that they have received training that prepared them to work with this population. Their role in helping classmates, teachers, and parents understand the child's disability is one way their work is distinct from the work they do with other children. As demonstrated, school social workers who received training and education on autism spectrum disorders tend to be confident in recognizing the characteristics of autism spectrum disorders. Based on the dramatic increase in the number of children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, there may be a need to provide education and training on autism spectrum disorders to the general population of social workers to ensure that they are confident in recognizing the characteristics and in referring children for screening.
The Effects of Mindfulness Meditation on Mental Health

by Geraldine A. Fedorowicz

Research Chair: Lance Peterson, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Stacy Husebo, MSW, LICSW; Karen Heegaard, M.A., L.P.

Current research supports the efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions in clinical social work, yet more rigorous research is needed to determine what makes it effective, and through which mechanisms. This study looked at the relationship between meditation experience and self-reported trait mindfulness and emotion regulation, two proposed mechanisms of change in mindfulness, and perceived levels of well-being. Data was collected using a quantitative survey involving 29 adults who currently have a mindfulness meditation practice. People who meditated more frequently each week scored significantly higher on measures of trait mindfulness. In addition, higher levels of trait mindfulness were correlated with less difficulty with emotion regulation and higher levels of well-being. The results of this study support the idea that emotion regulation and trait mindfulness are possible mechanisms of action in mindfulness-based interventions. Although sample size limits generalization of findings, this study suggests that the use of mindfulness meditation in clinical social work is beneficial in improving emotion regulation, which is an important aspect of many mental health challenges.
Factors Involved in College Students’ Use of Counseling Services

by Terri Flansburg

Research Chair: Carol F. Kuechler, MSW, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Don Johnson, PhD.; Krista Larson, MSW, LICSW

The purpose of this study was to identify key factors associated with students’ use of college counseling services. Six common factors were seen throughout the available related research: stigma, gender, culture, experience & knowledge, fear and accessibility. In order to ascertain if and to what extent these factors influence college students’ decision to seek counseling, students at an urban Catholic university were invited to take part in an anonymous online survey through their school-sponsored daily e-news. The survey included questions related to the six factors drawn from the literature, and was completed using Qualtrics, an online survey tool. There were 46 students who completed the survey, and the data collected from the surveys was analyzed primarily using descriptive statistics. Each of the six factors had an impact on students’ use of counseling services, however the manner and extent to which each one affected an individual was not always congruent with previous research. The qualitative data consisted of voluntary comments and illustrated participants’ personal experiences and points of view. Given the findings from this and previous studies, college counseling centers may need to consider increasing their hours of availability, offering more information about their services online, staffing the center with counselors who match the student body demographically, and increasing education about counseling and therapy to students. It would also be valuable for more comprehensive research to be done on each of the six factors presented here, specifically the change in stigma over time.
**Comparison of Caregiver Burden among Types and Stages of Dementia**

by Jeanette J. Foizie

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D., LISW  
Committee Members: Alvin Holm, MD; Tanya Rand, LICSW

The purpose of this study was to better understand the effects of caregiver burden as they relate to different dementia diagnoses and the stage of the disease in order to discover appropriate supports and interventions. Potential participants were identified through their use of a specialty memory loss clinic. Using a mixed methodology, respondents completed a survey which included a quantitative measure and qualitative open ended response questions designed to allow the caregiver to expand on their experience. The quantitative portion of this research used the Zarit Burden Interview (ZBI), a caregiver self-report measure. Diagnosis information and the patient’s Allen Cognitive Level (ACL) were supplied by the clinic in order to confirm appropriate diagnosis and stage of disease. Moderate ACL scores of 3.5-4.5 appear to increase burden. Caregiving daughters in this study were found to have the highest total ZBI scores, indicative of a higher level of burden than other caregivers. Husbands and wives in this study had identical mean total ZBI scores. The findings indicated several areas of caregiver burden in which social work supports could be valuable. Role transitions, isolation, a lack of social support, and the need for adult day centers equipped to handle patients with dementia related behaviors were all identified as areas of concern.
Preventing Recidivism: Perspectives on the Effectiveness of the Juvenile Justice System in Meeting the needs of African American Youth with EBD

by Carmeann Foster

Research Chair: Dr. Pa Der Vang, MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: George V. Baboila, MSW, LICSW; Amy Mellum, MSW, LICSW

Nearly two million young people, under the age of 18, are arrested each year nationwide (Gottesman & Schwarz, 2011). Of these youth, 70% are male, and 46% are African American (McPherson & Sedlak, 2010). Approximately two thirds suffer from symptoms of aggression, depression or anxiety. Those who suffer from behavioral symptoms, 27% suffer from severe and persistent mental illness. (McPherson & Sedlak, 2010). Similar statistics exist within the Hennepin County justice system. These statistics paint a frightening picture of a system in which emotionally and behaviorally disturbed African American males are grossly overrepresented in both the local and national juvenile justice systems. This study seeks to capture perspectives about the effectiveness of the Juvenile Justice system in addressing factors that lead to the high rates of recidivism seen in African American male offenders with identified emotional/behavioral health concerns (EBD). An online survey, made up of open and closed questions and tailored to solicit this information was used. The sample was composed of thirteen professionals including both attorneys and social workers working in and on behalf of the juvenile justice system in Hennepin County, Minnesota. Results were consistent with existing research and theoretical understanding in the area. They revealed an overwhelming perception that the juvenile justice system is in need of reform and raised the question “what are the limits of the juvenile justice system?”
The Role of the Emergency Room Social Worker: An Exploratory Study

by Elizabeth Fusenig, LSW

Research Chair: Valandra, LICSW, ABD
Committee Members: Susan Dean, LICSW; Stephanie Spandl, SSND, LICSW

Research suggests the defined role of emergency room social worker is unclear among other professionals working in the emergency room (Cowles & Lefcowitz, 1992). Changes to the healthcare system including a decrease in resources, combined roles of emergency department personnel, and delivery of mental health treatment in emergency rooms has necessitated further investigation of the role of emergency room social worker. Using a qualitative design, seven participants from two Midwestern hospitals were surveyed in regards to how they defined their role as a social worker, barriers to their role, and demographic information was collected including licensure and years worked as an emergency room social worker. Findings of this study suggest the emergency room social worker is a valuable member of the interdisciplinary team in the emergency room, fulfilling multiple roles for the well-being of patients. Study results indicated emergency room social workers may be underutilized as educators of mental health topics both within the hospital and in the community setting. Additionally, the role of emergency room social worker as a cultural broker may also be underutilized within the emergency room setting. This study also indicated significant barriers to the role of emergency room social worker, including lack of community resources. These findings demonstrate the need for future research in various areas relating to the emergency room social worker such as researching the emergency room social worker as an educator and as a cultural liaison.
Prevention of Vicarious Trauma: Are Coping Strategies Enough?

by Angela M. Gerding

Research Chair: Lance Peterson, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Twyla George, LICSW; Mark Olson, LICSW

Social workers are increasingly being called on to assist a greater proportion of clients who have experienced trauma. As a result clinicians are exposed to greater chances of developing vicarious trauma. The clinician may experience higher levels of stress, unwanted/distressing images of trauma material, sleep disturbance, and anxiety (Cunningham, 2004). Researchers have found that the signs and symptoms of vicarious trauma can decrease if the clinician uses commonly recommended coping strategies to help control the unwanted disturbances of working with traumatized clients (Bober, Regehr, 2005). These coping strategies include leisure, self-care, supervision, and spirituality activities. A quantitative survey was sent to 450 social workers in the metro area with a license level of LGSW or LICSW. The purpose of they survey was to investigate the effectiveness of commonly recommended coping strategies at reducing the signs and symptoms of vicarious trauma. A total of 62 surveys were returned and the data was carefully analyzed. The literature reviewed and the data obtained from the data analysis contained similar findings. The findings found that leisure, self-care, and spirituality activities all had a strong relationship for reducing a clinician’s score on the quality of life scale. Supervision activities had a weak relationship between time spent engaging in supervision activities and a participant’s score on the quality of life scale. To date, most research has focused on what individuals can do to address vicarious trauma. Further research should explore what can be done at the organizational level to help reduce the signs and symptoms of vicarious trauma.
The Body as Process: An examination of core concepts in body-oriented psychotherapy and a brief model for implementation in a clinical social work setting

by Ashleybree Graczyk

Research Chair: Felicia Washington Sy, MSW, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Janet Dahlem, MA; Susan Arnold, MA, RN

The field of body-oriented psychotherapy, of engaging the body and affect in the psychotherapeutic process, has grown tremendously over the last 20 years, and has shown to improve the treatment of both cognitive and somatic focuses of treatment. This paper uses existing research and interviews with practicing body-oriented psychotherapists to identify core concepts among various body-oriented modalities. Grounded theory was used to bring out the major themes from the interviews, which included: the importance of preparation and support, body awareness, memory stored in the body, touch, empowerment of client’s innate healing capacity, the clinician’s own practice, and a greater demand for the work. The concepts identified from research and interviews were then used to create a model for integrating this work into a clinical social work setting. Where there was once an emphasis on only treating individuals through talk, these findings support that a deep awareness to one’s body provides an opportunity for clients to connect with their own inner capacity for healing, and to live in a more embodied, integrated way.
The Benefits of Yoga to Eating Disorder Recovery

by Jennifer Grant

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Amy Moran, MA, RYT; Heather Pizzanello, MSW

This study is aimed at gaining a better understanding of the perceived benefits of yoga to eating disorder recovery through the subjective experiences of those in recovery. Qualitative interviews with seven women in recovery from eating disorders who regularly practice yoga were used to identify the specific ways in which yoga contributed to the recovery process. Findings indicated that the perceived benefits of yoga to eating disorder recovery include improved mind-body awareness, greater self-acceptance and more positive feelings about body image. Respondents also indicated that the practice of yoga can be a spiritual experience and a vehicle through which to develop a sense of calmness that helps to buffer the stress of everyday life. Implications for social work practice and future research are provided.
Assessment for Domestic Violence in Couples Requesting Conjoint Therapy: Current Practice of Assessment among Licensed Therapists

by Ilene M. Grosam

Research Chair: Jeong-Kyun Choi, MSW, LISW, PhD
Committee Members: Julianne Bulau, MSW, LICSW; Jeannie Jackson, BSW, LSW

Marital therapy with couples is routinely provided by licensed professionals including psychologists, marriage and family therapists, and licensed clinical social workers. Studying assessment practices provides information about how individuals, differing licensing categories, and the overall group assess for domestic violence in couples presenting for conjoint therapy. The present study utilized a survey consisting of both quantitative and qualitative items requesting responses to find out the frequency and methods of assessment for domestic violence when couples present for conjoint marital therapy. Respondents to the survey included 30 Licensed Independent Clinical Social Workers, 19 Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists, 5 respondents indicating belonging to other categories. The results indicate not all therapists assess for domestic violence in a universal manner, leaving some couples unscreened for violence in the relationship. The methods used to screen for violence in relationships were not always consistent with recommendations from professional organizations and research based literature. Overall therapist responses to working with couples where domestic violence is disclosed indicate safety for the abused partner is considered a foremost concern. Training about assessment processes and the dynamics of violent relationships may increase therapist feelings of competence in their work. More evidence based research is needed to agree what the best methods are to assess and treat violent relationships.
The present study explored the need for empathy-based rape prevention programs on college campuses by investigating the following research question: What is the relationship between undergraduates’ empathy for rape victims and their self-reported likelihood of raping, the gender of the rape victim, their past sexual experiences, and their demographics? The design of the present study was a cross-sectional, quantitative study in which participants completed an online questionnaire. The present study found that participants at low risk of forcing sex empathized more with rape victims than those at high risk for forcing sex; however, there was not a significant difference between participants who were at low risk and those at high risk of raping with regard to their rape empathy. Additionally, the results suggest that undergraduates may empathize more with rape victims of their own gender. Furthermore, as the severity of participants’ sexual perpetration experiences increased, their empathy for rape victims decreased significantly; however, there was not a significant relationship between participants’ sexual victimization experiences and their rape empathy. Finally, the present study found that female participants empathize more with rape victims than male participants; however, there were not many statistically significant differences between the other demographic groups on their rape empathy. Future social work research should continue exploring undergraduates’ rape empathy. Additionally, future social work practice should incorporate rape prevention programs that focus on increasing participants’ empathy for both male and female rape victims, as the results of this study and of other studies suggest that men and women may empathize more with rape victims of their own gender.
Stress, Coping Strategies, and Marital Satisfaction in Spouses of Military Service Members

by Charlene M. Haapala

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Mary Aleckson, MSW, LICSW; Donna McEleveen, MSW, LISW

The literature emphasizes that civilian spouses of military service members experience significant stress, utilize coping strategies, and experience marital issues. A survey of civilian spouses ($N = 10$) of military service members identified levels of perceived stress, common coping strategies, and marital satisfaction. The focus of this study was to examine the relationship between perceived stress, coping strategies, and marital satisfaction. There were not enough participants in this study to determine these relationships. Descriptive statistics show averages of low perceived stress, and high marital satisfaction. Coping strategies most often used by civilian spouses were active coping, positive reframing, planning, and acceptance. The limitations of the study were examined, and suggestions for future research were discussed.
Complex trauma in early childhood has the ability to impact a child’s development in multiple domains, thus influencing development throughout the rest of their life. The purpose of this study was to explore best practices with children who have experienced complex trauma from the perspective of mental health professionals, with a focus on children between the ages of three and five. Qualitative interviews were conducted with six mental health professionals who were asked to discuss the presentation, interventions, and outcomes of a case where the child experienced complex trauma. Consistent with previous literature, all participants in this study reported self-regulation deficits and relational impairments for the case they discussed. Additionally, all six participants utilized play therapy and expressed the importance of collaboration with other adults and systems in the child’s life in order for treatment to be successful, exemplifying the need to utilize an ecological approach. Other practices used by professionals included Cognitive Behavioral Therapies, feelings/emotion interventions, EMDR, and relational interventions such as including the parents/caregivers in treatment, addressing the attachment needs, and coaching parents. Overall, participants utilize a combination of approaches and interventions in order to provide best practices, always emphasizing safety, attachment, and development.
Perspective of Aging from the Prose of Age Specific Birthday Cards

by Lori Halbur

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Jay Anderson, Ph.D.; Annette Licht, MSW

With a growing number of older people in the United States, it is important for social workers to acknowledge that ageism exists in our society and continue to research, study and understand the influences that contribute to it. Media outlets are one source that has been found to have an influence on people’s perceptions about older adults. A qualitative study was carried out to determine if the messages in age specific greeting cards that are produced specifically for individuals age 60 and older portray more positive or negative perceptions about aging or older individuals. The non-probability, convenience sample for this study included 83 greeting cards. Using Grounded Theory Method, the data from the prose of the cards was coded and major themes emerged. It was found that the messages presented in the greeting cards displayed many forms of ageism both positive and negative in nature. Future research on the messages presented in different forms of media and how it relates to ageism will be helpful in increasing social workers knowledge so that they will be prepared to assist older adults and their families more successfully through the end years of the older adults’ lives.
Food Deserts: Low Income Communities and their Lack of Adequate Nutrition

by Lauren M. Harding

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel PhD, LCSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Laura Senst, LICSW; Andy Bennett

Food deserts are urban as well as rural areas where a quality amount of adequate nutritional food is hard to come by. In many instances, people may live within a few blocks of fast food restaurants, but in order to get to a grocery store they may have to travel many miles. The people who live within these food deserts are often considered low income and are ethnically minorities. This research project is a qualitative exploratory study that analyses the relationship between people living in low income food desert communities with their lack of nutritionally affordable food options. One of the goals of the research project was to discover how the population living in these low income communities feels about their opportunities to obtain healthy food. A theoretical framework of content analysis was used as the method to construct and interpret themes found throughout the analysis. Eight in-depth interviews were conducted with low income community members, male and female, who were 18 years or older. Data analysis occurred within one month of conducting the interviews. The core themes that emerged in the data were: 1) characteristics of participants; 2) impact on children; 3) consequences of living in a food desert; and, 4) solutions to food deserts. The social work profession has paid little attention to this area of concern. Food deserts are made up of primary low income level populations, which is a major area of social work practice. It is important that the social work profession researches this topic more in depth and become more knowledgeable on how food deserts affect their clients.
Autism and its Impact on Families

by Ashley Hartmann

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, Ph.D, LICSW
Committee Members: Jen Olson, LSW; Jennifer Gregor, LICSW

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is typically diagnosed in childhood and has a wide range of symptoms, some being more severe than others. The purpose of this research is to examine ASD and how it is impacting families. The empowerment theory, strengths perspective and family systems theory promote resiliency among families who are impacted by an ASD diagnosis. These theories strengthen the individual and family unit by allowing them to live a more fulfilling life. In this study, qualitative research was used. Qualitative research includes data collection, data analysis and drawing conclusions. This study is based off of eight interviews, four being the sibling perspective and four being the parent perspective. There were six primary themes found in the sibling interviews; knowledge of Autism, effect on relationships, feelings of sibling’s autism diagnosis, future care for sibling, meaning, acceptance and advice and extended family. There were also six primary themes found in the parent’s interviews, feelings around autism, knowledge around autism, life changes, effect on relationships, support systems and acceptance, meaning and advice. My overarching research question asks, what are the experiences of parents and siblings with a child diagnosed with autism? After reviewing the literature, my findings produce both similar and contradictory results which were discussed. This research produced both strengths and limitations. The implications of this research allow current and future social workers to relate and work with families who have a child or sibling with an autism diagnosis.
The diagnosis and treatment of a serious childhood illness impacts the entire family system and causes a wide range of changes and losses. This research explored the experience of eight families faced with the extended hospitalization of a child and investigated how their experiences could be understood from an ambiguous loss framework. Qualitative interviews were conducted with eight mothers to explore their perception of the changes within the family unit during extended hospitalization. Results indicated families do experience ambiguous loss during extended hospitalization, particularly family boundary ambiguity and the loss of a normative family experience. Participants indicated these losses were related to the ambiguous absence of the patient and caregiver. Social workers should be aware of these unrecognized or uncertain losses and how they impact the entire family system when working with children with a serious medical illness.
The Achievement Gap from the Student’s Perspective

by Jennifer Hipp

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph. D., LICSW
Committee Members: Gail Pedersen, LICSW; Erica Sauer, LICSW

African American students disproportionately perform poorly compared to their peers academically. This research project reviews previous findings for causes of the achievement gap. Race, Socioeconomic Status, Family and High Quality Teaching/Schools were the recurrent themes in the existing research. A qualitative research method was used to discern the barriers to graduating high school on time from the student’s perspective. Semi structured qualitative interviews were used to conduct research about why students did not graduate high school. The sample for this study included seven adult male participants who did not graduate high school. Overall, the research showed that participants agreed with previous literature. Participants generally did not think that their parents or school supported their education. The majority of participants also thought that their family's income impacted their learning negatively. The implications of this project invite continued research on why being mobile and poor impact education negatively. Further research also needs to be conducted to identify what students and families affected by the achievement gap identify as areas that need improvement and how it has affected them. Implications for education are to offer a culturally sensitive curriculum to students and provide individualized instruction to students identified as struggling.
This study explored social workers’ beliefs towards harm reduction. Specifically, it explored clinical social workers’ beliefs towards harm reduction principles, characteristics of substance users, and beliefs regarding substance abuse treatment options. It also investigated if professional or demographic variables were related to clinical social workers’ beliefs towards harm reduction. Using a quantitative design, 24 clinical social workers were surveyed using the Substance Abuse Treatment Survey (SATS) (Housenbold Seiger, 2005). Data was analyzed using descriptive and basic inferential statistics. The findings indicated that chemical dependency or substance abuse training, perceptions of chemical dependency training sufficiency, and previous employment in the chemical dependency field positively impact clinical social workers’ beliefs towards harm reduction principles. In addition, training in chemical dependency or substance abuse also positively impacted clinical social workers’ beliefs towards harm reduction type substance abuse treatment options. These findings overlap with the preexisting literature. The impact training has on clinical social workers is profound. Continued training is important so clinical social workers can effectively work with the substance using population.
Effects of Unemployment on Health and Mental Health based on Gender

by Kelly B Holland

Research Chair: Dr. Jessica Toft, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Karen Jensen, LICSW; Gloria Kennedy

This research looks to explore three research questions: 1) What are the health concerns people believe are related to their unemployment? 2) What are the mental health concerns people believe are related to their unemployment? 3) Finally, do genders experience a difference in unemployment-related health effects and mental health issues? The research took place by an interviewing process. The respondents were found by advertising via informational flyers posted in a southern Minnesota community. Ultimately, three respondents were interviewed. The respondents discussed the financial effects of unemployment reporting that this was a deterrent in their job searching process. Additionally, all respondents had physical health concerns and explored the impact of unemployment on those concerns. The mental health concerns that respondents had varied and affected each differently. The issue of unemployment has many implications in social work practice. On the micro level, social workers are going to be faced with a variety of issues from financial to mental health concerns. On the macro level, additional research was recommended to address the current degree of unemployment.
The Effect of Multiple Military Deployments on Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms

by Joseph R. Hoops

Research Chair: Andrea A. Nesmith, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Tamara Kincaid, LICSW; Jenny Jendro, MSW

The purpose of this study was to learn the effects of multiple, combat-related military deployments upon post-traumatic stress symptoms. This subject has particular importance given that the protracted conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have been fought by a military that is much smaller than in previous wars. A review of the literature showed that the effects of combat related deployments on post-traumatic stress symptoms are significant. The impact is felt by both the veterans and their families. This has implications for clinical social workers working in systems that provide treatment and services for veterans and families affected.

This was a qualitative study. Interviews were conducted with seven subjects, all of whom are credentialed at the level of either Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker or Licensed Psychologist. The interviews concerned the post-traumatic stress symptoms of those clients for whom each clinician has provided treatment that has experienced multiple combat-related military deployments. The data was analyzed and four themes were noted with respect to the effect of multiple deployments on post-traumatic stress symptoms: 1) effect on emotional arousal, 2) distinguishing aspects of multiple deployments, 3) effect on relationships and 4) self-destructive behavior. Issues of dysregulation of emotional arousal and negative impact on families also emerged in the literature review.
The experiences of compassion fatigue and job satisfaction among workers who serve homeless clients is explored. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between workers’ experiences of compassion fatigue and workers’ experiences of job satisfaction as they engage with homeless clientele with multifarious presenting concerns. Specifically, this study sought to determine if a relationship between the compassion fatigue and job satisfaction existed, and to determine the nature of possible correlations between the variables. Using a quantitative design, employees of a local, targeted agency that serves homeless clientele were targeted and administered two survey instruments. Data was collected and analyzed using inferential statistics, including chi-square calculations. These findings indicated that a correlative relationship exists between workers’ experiences of compassion fatigue and experiences of job satisfaction, although the correlation appears to be weak. The findings point to the need for continued efforts to identify and treat compassion fatigue among workers, and the continued need to investigate the role of compassion satisfaction opportunities as they influence experiences of job satisfaction.
The Experiences of Individuals with a Sibling Diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder

by Hannah Huinker

Research Chair: Keith DeRaad, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Bridget McMahon, BA; Doug Eischens, MSW, LICSW

This study investigated the experiences of individuals with a sibling diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. Six siblings between the ages of eighteen and thirty-nine participated in the study. This qualitative study investigated the quality of the sibling relationship between the neuro-typical sibling and the sibling diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. In addition, participants were asked how having a sibling diagnosed with an autism spectrum impacted their pro-social behavior, parental treatment, career choice, self-esteem, and academic performance. The advantages and disadvantages of having a sibling diagnosed with an autism spectrum were also explored. Results indicated that participants have very close sibling relationships with their sibling diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder but there were mixed responses to how their sibling affected their academic performance and parental treatment. The majority of participants responded that their sibling on the autism spectrum had an impact in their career choice. All of the participants believed that their sibling improved their pro-social behavior making them more compassionate and understanding of other peoples’ differences.


Substance Abuse Education in Master’s of Social Work Programs: A Content Analysis

by Alex N. C. Johnson, B.A., L.A.D.C.

Research Chair: Lance T. Peterson, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: James L. Stolz, LICSW; Kris Miller, MSW, LGSW, LADC

Prior research suggests that inadequate substance abuse education in social work programs contributes to misdiagnosis, bias, and produces students who are unprepared to work with substance abuse. This study assessed for the presence of substance abuse education in Minnesota MSW programs’ core curriculum. Using 19 educational objectives based on Minnesota statute for Alcohol and Drug Counseling licensure, this study sought to determine if current graduates are adequately prepared to work with substance abusing and dependent people and their families. Five of six MSW programs were assessed. This study found that only 4 of 19 objectives were met by all schools, while 7 of 19 objectives did not appear in any of the schools syllabi. The majority of schools do not appear to be teaching assessment, crisis intervention, family systems dynamics, cultural implications, or even a basic overview related to substance abuse. Implications for social work education include mandatory integration of these 5 objectives into MSW programs. These objectives are exclusive to substance abuse practice and are not easily applied without specific education. Teaching these objectives would offer a baseline understanding of the complex nature of substance abuse and benefit all Master’s level social workers regardless of specialty.
Agency Level Interventions for Preventing and Treating Vicarious Trauma: A Qualitative Study

by Jessica A. Johnson

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Todd Erickson; Traci Boser; LICSW

The purpose of this study was to explore what types of strategies agencies are using to prevent and/or reduce vicarious trauma. To do this, five qualitative interviews were conducted with participants who work directly with individuals who have survived trauma. The findings showed mixed results, as some agencies employed multiple strategies, while others employed few. Agencies seemed to provide adequate benefits and training to employees, and to also encourage them to engage in self-care. While most agencies required supervision/consultation, only one agency encouraged staff members to discuss how they are being impacted by their clients’ trauma. Agencies also did little to manage caseload sizes, as only two participants said that their agencies work to be mindful of the number of trauma cases each staff member has on their caseload. While employees should be held accountable to taking an individual stance in preventing vicarious trauma, agencies also need to make conscious efforts to ensure that staff members are receiving adequate supervision/consultation, training, and benefits, and that they are also being encouraged to engage in self-care. If agencies do not provide adequate support to their employees, the wellbeing and work of their employees, as well as the care of their clients, could be jeopardized.
How Can Western Providers Adapt Their Techniques When Working with the Hmong Population in a Mental Health Setting?

by JoAnna Johnson

Research Chair: Dr. Pa Der Vang
Committee Members: Amy Newell, LICSW; Anne Hall Psy. D; LP

Mental health is a common concern for Southeast Asian refugees who are struggling with acculturation. This study examined what therapeutic techniques Western clinicians use to assure cultural sensitivity during therapy. A qualitative study was conducted and nine clinicians were interviewed. The results of this study demonstrated it is imperative to include family, exhibit respect, and include traditional beliefs and values in an effort to be culturally sensitive. This maximizes optimal therapeutic interventions. The main diagnoses explored in this study were Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Anxiety, and Depression. Both the study and the research displayed similar themes affecting clinicians when providing therapy to Southeast Asian refugees. This study is significant to clinicians working in the mental health field to ensure positive interactions with Southeast Asians. The idea of Western psychotherapy is foreign to Southeast Asians; it is crucial that clinicians have insight when providing care to this population.
Private mental health agency employment: The impact on practitioner's quality of life

by Liz Jones

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, MSW, MPP, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Kathy Lombardi, MSW, LICSW; Katie Lewis, MSW, LGSW

The purpose of this study is to take a closer look at what factors of working at a private mental health agency affect a mental health practitioner's quality of life. This overall research question was broke down into four research questions which are: How does work-life balance impact a mental health practitioner's quality of life, How does workplace culture impact a mental health practitioner's quality of life, How does job-related stresses impact a mental health practitioner's quality of life, and lastly, How does workplace supervision impact a mental health practitioner's quality of life. Using a quantitative design, a survey was administered to 41 mental health practitioners, and 40 surveys were returned. The findings in relation to the research questions indicated that stress from work does affect the relationship with a spouse or partner, the majority of practitioners are at least somewhat satisfied with their job, most caseloads felt about right or too high, the majority experience burnout sometimes, and lastly that they feel they receive enough quality supervision. Implications for social work from this survey is that agency structure should be examined, more specifically in the realm of amount of paperwork and time allotted to this; supervision more specific on how to separate work and family life while having stress from work which leads into another implication of more continuing education on self-care.
Practitioner perspectives on the impact of collaborative documentation on the therapeutic alliance

by J. Mark Kaufman

Research Chair: Phil AuClaire, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Steve Carlson, Psy.D.; Jeff Maciej, LICSW

Collaborative documentation (CD), also known as concurrent documentation, is the practice of creating the case record in the presence of the client. This is often done in collaboration with the client, where the client has input into what is written in the clinical record. This practice is relatively new, and there is disagreement among practitioners about how this can impact the therapeutic alliance between the practitioner and the client. Some say that it could harm their relationships with the clients they serve, others report improvements in the therapeutic alliance. This study explored the relationship between the practice of CD and the quality of the therapeutic alliance. Five practitioners were selected who use CD in providing mental health services. Each was interviewed utilizing an interview schedule based on the short form of the Working Alliance Inventory- short (WAI-s) (Horvath & Greenberg, 1989). Findings included variance in the practitioner perceptions of the impact of CD on the therapeutic alliance, but did support that when certain ways of practicing CD are used the impact can be a positive one. Some practitioners were more skeptical of the positive impact of CD on the therapeutic alliance, but most agreed that it is helpful in gaining improved agreement between practitioner and client on goals.
The Use of Motivational Interviewing in Chemical Dependency Group Work

by Jessica M. Kessel

Research Chair: Lance Peterson, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Teresa Movick, MSW, LGSW; Russ Turner, MS, MA

This study was conducted to discover clinician's perspectives of appropriate times and ways to incorporate Motivational Interviewing with adults participating in substance abuse programs in order to identify best practice methods used for this population in a group setting. The method used was qualitative interviews with four respondents who were all group social workers. Initially, the study reviewed how Motivational Interviewing was being used and in what ways it can be useful in a group setting. The study then looked at some of the drawbacks/challenges of using Motivational Interviewing in group work, such as time constraints, when there are safety concerns, and it being more designed for individual treatment. Finally, aspects of Motivational Interviewing that work well in a group setting were addressed, such as its use as a tool to connect with clients and a way to increase self-efficacy and confidence. The research confirmed that Motivational Interviewing is being used with other therapeutic approaches in a group setting but it is mostly unintentional. There is a growing amount of research on Motivational Interviewing and much empirical support for it as an effective method when working with substance use. However, results from this study imply that there is a lack of knowledge around Motivational Interviewing strategies and concepts, especially within a group setting. For this reason, it is concluded that more research and training should be done around this topic with clinicians conducting substance abuse groups with adults.
African American Men’s Perception of Psychotherapy at the Mental Illness & Chemical Dependency (MICD) Program: What Factors Do They Consider Therapeutic

by Tou Jean Killen

Research Chair: Jeong-kyun Choi, MSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Jeffrey Hill, Ph.D.; Al Holloway, Ph.D.

There are limited empirical data that study the factors that enhance or prevent African American men from using psychotherapy. The purpose of this study was to explore the perception that African American men have of psychotherapy and factors that they consider helpful. Using a qualitative design, eight African American men volunteer to participate in the study to explore their perception of psychotherapy. These eight African American men came from a day treatment facility in the Twin Cities area and had a positive perception of psychotherapy as a tool to help them manage their drug and alcohol and mental health problems. The participants in this study contributed lack of knowledge, stigma of being labeled crazy, fear of being misunderstood, misdiagnose and medicated, fear of being considered weak, self-pride and defensiveness as some of the factors that discourage African American men from using psychotherapy.
Elder Abuse in the Nursing Home Setting: Social Workers’ Perspectives of Training and Education

by Kelli M. Kinney

Research Chair: Katharine M. Hill, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Rajean P. Moone, Ph.D.; Beth D. Rollie, LGSW

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perspectives that social workers in the nursing home setting have in regards to their training and education on prevalence and prevention of elder abuse. Qualitative interviews were conducted with six nursing home social workers and one aging advocate from the St. Paul area, using convenience and snowball sampling. A demographic survey was also administered to participants. Content analysis was used to analyze the data. Findings from the nursing home social worker interviews suggest themes of: awareness of elder abuse, education on elder abuse (both in nursing homes and education settings) and its adequacy, knowledge and understanding of abuse reporting procedures, limited knowledge of federal laws, lack of trust in state Ombudsman, increased education for other nursing home staff, and brief responses and researcher observations of uncomfortable body language. Themes in the data from the aging advocate interview include: limited education on elder abuse for nursing home social workers, limited experience of nursing home social workers, limited comfort level for nursing home social workers to discuss elder abuse, and good and bad experiences in working with the Ombudsman. Thus, though nursing home social workers are aware of elder abuse and perceive their training and education on elder abuse to be comprehensive, training and education is still lacking in both nursing home and educational settings.
Interventions for Multicultural Children with Autism

by Stephanie Kitzhaber

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Jenna Butzow, LGSW; Katie Thormodsgaard, LGSW

This qualitative study examined the interventions that are helpful when working with multicultural children who have autism and their families. Data was collected through five semi-structured interviews with professionals who work with children who have autism, which included a variety of psychotherapists, social workers, mental health practitioners, and counselors. Grounded theory methods and open coding were used to analyze codes in the data to record common themes from the interviews. Themes found from this study were separated into five categories: language, importance of play, family education, gender roles, and stigma. Findings from this study were consistent with some of the previous research on autism. Implications from this study suggest ideas for future research in this area, with hopes to improve the treatments that are provided for multicultural children who have autism.
Effectiveness and Utilization of School-Based Mental Health Services

by Holly Kline

Research Chair: Jeong-Kyun Choi, MSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Dan Porter, LICSW; Connie Wilensky, LICSW

The need for school-based mental health services has increased in the past decade, but little is known about the effectiveness and utilization of school-based mental health services. This research will focus on the reported effectiveness and utilization of school-based mental health services in Minnesota. This research focuses on surveying a total of 150 schools, including elementary, middle, and high schools in Minnesota. The survey consisted of quantitative and qualitative questions, as developed by the researcher. The targeted respondents were school social workers school psychologists. Integration of education and mental health services in schools continues to grow rapidly. This research also focuses on the need for school-based mental health services and the benefits of having a school-based mental health program in the school. The results suggest that school-based mental health services are beneficial to students and are utilized when possible by the student. The most commonly used interventions is social skills training, solution-focused therapy, and group work, as reported to the researcher.
Effects of Spirituality on Professionals at Risk of Developing Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder

by Stephanie Koslowski

Research Chair: Keith DeRaad, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Leola Furman, Ph.D.; Suzanne McInness, LICSW

This study investigated the relationship between spirituality and secondary traumatic stress with counseling professionals in a Midwestern metropolitan area (N= 35, 34). This study utilized a sample of therapists, social workers, case managers, and counselors. Two surveys were utilized to measure the level of secondary traumatic stress symptoms and level of spirituality. Scores from the Secondary traumatic Stress scale were used as predictor variables, with scores from the Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale Revised as criterion variables. Demographic variables were also utilized to explore the relationship between spirituality and secondary traumatic stress symptoms. Measurement of central tendencies was conducted on both surveys. The results of this study implies that there may be a correlation between the two variables.
School Staff Perceptions of Post-Transitional School Outcomes for Students Educationally Diagnosed with EBD

by David G. Krygiel

Research Chair: Keith DeRaad, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Judy Elks, MSW; JoAnn Gonzalez, MSW

This study explored staff perceptions of post-transition school outcomes for students educationally diagnosed with Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD). This study conducted interviews with school staff professionals to learn about their perceptions of post-school outcomes. This research specifically looked at the areas of further education, employment, relationships, and housing. Consistent with previous research, the present study found that post-school outcomes for students with EBD are inadequate according to staff perceptions. Recommendations for areas of future research are stated.
What is the case manager's perspective on medication therapy management? The study consisted of 3 focus groups consisting of mental health case managers who work with clients in the community within the St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota. This study analyzed how case managers engage with their client; more specifically, the perceived importance of engagement and effectiveness of client engagement was explored. This research also examined what barriers case managers face in engaging with their clients and how these barriers affect a client to be medication compliant. Finally, this research attempted to obtain data on the case manager's attitude of the importance of medication as a form of treatment for clients. This study used a qualitative approach to interviewing case managers in agencies chosen from a convenience sample. Narrative information from interviews was transcribed and subjected to a content analysis to inductively explore themes from the sample.
Sibling Relationships of Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disability

by Cecile M. Kudela

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, PhD, LICSW,
Committee Members: Carol Ashwood, MSW, LGSW; Patricia Richardson

This is a small, qualitative study about the lived experiences of adult siblings of individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD). Previous research has focused primarily on the caregiving experiences of parents with adult children with I/DD. However, as people are living longer, healthier lives, it is increasingly becoming the role of adult siblings to support their brother or sister with I/DD. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of siblings of adults with I/DD regarding decision-making around quality of life and end-of-life. The goals of this study were to 1) contribute to the literature on the relationships of siblings and adults with I/DD, 2) discover ways to support families of adults with I/DD, 3) add to the conversation on end-of-life care for adults with I/DD and 4) develop ideas for further research in these areas that will support social workers who work with individuals who have I/DD and their families. This study included nine participants who are currently involved in supporting their sibling with I/DD. Findings of this study include that the kind of support siblings provide is guided by, yet different from, the support provided by their parents. Also, that siblings use their relationship and values to guide decisions about quality of life and, ultimately, end-of-life for their sibling with I/DD.
The Somali Community’s Experiences with Autism: An Exploratory Study

by Jessica Kuenzli

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: David Holewinski, MSW, LICSW, CBIS; Christina Krol, MSW, LGSW

Recent studies indicate that children of immigrants are up to four times more likely to have an autism diagnosis than the general population (Barnevik-Olsson, Gillbert, & Fernell, 2008). Emerging research demonstrates that Somali immigrants are one of the immigrant groups disproportionately affected by the condition (Minnesota Department of Health, 2009). The purpose of this study was to explore how the Somali community experiences and perceives the condition of autism. The study consisted of interviews with community professionals who work with Somali families affected by autism. The findings of this research indicate that autism is a new concept for many Somali immigrants. The study found that the differences in views of childhood development between Somali and American cultures contribute to how Somali immigrant parents perceive autism. The study also found that Somali parents experience several barriers when accessing the service system. The findings of this study support the need for further autism education and outreach efforts to this population.
Community Based Efforts that Promote Healthier Diets for Low-Income Minnesotans

by Stephanie Karin Larson

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D., LICSW, (Chair)
Committee Members: Tracy Hinz, MSW, LICSW; Larry Hosch, MSW

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges and successes community-based Minnesotan Programs have had in promoting low-income adults to eat healthier to avoid obesity and complications from obesity. This research highlighted factors associated with community based programs from the perspective of the professionals working with these programs. This study outlined the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) definition of healthy diet and weight along with the current measurement of Body Mass Index (BMI). The conceptual framework utilizing the concepts developed by National Geographic researcher Dan Beutner through his book The Blue Zones showing it is possible to live a long healthy lifestyle. Using a qualitative research design, the researcher interviewed twelve professionals from various backgrounds invested in working with community-based programs that work with people living with limited incomes. Semi-structured interviews with open ended questions were chosen to better understand the successes and challenges the professionals face in their work and suggestions for future study. Six major themes emerged from the interviews:

- Generational Lack of Knowledge of How to Cook
- Competing Demands
- Sedentary & Convenience Lifestyles
- Lack of Available and Safe Streets and Neighborhoods to Move Freely
- Successes
- Challenges

This research suggests the need for individualized one-on-one education when working with populations of low income although current research states it does not work. This research suggests that offering people healthy options and changing their environments may work but telling people what to do does not. This study offers implications for social workers working with people with low income, as well as suggestions for future research.
Effective Practice Based Therapeutic Techniques with Children Diagnosed with Reactive Attachment Disorder: From the Perspective of Mental Health Professionals

by Jennifer R. Lawrence

Research Chair: Felicia Sy MSW, PhD., LICSW
Committee Members: Pamela Baker, MS, LISW, LMFT; Paul Buckley, LMFT

Children diagnosed with Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) have experienced pathological care and disruption of early attachment experiences, resulting in disorganized attachment with caregivers, as well as a myriad of complex symptoms and behaviors. Little research exists regarding effective treatment for children diagnosed with RAD, leaving both mental health professionals and caregivers wanting. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore effective treatment for children diagnosed with RAD through the lens of mental health professionals. Seven experienced mental health professionals were interviewed regarding their perceptions on effective therapeutic treatment that contributes to increased attachment bonds with caregivers and decreased RAD symptoms. Analysis of the data revealed key themes, which were organized into a theory representative of an effective therapeutic process. Findings demonstrated an overarching conceptual framework of Attachment Theory emphasizing the core themes of theory and research, professional competency, assessment and evaluation, an attuned therapeutic dyad, and community collaboration. These key themes may contribute to increased attachment bonds between children and their caregivers, as well as resolve of symptoms. Future research that addresses and refines these critical components is necessary for prevention, effective treatment, increased professional competency and decreased societal stigmas towards children diagnosed with RAD and their caregivers.
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Generational Differences of HIV Today and Over the Last 30 Years

by M. Leonard-Mayers

Research Chair: Philip AuClaire, Ph. D
Committee Members: David Chollar, LICSW; Catherine Patterson, MA

This study examines the generational differences and perceptions of HIV today and over the last 30 years from the viewpoint of ten individuals living with HIV. Despite the high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS among young men who have sex with men (MSM), African American women, as well as other minority groups, little is known about how stigma and sexual risk perception play a role in the continued rise in HIV incidence throughout the United States and the world today. This paper will show that as medications have improved and become readily available to the public, cavalier attitudes among the younger generation towards contracting HIV are becoming more typical. Data was collected by interviewing five individuals, each of whom has been living with HIV for over 20 years, and five young MSM who have been diagnosed with HIV within the last three years. The data were coded, and several themes emerged, revealing that along with drugs, stigma, myths, risky sexual behaviors and cavalier attitudes towards HIV have played a major role in the transmission of the disease today. There are multiple perceptions of HIV. This study reveals that each population has its own beliefs about risk, stigma and views on medications and attitudes towards acceptance of HIV being part of today’s culture. This study left the door open for more in-depth research to be completed, not only on what the perception of HIV is today, but why this is and how to end the epidemic.
PRISM Express Program Evaluation

by LeeAnn Lewis

Research Chair: Kendra J. Garrett, Ph. D
Committee Members: Theresa K. McPartlin, LICSW; Courtney L.B. Whited

The process evaluation of PRISM Express researches client delivery and administration supports in place for successful service delivery. This program evaluation is necessary to determine the effectiveness of PRISM Express’ efforts is alleviating problems associated with inadequate transportation. The process evaluation conducted was intended to monitor, describe, and assess services provided to clients, and how satisfied stakeholders were with services provided by PRISM Express. Most of the populations utilizing this program are elderly; however, this service is available to low-income individuals and families in specific communities. Participants for this evaluation included recipients of the program’s services, program drivers, and program board members and other staff. Results indicated that PRISM Express is providing an excellent transportation service to address the needs of the community with the resources that are currently available, as reported by clients, employees, and board members or other staff of PRISM Express. Additional funding would assist PRISM Express in implementing improvements to the program, as suggested by respondents in this research. Improvements that were suggested were improving the bus routing system, and vehicle maintenance. Further research on community need would be beneficial for PRISM Express and other transportation programs.
Effects of Client Trauma on Interpreters: An Exploratory Study of Vicarious Trauma

by Mailee Lor

Research Chair: Pa Der Vang, Ph.D, LCSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Anne S. Hall, MA, LP, PSY.D; David McGraw Schuchman, MSW, LICSW

This qualitative study explores the experiences of interpreters in mental health settings and examines how working with clients that have experienced torture, trauma, and war can impact their personal and professional lives. The findings from this study are not meant to be viewed as any form of incompetency that needs attention, but rather to shed light on the needs of this population within mental health settings. In working with interpreters, it is the intention of the researcher that mental health practitioners will use these findings to inform and guide their professional work with interpreters in a manner that is ethical and responsible.

A review of current literature reveals that there is not enough effective and appropriate training for interpreters; that interpreters frequently experience role conflicts while working with clients; and that interpreters are frequently emotionally impacted by the traumatic material they interpret. The literature review also reveals a gap in the research on the use of interpreters with refugee clients and populations.

Four participants were interviewed regarding their experiences as interpreters on handling traumatic client material. A content analysis of the qualitative data using inductive approach and open coding found that a majority of the participants experienced emotional, psychological, and some cognitive impact in varying degrees that they struggled to manage and cope with on a regular basis. These findings suggest that a majority of the participants have struggled or are struggling with components of vicarious trauma throughout their interpreting experiences and would benefit from more training; additional coping and self-care strategies; guidance on how to navigate changing relationships in the community; and more focus on the healing and hope that can come from their role.
Relative Influence of Family, Peers, and Media on the Development of Eating Disorders in Adolescents

by Debra Lorasch-Gunderson

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Heidi Frank, MSW, LCSW; Karel McGreary, BSW

This study examined the relative pressure of family, peers, and media influences on adolescent boys and girls and their development and maintenance of their eating disorders. A mixed method study was facilitated using a 22-question survey that was taken by freshmen and sophomores, ages 18-21, from the University of St. Thomas. These students accessed the survey via the University's online informational website, Bulletin. The questions were designed to get a better understanding of the influences adolescents receive on a daily basis regarding their body and which one is more influential to them in developing and maintaining their eating disorders. The researcher had 14 participants start the survey and 10 completed it. The survey showed that students acknowledged greater pressure across all three environmental contexts as well as reported more eating disorder symptomology. However, the similarities between the perceived pressure and eating disorder symptoms were different for each participant. Most pressure started at home, but as they developed more independence, peers and media became an influence. Implications for future research and prevention programs are discussed.
The Importance of Cultural Competency in Alzheimer’s Disease Care Giving

by Jacquelyn M. Lotter

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D., L.I.S.W.
Committee Members: Jessica Arndt, L.I.C.S.W.; Lisa Kielty, L.I.C.S.W.

While the importance of cultural sensitivity has been actively researched in healthcare settings, there is little research about the importance of culture as it relates to people with Alzheimer’s disease. As the most common cause of dementia, there are currently over 5 million Americans over the age of 65 who are believed to have AD and it is expected to increase to over 15 million by 2050. Previous social work research has revealed two major themes in the study of caregiving and Alzheimer’s disease: 1) importance of a familiar environment and 2) management of aggressive responses, both of which factors into a person’s quality of life. This research was designed to discover in what ways is cultural competence important in providing care for and improving the quality of life of a person with Alzheimer’s disease? Seven professionals working in a nursing home’s Alzheimer’s unit participated in the qualitative study. The study included offsite interviews where participants completed a self-reflection questionnaire and recorded interviews which were then transcribed for the research. Several themes emerged from the study. Six out of seven professionals interviewed believe that cultural competence was important in providing care and the quality of life demonstrated through communication barriers, dependence on family, diet, trust, Resident advocacy, inter-staff relations and sense of community. The results of this study suggest that the cultural sensitivity of care providers plays a direct role in maintaining the quality of life for those living with Alzheimer’s disease. Additionally, a lack of cultural sensitivity can lead to frustrated Residents, exclusion, aversion to standard care and poor nutrition. More research is needed to understand to what extent culture influences aggressive responses and overall quality of life.
Why Social Workers Remain in the Field: An Exploratory Study on the Protective Factors Associated with Social Worker Perseverance

by John Mack

Research Chair: Kendra J. Garrett, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Theresa Kelly McPartlin, LISCW; Meghan Leach, LICSW

Social workers face many challenges and hardships throughout their careers. This study examines the numerous stressors that social work professionals come in contact with on a daily basis, and explores the protective factors that provide these professionals with the drive to persevere in the face of these stressors. Data was obtained through semi-structured qualitative interviews with four professional social workers with a minimum of 15 years of experience in the social work field. Methods such as committee analysis, thematic clustering, and peer reviews were all utilized to analyze data for this study. The interviews highlighted key themes such as: career satisfaction, stressors, protective factors, the journey to a career in social work, and why social workers choose to remain in the social work field. Findings indicated that factors such as lack of resources, the “do more with less” mentality, balancing self-care and client needs, lack of co-worker support, poor management, and being a witness to the pain of others, all contributed to higher levels of social worker stress. Findings also indicated a number of protective factors that social workers report help to reduce the impacts of stressors in their careers such as self-care, work diversity, worker autonomy, work with clients and problem solving, job security, and alternative work fantasies.
Nursing Home Caregivers Attitudes Regarding Sexual Behavior of Nursing Home Residents: A Cross Sectional Survey

by Teresa Madsen

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson Ph. D.
Committee Members: Sarah Anderson, MSW; Kimberly Bauman, MSW

Sexual needs do not disappear as a person ages. It is possible for older adults to maintain their desired level of sexual activity if the environment is accepting and accommodating for the adults’ needs. Those who are institutionalized in nursing homes often have fewer opportunities to meet their needs than those who are not. The purpose of this project was to explore nursing home caregivers’ attitudes toward sexual behavior in their residents and thus assist in identifying areas for further education and educational programming that will allow residents to lead full and happy lives and meet the needs of the older adult. Data was gathered in nursing homes in a Midwestern metropolitan area using a survey comprised of questions from the 2009 AARP sexuality study. Statistical tests including t-tests, ANOVA, and correlations were used to examine the relationship between demographic variables and the attitude scale score devised for this study. The findings indicated that there were no significant relationships between the variables and the attitudes scale score. The scale score itself was distributed indicating only moderate acceptance of sexual behavior by caregivers. The findings indicate that further education on the sexual needs and rights of older adults may be necessary to allow for nursing home residents to meet their needs without facing judgment and shame.
Examination of Multi-Modal Interventions on Disruptive Behavior of Children with ADHD

by Christine Mann

Research Chair: Jeong-Kyun Choi, MSW; Ph.D.
Committee Members: Stacy Schepel, MSW, LICSW; Madeline Borach, RN

The purpose of this project was to investigate the perception of teachers and school social workers about the effectiveness of multi-modal strategies on disruptive behavior of children with ADHD in the classroom setting. Additionally, this research study examined teachers and school social workers perceptions of ADHD, in relation to substance use disorders (SUD). The research design utilized a cross-sectional written survey with quantitative and qualitative questions and data was gathered using Qualtrics. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential analysis and qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis. The results of this project suggest that multi-modal interventions are effective to decrease negative behaviors of students in the classroom setting. However, 16 percent of respondents were not familiar with multi-modal interventions. Additional education and training is needed in the school system to increase awareness of effective interventions to treat ADHD. In addition, a majority of respondents agree that ADHD increases the risk for substance use disorder. Additional research and education is needed to address the issue of disruptive behavior of children with ADHD.
Barriers of Karen Refugee Resettlement in Minnesota: A Qualitative Study

by Emily L. Mathews

Research Chair: Philip AuClaire, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Stephanie Spandl, SSND, LICSW; Gus Avenido, M.A

Many systems and programs affect the resettlement of refugees. The purpose of this research was to explore the barriers Karen refugees encounter in resettlement to the United States. Previous literature indicates several barriers refugees come into contact with, including employment, English-speaking ability, Housing, Health Care, Education. Using a qualitative design, 8 participants were interviewed regarding their resettlement to the United States to identify barriers and successes of their experience. Data were analyzed for themes pertaining to barriers refugees faced during resettlement. The most prominent barrier addressed by the interviewees were monetary issues. Other barriers included: employment, language, resettlement agency, transportation, apartment/housing, and adaptation issues. The findings indicated that refugees are not being given adequate means to live when they arrive in the United States. Limited monetary assistance led to the need to seek early employment and have less time to learn English. Other barriers on top of these compounded and created stress and adaptation issues. These findings highlight the need for a more comprehensive resettlement program that provides the same services to all refugees and adequate means for survival while initially adapting to a new country and way of life.
Motivation and Retention Strategies for Reaching Volunteers Across Generations

by Stephanie McCabe

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph. D., LICSW
Committee Members: Christopher Bargeron, LICSW; Heather Broadwell Lincoln, LGSW

While volunteer recruiters seek to better understand motivation and retention strategies throughout nonprofit settings, business literature provides an understanding of generationally significant motivation strategies. Along with traditional motivational theorists this study focused on what methods best motivate and retain volunteers across an intergenerational perspective in nonprofit settings. By using a qualitative design and conducting interviews, sensitizing concepts were developed from business and traditional motivational theories. This research examined how best to motivate and retain volunteers from the Y, X, Boomer, and Senior generations. Study findings suggest the importance of attunement to generational motivation factors for initial recruitment and the importance of traditional motivational theories for retention of volunteers.
Factors Influencing Successful Psychotherapy Outcomes

by Margaret McCoy Lynch

Research Chair: Philip AuClaire, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Katie Kaminski, MSW; Danielle Szczepanski, MSW

Previous research indicates that the therapeutic alliance is a main factor in determining successful outcomes of psychotherapy. The goal of this study was to expand the understanding of not only the therapeutic alliance, but also how other contributing factors such as empathy, experience of the therapist, therapeutic modality, client’s level of motivation, personality, and symptomology increase positive therapeutic outcomes. The present study explored the following research question: What are the key factors to producing successful therapeutic outcomes in individual psychotherapy? This is an exploratory study with a qualitative research design. The findings of this study appear to correlate closely with the literature reviewed. The therapeutic alliance remains a key component of creating successful outcomes in psychotherapy. Empathy also continues to be an integral factor to not only forming the alliance, but also increasing a client’s ability to feel validated and understood. It appears that experience does not always increase the odds of creating successful outcomes in therapy, and no one type of therapeutic modality is superior to another. The findings also concur that a client’s level of motivation, personality characteristics, and symptomology do play a role in their therapeutic outcomes.
The Effects of Empowerment on Case Consultation in the Self-managed Team Environment

by Mary R. McDonnell

Research Chair: Jeong-Kyun Choi, MSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Mary Thalberg, MS, LICSW; Barbara Yelle, MSW, LICSW

This study examined the effects of empowerment on the efficacy of case consultation and clinical supervision in the self-managed team environment. The literature reviewed for this study showed a lack of research regarding self-managed work teams in the mental health field as well as a lack of research regarding empowerment as related to case consultation and clinical supervision. This study surveyed individuals who were part of a self-managed team in a mental health organization. The survey used demographic questions, scaling items, and open ended questions to gather information regarding respondents and their perceptions of empowerment, psychological safety, and the efficacy of case consultation in both self-managed team and hierarchical environments. Findings of this study indicate a correlation between perceptions of empowerment and the efficacy of case consultation and clinical supervision. There was not a significant relationship between empowerment and psychological safety. A correlation was found to exist between psychological safety and case consultation. Implications for practice in the social work and mental health fields would include training, programs, and policies to sustain the empowering capacity of self-managed teams and case consultation efficacy. Implications also point to a need for further research to determine if the findings of this study would be replicated.
African American Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

by Gina L. Misiewicz

Research Chair: Lance A. Peterson, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Judith Pilz, MSW; Tamara Christopherson, MEd

The overrepresentation of African Americans in kinship care placements has become a growing concern over the last decade. A review of available literature has found that African American children in kinship care arrangements, especially those being cared for by grandparents, are more susceptible to mental health and academic deficiencies than those in other foster care arrangements (Ghuman, Weist, and Shafer, 1999). A quantitative and qualitative survey designed for professionals working in child welfare was administered in regards to the perceptions of child outcomes of African Americans in grandparent-headed kinship care arrangements within the foster care system. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to evaluate the findings. Additionally, the findings from one open-ended qualitative question as well as additional comments from all survey questions were carefully analyzed, coded, and organized into themes for qualitative data. The literature reviewed and the data obtained from the interview contained somewhat different findings. Although the majority of respondents agreed that children in kinship care arrangements have more positive outcomes in life than those in non-familial placements, themes such as reluctance in accessing resources and services, lack of trust in social service agencies, acceptance of behavioral problems, and health and quality of care among caregivers were all considered significant factors that contributed to the overall well-being of those in kinship care placements. Further research is needed to implement practices that will effectively provide services and resources to kinship caregivers that encourage them to utilize what is available to them in order to provide children with even better outcomes in kinship foster care placements.
The Use of Self-Service Technologies in Stress Management: A Pilot Project

by Carissa Morris, MSW

Research Chair: Philip AuClaire, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Janet Dahlem, MA; April Brandt, MSW

This research illustrates a pilot program created to help St. Catherine University’s Associate nursing students receive education regarding stress management and practice relaxation techniques. The program was developed using three key elements: 1) practicing a variety of relaxation and mindfulness techniques 2) practicing these techniques through the use of self-service technologies, and 3) participating in group sessions where psychoeducation regarding stress, depression and anxiety was provided.

Six participants fully completed the stress management program. They practiced breathwork, mindfulness and guided imagery exercises through podcasts and apps on internet-capable, mobile devices. Results showed decreases in stress and anxiety levels among participants. Additional studies, and replications of this type of program using integrative practices, in a group setting and utilizing self-service technologies as a means to reduce stress is encouraged.
Factors That Impact Parent-child Closeness in Special Needs Adoptions

by Mary Morrison

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Margaret Thomsen, MSW, LICSW; Matana Morin, PhD., LP

This study set out to determine if adoptive parents with biological children would report a lower degree of closeness with their adoptive child with special needs than adoptive parents without biological children. A review of the literature showed that multiple factors impact the rates of adoption disruption and parental satisfaction, including: stress, externalizing behaviors exhibited by the child, family structure and levels of pre and post-adoption support provided to parents and families. One hundred and twelve adoptive parents responded by completing an online survey. Levels of closeness between the adoptive parent and their adoptive child were measured using a five point Likert scale. Information on the type and frequency of externalizing behaviors, parental satisfaction with their adoption agency and types and frequency of post-adoption support was also gathered. The results showed that adoptive parents with biological children rated their degree of closeness with their adoptive child lower than adoptive parents without biological children. Given the steady increase in domestic special needs adoptions, further research that looks more deeply at the differences between adoptive parents with biological children and those without would benefit the social work community and the families that they serve.
Connecting Foster Care Services and Training to Attachment Theory

by Kathryn Muellner

Research Chair: Andrea Nesmith, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Kathleen Fargione, LICSW, MSW; Nikki Newman, LSW, Child Protection Worker

Is foster care services and training adequately providing what is needed for the foster care families to care for the children both physically and emotionally? Is it supporting the research and knowledge that is known about attachment theory? This study asked Foster Care Workers, in a public and private setting in the Minnesota Twin Cities Area, if in their opinion their agency does just that.

The respondents were asked seventeen Likert Scale questions and three open-ended questions to get a sense of their satisfaction with the services and training they are able to give their family and if it is not satisfactory, what gets in the way. Six workers responded to the survey, three from each agency.

Overall the workers from both the public and the private agencies were satisfied with the services and training that their agencies provide. When looked at individually, the average of the responses, the workers at the public agency disagree that they include foster parents in on planning for the foster children and that they do a good job of informing the foster parents of the child’s attachment history. The averaged responses of the private agency disagreed that the foster care parents take advantage of the trainings. One of the open ended questions might have shed light on barriers that get in the way of foster parents accessing not only trainings, but possibly other services.

Social Workers who work in the field of foster care can take note to these concerns. Some of the literature found that foster parents had the desire to be included and help the children in their care more than just physically. Including the foster parents in on the history, especially attachment history, and in on the planning, both present and future, will help them understand and fulfill the needs of the children placed with them. When the foster parents have understanding and investment this might change the way they look at situations, parent the child, and seek out support and services. This might also help with placement disruption, which as the literature shows can continue the cycle of insecure attachment.
Therapist’s Perceptions on Working with the Developmental Repair Model with Children who come from Disruptive Attachment Styles

by Molly S. Murphy

Research Chair: Kendra J. Garrett, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Theresa Bozic, LICSW; Anne Gearity, Ph. D., LICSW

The present study was designed to look at therapist’s perceptions on working with the Developmental Repair Model developed by Dr. Anne Gearity (2005) with children who come from insecure or disruptive attachment styles. Nine clinicians from an agency in the Minneapolis area were interviewed for this qualitative study. Each research interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. All the questions focused on different areas of the Developmental Repair Model, and different aspects of working with the particular population. Findings suggest that clinicians must truly know oneself, be comfortable adapting and practicing the model and understand the importance of language, and how to use it with children. Furthermore, findings about the children suggest they need relationship consistency, chances to “fix it,” new experiences, new learning opportunities, and co-regulation skills and eventually self-regulation skills. Implications of the study indicate the importance for relationship formation and connection, and the growing need for infant and children mental health services in our country.
The Use of Support and Coping Skills Among Emerging Adults Following Parental Loss

by Christina S. Newton

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, PhD, MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Diane Bauer, MSW, LICSW; Brooke Skinner-Drawz, PhD, MSW, LICSW

Experiencing the death of a parent is often a life changing event, regardless of the age at which the loss is experienced. This research explored the experiences of adults who lost a parent during emerging adulthood, between the ages of 18 and 26. Using a qualitative method, 10 adults were interviewed regarding the support that was available and that they utilized following their loss, as well as the coping skills and mechanisms which they employed to assist with their grief. The resulting data from interview transcriptions were analyzed and themes were developed. The themes that developed included participant views of and feelings about support following the death of a parent, participant understandings of coping skills utilized following the death of a parent, and participant experiences of grief over time. Findings revealed common themes in the use of support and coping and also unique grief experiences among participants. This life crisis during emerging adulthood presented particular challenges with regard to individuation, while participants also yearned for connection. Social workers need to be prepared to encounter grieving emerging adults in various settings and understand their perspective on the world. Further research would be helpful with more specific groups of emerging adults.
The Effectiveness of PTSD Treatment on Symptoms of PTSD and Depression in Military Veterans

by Kylene E. Occhietti

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Glen Palmer, Ph.D., ABN; Jackie Wright, LICSW

The military veteran population has received national attention for the struggles some of its members have had with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Currently, PTSD is treated within the VA using a number of pharmacologic and/or psychotherapeutic interventions in residential and outpatient settings. The purpose of this research project was to learn more about PTSD treatment by conducting a program evaluation of therapies offered in a VA PTSD program. A non-probability sample of 124 veterans who participated in a VA residential PTSD program in the mid-western United States between 2006 and 2009 was used to determine the effectiveness of Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE), and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy (EMDR) on PTSD and depression symptoms over time. Each therapy provided resulted in decreased symptomatology of PTSD and depression from pre- to post-treatment, with no therapy showing greater efficacy over the others. However, at 6- and 12-month follow-up measurements, PTSD and depression symptoms increased to approach pre-treatment values for all therapies examined in this project. The future direction of research, practice, and policy surrounding PTSD treatment must be further examined to consistently provide competent, effective care to every veteran served by the VA.
Hypnosis in Clinical Social Work Practice: What Contributes To Its Under-Utilization?

by Amanda Olson

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Beverly Caruso, MSW, LICSW; Bruce Eisenmenger, MA, ABD, LP

Within the social work profession the clinical practice of hypnosis has generally been under-utilized and under-researched. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore some of the components related to its lack of use in the profession. Qualitative interviews were conducted with four LICSW respondents who practice clinical hypnosis and three LICSW respondents who do not practice hypnosis. Content analysis was used to evaluate the data from the transcripts. Limited exposure and understanding of hypnosis affected respondents’ opinions regarding the alignment of hypnosis with the social work profession and code of ethics. Concerns surrounding public and provider apprehensions were cited in relation to stage entertainment and media misconceptions. Yet, LICSW respondents who use hypnosis described it as a healing and client empowering intervention.

Overall, respondents described that the macro-level lens of social work may contrast with the amount of specialized micro-level training needed for hypnosis practice. Some respondents also identified that limited training in theory and clinical application during graduate school may affect the amount of micro-level social work research in the field. Moreover, respondents described limited exposure to education, related trainings, and publications on hypnosis during graduate school and within their professional careers. Discussion of the research findings accentuated the healing and empowering benefits of hypnosis in contrast to the general population misconceptions. The importance of adhering to the social work code of ethics was also emphasized in order to maintain an upstanding practice. Implications for hypnosis training and education in the social work profession were also provided.
Social Workers’ Ideas on Health Promotion among Older Adults

by Kaylee Olson

The purpose of this study was to explore the role and experience of social workers who provide services to older adults in the community. With the unprecedented demographic shift and multitude of challenges, problems and barriers traditionally associated with aging, a paradigm shift from a problem based focus to one that emphasizes health promotion is gaining visibility. This shift in focus is relevant for social workers who work with older adults in a variety of social service settings. Eight licensed social workers working in community-based agencies were interviewed to include social workers’ voices with a focus on how they utilize the health promotion framework of Vital Involvement to identify and assess older adults’ strengths, structural and environmental barriers and levels of engagement with activities and support systems. Findings showed that these community-based social workers’ practice reflects principles and processes congruent with health promotion. Implications for practice suggest that future social workers who work with older adults, living in the community, could benefit by utilizing the Vital Involvement Framework, because it guides them through a systematic exploration and assessment of all areas of the older adult’s life.
An Examination of Self-Care and Social Support Regarding Burnout Levels of Direct Care Staff and Social Workers

by Tina Paskey

Research Chair: Lance Peterson, LICSW
Committee Members: Tina Welke, LICSW; Denise Morcomb, LICSW

Previous research has examined burnout in social workers and other helping professions, however, there is little research regarding burnout in "direct care" workers, or those who work directly with clients and tend to have less experience and education. This research examined the effect of demographic factors such as age, experience, gender, and degree level on burnout rates, as well as the effect of social support and self-care on burnout. Twenty-nine participants from two social service agencies in the Minneapolis-St Paul, Minnesota area completed an online survey. Results showed that none of the variables studied appeared to have an effect on burnout. The researcher attributes small sample size and convenience sampling to these results. Further research should examine the burnout rates of direct care workers, as well as workers in all professions, and should examine whether mezzo and macro factors contribute to burnout rates.
Victims to Survivors: Liberians’ Experiences and Resilience during the Liberian Civil War

by Melissa Petersen

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: David McGraw Schuchman, MSW, LICSW; Kathryn McGraw Schuchman, MA, LP

Warfare is an ever-present phenomenon that impacts people all over the world. Many of those who live in a war-torn country encounter horrific experiences that cause trauma, loss, and grief. The Liberian people are an example of those who have experienced the tragedies of war in their country. The Liberian Civil War caused many individuals to flee, becoming displaced and seeking safety in other countries or refugee camps. This research study interviewed eight Liberian refugees who were children or adolescents during the war in order to explore their experiences and resilience. The participants in this study experienced horrific violence, separation, long travels, harsh conditions, and tremendous loss. The participants were resilient by relying on their faith in God, family, determination, adaptability, and hope. The resilience the Liberian refugees embodied allowed them to become survivors of war. The findings of this research are significant and an important addition to the literature on warfare, refugees, trauma, loss, resiliency, macro-level social work, and cross-cultural social work.
Correctional Officers’ Perceptions and Self-Reported Abilities of Working with Inmates with Mental Illnesses and the Effectiveness of Mental Health Training

by Cerenity Petracek

Research Chair: Philip AuClaire, Ph.D
Committee Members: Jane Hurley JohnCox, MSW, LISCM; Anna McLafferty, MPP (NAMl)

Many correctional officers have voiced not receiving adequate training in mental health and how to best work with inmates who may be experiencing mental health symptoms. Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training has improved officers’ responses to working with individuals during a mental health crisis. The purpose of this project was to examine correctional officers’ perceptions of working with inmates with mental illnesses and how prepared they feel working with inmates who are in crisis. Seventy correctional officers were surveyed in two county jails in Minnesota. The sample of participants included officers who have been certified in CIT. Results were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. While findings indicated there were no differences in perceptions of inmates with mental illnesses between correctional officers’ certified in CIT and correctional officers who were not, correctional officers’ who were certified in CIT self-reported they felt more prepared to work with inmates experiencing mental health symptoms and inmates who were in crisis. A third finding demonstrated correctional officers who indicated they were prepared to work with these inmates also had more positive perceptions of them. The participants surveyed were unrepresentative across gender and race. Conducting further research will help gain a better understanding on the views correctional officers have towards mental illnesses and responding to inmates who have mental illnesses, or who are in crisis.
Protective and Risk Factors of Women Who Have Killed Their Children in the State of Minnesota

by Roxanne Peyton

Research Chair: Valandra, PhD Candidate, MSW, LISW, MBA
Committee Members: Jennifer Schnarr, MSW, LICSW; Colt J. Blunt PsyD

This study examined the protective and risk factors of filicidal mothers in the State of Minnesota. Case studies of women incarcerated for filicide (N=19) were studied to identify what factors were prevalent when they committed their crimes. The researcher predicted that the women with the most risk factors would be filicidal. Case studies of the women were developed using multiple sources of material to include: legal indictment documents, legal pleadings, legal motions, legal court orders, trial transcripts, jury verdicts, associated legal materials, court trial transcripts, newspaper articles and other research and media documents. After obtaining those documents the case studies were applied to the Meyer and Oberman (2001) maternal filicidal classification system and cross-analyzed with Hill-Collins (2000) Intersectionality framework. The Intersectionality framework was used to identify the potential risk and protective factors. It has been shown that a majority of the women had a mental illness that was either diagnosed or undiagnosed, at the time of the crime. Additionally, many of the women had histories that included poverty, abuse, divorce, single parenthood, special needs children and unemployment.
The Role of a School Social Worker from an Administrator’s Perspective

by Alexia A. Poppy, LSW

This mixed method study explored the perceptions of school administrators regarding the role of school social workers. School Administrators received a survey via email that contained twenty-five questions pertaining to the functions, tasks, benefits, evaluation, and professional development of school social workers. Administrators reported that improving student attendance, collaboration with teachers, and decreasing student discipline were primary functions of the school social worker. They also reported that participating on child study team, facilitating skill groups, and making referrals and building relationships with outside agencies were primary tasks of a school social worker. Overall, administrators agree that school social workers are vital to the success of the school and engagement of students. They reported that they would like to see an increase in school social workers in their site, increase funding for general education social workers, and a more consistent way of evaluating and reporting outcomes of school social workers.
A Social Workers Perspective on the Barriers Faced by Students when Accessing Mental Health Services

by Kristin M. Pufall

Research Chair: Colin F. Hollidge, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Mary E.H. Paulson, MSW, LICSW, LCSW; Gail Pedersen, LICSW

This qualitative exploratory case study provides in depth knowledge on school based mental health services and the needs and experiences of rural vs. urban students. Interviews with school social workers were used as the primary instrument for data collection. Four dominant themes were identified using a descriptive phenomenological approach to data collection. The importance of school relationships emerged as a dominant theme of this study. From the dominant theme of school relationships two more specific themes surfaced and were divided into sub-themes of social work relationships and student relationships. Barriers that occur when accessing mental health services among students and the professionalism and framework of school social work also emerged as dominant themes from the data collected. The findings of this study support previous research regarding the mental health needs of students. Implementations for practice include, integrating science, policy, and practice to achieve effective school-based mental health services delivery. An implication for future improvements in the legitimacy of the social work profession was also indentified. Future research is needed to provide more in depth knowledge on the needs of students who face mental health disabilities.
The Government Funding of Non-Profits: The Non-Profit Employee’s View of the Practice

by Michael Raguet

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Alyssa Lovgren, M.S.; Annette Hanley

Government funds are an essential funding source for many non-profits. The purpose of this project was to explore the views that non-profit employees have of the government funding of non-profits. Using a quantitative design, 86 employees at one Twin Cities area human services non-profit were surveyed about their views of the government funding of non-profits. Data were analyzed using frequency tables. The findings indicated that over 80% of those surveyed agreed with the practice of government funding of non-profits.
Risk and Protective Factors of Delinquency: Perspectives of Professionals Working with Youth

by James Reilly

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Denise Morcomb, LICSW; Dana Swayze, MSW

This study examines the risk factors that increase an adolescent’s chance of engaging in delinquency and the protective factors that reduce the risk of delinquency. The risk and protective factors were examined through the ecological paradigm, which included the individual, family/peers, and neighborhood/community domains. This study used a qualitative method to examine the risk and protective factors through the perspective of professionals working in the juvenile justice system. Data was collected from a sample of professionals working at all levels of the juvenile justice system (N=6, average length of experience in working with youth=21 years), which included juvenile judges, assistant county attorneys, and probation officers. This study has found that professionals, who are responsible for the decision-making in the juvenile justice system, base their decision-making on the risk and protective factors that a youth presents. The study has also revealed that youth in the criminal justice possess more risk factors than protective factors. Risk and protective factor themes are identified in each of the domains. Implications for social work and interventions within each domain are discussed.
Recovery from Bulimia: What Helps in Healing

By Erin Reynen

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Christy Zender, MSW, LICSW; Teresa George, MSW, LICSW

There is an astonishing presence of eating disorders in American culture today, affecting upwards of 11 million individuals, and the treatment for these disorders is becoming increasingly comprehensive. Bulimia nervosa is one of the most common eating disorders, involving episodes of binge eating followed by compensatory behaviors to rid the body of food for fear of weight gain. Using a holistic and procovery-based framework, the present study focused on the perspectives of individuals who described themselves as being in recovery from bulimia and their stories of what helped in the healing process. This researcher created a mixed-method online survey to examine the types of treatment accessed by those who had recovered from bulimia, their attitudes about recovery, and their descriptions of what changed with their relationships to food, body, self, and others during recovery. Descriptive statistics were run on the quantitative data collected, and content analysis was used to describe information collected from the qualitative questions. Participants indicated a strong belief that recovery from bulimia was indeed possible, but that it involved significant input from professional, non-professional, and spiritual realms to be achieved. Professional services were found to be the most important aspect of the recovery process. Spirituality was also a powerful source of strength in healing from bulimia for many participants, though it was not a resource used by the majority. Social workers can use the anecdotal results from this study to provide a realistic, yet hopeful, vision of healing from bulimia to clients who still struggle with the disorder.
Clinical Social Work Practice in America: Has it Maintained its Ethical Core?

by Lawrence A. Ribel, LSW

Research Chair: Keith DeRaad, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Kristen Carpenter, BSW; Derek Gilde, MSW, LICSW

The purpose of this study was to identify if there is an ongoing dilemma relating to the ethical core values of the current practice of clinical social work in America. The conceptual framework for this study is based on a qualitative paradigm consisting of a synthesis of existing research and the subjective data that was collected and analyzed for the purpose of this research study. This study reveals an ongoing polarized view of the perceived priorities of the ethical constructs of clinical social work as practiced in America over the last 40 years. This study reflects the need for clarification, as well as further research on the part of the National Association of Social Workers, as the NASW hopefully moves forward and provides a more comprehensive and clearly defined national policy regarding the current construct of the ethical model of clinical social work practice.
Engaging Clients in Eating Disorder Treatment; Reducing Dropout

by Lauren E. Ribnick

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Rebecca Rand, LICSW; Amanda Thooft, LICSW

The purpose of this study was to explore how to successfully engage clients in eating disorder treatment and reduce dropout. This study collected qualitative data from five female therapists and one male therapist working in outpatient settings with individuals with eating disorders. Qualitative interviews were conducted over a period of two weeks. Interviews were audio recorded to assist in data analysis. The strongest themes found in this study were low dropout, anorexia has the highest dropout rate, and educating the family. Themes that coincided with the literature included participants having no experience asking clients to leave treatment and providing family support. Social work implications were also discussed. Given the high mortality rate with this population, it is important that we continue to research this issue with the hope of reducing dropout.
Impact of MBSR on Symptoms of Anxiety, Stress, and on the Degree of Mindfulness

by Maureen Rivord

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Jean Walstrom Haley, MLS, MS, MSW, LICSW; Jessica Bills, MSW, LICSW

Anxiety and stress are felt by millions of people in the United States, and when experienced at high levels they can leave a debilitating impact, including both physical and mental health concerns. The purpose of this research project was to explore the impact of a mindfulness course, specifically Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, on voluntary participants’ reported symptoms of anxiety and stress levels. The 8-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction course took place in a mid-sized Midwestern city. Using quantitative methods the 10 voluntary participants were given a pre- and post-test survey where the participants reported their anxiety, stress, and mindfulness levels before and after the 8-week course. The researcher then compared the anxiety, stress, and mindfulness scores from pre-test to post-test survey administration. The findings indicated that the participants’ reported levels of anxiety and stress both significantly decreased at the time of the post-test compared to the pre-test administration. Also, participants reported a significant increase in their mindfulness awareness at the time of the post-test compared to the pre-test administration. These findings suggest that a mindfulness practice may be a successful intervention for mental health practitioners to use with clients in alleviating symptoms of anxiety and stress.
The Realities of Burnout in Health Care Social Work: How Individuals Are Responding by Practicing Meditation

by Laura L. Robinson

Research Chair: Felicia Washington Sy, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Merra Young, MSW, LICSW, LMFT; Stacy Remke, MSW, LICSW

In today's society social work professionals are often overwhelmed as they try to juggle the responsibilities of life, from managing their home and advocating for their community, to meeting the demanding needs of work. For many the reality of burnout is all too familiar. Burnout is often characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism and a lack of personal accomplishment. For health care social workers who struggle in juggling the act of life, their experience is additionally impacted by the health care system as their expectations and responsibilities feel unmanageable. Some professionals in the field of health care social work have responded to the stressors that can lead to burnout through practicing meditation. The purpose of this research was to explore the essence of the experience of health care social workers who have practiced meditation. Based on phenomenological design, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with licensed social workers who work in the health care field to gain a better understanding of their experience of practicing meditation. The findings indicated that social workers who graduated in the last ten years often had more opportunities to learn about meditation in their social work education. Also one’s professional environment often had an influence on their level of support for practicing meditation personally and professionally. Though social workers described ways that meditation enhanced their lives, all of the participants of this study expressed that their practice could be improved. Overall practicing meditation not only brings social workers joy and wellbeing, but strengthens their practice as a social worker, allowing them to be more present with clients and have better work-life balance.
How Deployed Service Members Make Meaning of Their Experiences: Chaplains’ Perspectives

by Jessica R. Roemer

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, PhD, LICSW
Committee Members: Sarah Heuser, LICSW; Sr. Katarina Schuth, PhD, OSF

Every service member experiences and is affected by deployment differently; there are, however, trends in the ways that service members are affected and ways in which they cope. The researcher explored the effect of deployment on religious and spiritual beliefs and the ways that service members use their religious and spiritual beliefs to make meaning of their experiences. Interviews were conducted with seven participants (n=7), primarily chaplains, who had discussed religious and spiritual matters with post-9/11 service members during deployment. This study found that deployment has an effect on the religious and spiritual beliefs of service members, and they use their beliefs to cope and to make meaning of their experiences. Service members cope through prayer, worship, good luck charms, reading Scripture, and discussions with others. The participants described how, why, and when service members make meaning and events where meaning was difficult to find. These findings indicate that social workers should assess for the religious and spiritual needs of service members because of the role that these beliefs play in coping and making meaning. Social workers should then make referrals if the needs of service members are beyond their scope of practice.
In Their Own Voice: Family Caregivers Speak About Chronic Mental Illness

by Emily E. Ross

Research Chair: Carol F. Kuechler, MSW, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Sandy Parnell, MSW, LICSW; Catherine Roach, MS

The shift in the United States’ treatment of individuals with chronic mental illnesses from a hospital to community-based system, a process that has come to be known as deinstitutionalization, has markedly impacted mental health service delivery. Family members of people with a chronic mental illness have often had to assume critical caregiving roles in order to provide care to their relatives with a chronic mental illness within the context of their own community. This study examined the needs of family members, often referred to as family caregivers, who have a relative with a chronic mental illness for whom they provide care to. Family members were recruited through the National Alliance of Mental Illness’ (NAMI) Family-to-Family Program and NAMI E-Blast newsletter. Using a qualitative design, five family caregivers discussed their needs in their role as a family caregiver to someone with a chronic mental illness, and how they have been able to get these needs met within the context of the current mental health system. Family caregivers experienced both benefits and burdens due to their role in their family member’s life. Benefits included an increased sense of compassion for others with chronic mental illness, an expanded knowledge base about mental health issues, and a personal sense of reward and accomplishment. Participants identified burden associated with their role as family caregiver such as increased levels of stress, worry, and sadness and strained relationships. Participants noted that limited amounts of time inhibited their ability to serve effectively in their role and highlighted the importance of having social support and case management services. Participants spoke highly of their experience with the NAMI Family-to-Family program. They identified other resources through which they have gotten their needs met in their role as a family caregiver and provided suggestions to improve service delivery.
A Qualitative Study of Medical Social Workers’ and Nurses’ Perceptions on Effective Interprofessional Collaboration

by Britta E. Ryan

Research Chair: Keith DeRaad, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Michelle Petz, MSW, LGSW; Britta Hendrickson, RN

This study sought to explore perceptions of nurses and social workers regarding interprofessional collaboration within the hospital setting. Specifically, this study examines barriers to collaboration as well as aspects of positive collaboration in an effort to outline ways in which collaboration between social workers and nurses can be improved. The study used a qualitative method and incorporated interviews. Four social workers and three nurses participated in the study. Ultimately, it was found that collaboration between social workers and nurses is overall positive, although time-management continues to be a barrier. Social workers stated that management was crucial to how social workers are viewed and respected within the hospital. More research regarding management’s role in supporting interprofessional collaboration needs to be done to further improve interprofessional collaboration between social workers and nurses to improve the quality of care for patients. Nevertheless, the findings of this study suggest that collaboration in the hospital setting may be improving.
Perceptions of Professionals Who Serve Adults with Mental Illness and Criminal Backgrounds

by Rosemarie A. Sayers

Research Chair: Keith DeRaad, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Ericka Bassey, LICSW; Christen Munn, B.A.

This qualitative research paper is based on the responses of social service professionals that were individually interviewed about their perceptions serving people with mental illness that have a criminal background by asking a series of questions. The social service professionals acknowledged the increased number of clients they serve in their work that have both a mental illness and a criminal background. Common barriers were reported, most commonly was lack of housing and employment. These barriers were identified as contributing homelessness amongst this population. The need for social service professionals to receive training about this population and to work collaboratively with criminal justice personnel was also determined. More research was recommended to identify best practices for improved service delivery when serving this population.
Why Are You Crying?: The Impact of Parental Trauma on the Child

by Michael Schaeffer

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, PH.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Mireille Bardy, LICSW; Birgit Kelly, Ph.D., LICSW

The purpose of this research project was to investigate the impact of parental trauma symptoms on the child. The researcher became interested in this topic over the last few years with the increased reports of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on returning vets from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. With reports of increase domestic abuse and suicides in this population, the research was curious how these symptoms of trauma impacted their children. The majority of the research reviewed centered around quantitative studies where parents had developed classic single event PTSD symptoms from war trauma (vs. complex PTSD), and how the diagnosis impacted their child on a micro level. The writer conducted a qualitative research project with 8 licensed mental health professionals who worked directly with children and families in private psychotherapy. Most of the findings supported the data in the existing literature. However, a major finding was that in some cases a trauma bond between parent and child existed that was so invasive it replaced any sort of nurturance, security, or love between the parent and child, and yet they remained connected to each other. An implication for social work would be the importance of working from a systems perspective so that the child is not labeled as the sole problem, and that potential new treatments could be developed to work collaboratively with both the child and parent. Future research recommendations include: 1) studying a larger sample in order to generalize the population, 2) Identifying if the parent has a specific PTSD diagnosis in case examples, 3) Studying how the age of the child mediates the impact of the parent’s PTSD symptoms.
School Social Workers’ Perspectives on Working with GLBT Youth

by Jamie Schley

Research Chair: Carol Kuechler, Ph. D., LISW
Committee Members: Lindy Fortin, MSW, LICSW; Sarah Krohn, MSW, LICSW

Past research has suggested that GLBT youth are at an increased risk for mental health issues including suicide. The purpose of this study was to examine school social workers’ perspectives of their role in working with GLBT youth through an online survey with school social workers currently working in middle and high schools. Most of the participants reported sometimes observing homophobic expressions or remarks and rarely observing verbal abuse based on sexual orientation in their school environment. Likewise, participants reported rarely observing physical harassment and never observing physical abuse of students because of their sexual orientation within their school environment. Roles identified by the school social workers included: being an ally, providing counseling, providing referrals, advocating for the implementation of support groups, and being an advocate for GLBT youth. The majority of participants were neutral about their role as facilitators of support groups for GLBT youth, since they identified others such as teachers or students themselves as effective group facilitators. This study has implications for social work practice. School social workers reported their active roles as advocates and service providers as critical ways in which they had a positive impact on the school environment for GLBT youth. In order to further develop our understanding of school social workers’ perspectives in working with GLBT youth future research should include a larger sample size and a wider range of school settings.
Collaboration among co-workers within the Social Work Profession

By Leigha M. Scholtz

Research Chair: Philip AuClaire, Ph.D
Committee Members: Shari Hornseth, MSW, LISW; Dan Porter, MSW, LICSW

This study explored the perspectives of social workers regarding collaboration among social workers within their workplace. The perspectives were examined through the conceptual frameworks of Ecological Systems Theory specifically how interactions within the work environment affect collaborative efforts among social workers. The online survey instrument Qualtrics.com was utilized to conduct the survey which contained 44 items that were designed to operationalize the concepts of interdependence, newly created professional activities, collective ownership of goals, flexibility and reflection on the process, Index of Interdisciplinary Collaboration developed by Laura Bronstein. Data generated from this survey were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics from the 23 respondents who completed the survey. The results of this study show that social workers appear to be engaged in collaborative efforts with other social workers in their workplace and appear to have a positive perception of working among their colleagues in a collaborative way even when it may be outside of the person’s job description or result in a loss of some autonomy. The results of this study that the field of social work practices implement and expand further formal procedures within social service agencies to promote collaborative work among colleagues to better serve client needs.
Understanding Mandated Reporting within a School Environment

by Paula R. Schulte

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Julianne Hinchcliffe, LICSW; Renee Hauwiller, BSW

The two distinct professions of teachers and school social workers work within the same environment of a school and share a common responsibility of reporting child abuse and neglect to child protection services as a mandated reporter. This is a unique situation to study because each profession is guided by their board of standards and code of ethics. This paper examines the different levels of knowledge on the responsibility of being a mandated reporter between these two professions and to what extent do they work together toward the same goal. A mixed method survey design was used in order to capture both qualities of the quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data collected allowed for statistical analysis and qualitative data collected captured the participants’ narrative answer allowing for additional breadth and depth to the study. Survey questions consisted of five categories: demographics, level of training, knowledge, experience and professional responsibility. The findings of this study suggest that teachers and social workers do have common knowledge about their responsibility as a mandated reporter and that is to recognize child abuse and neglect and to make a report to the child protection services (CPS). However, responses to the open-ended questions on the survey suggest that there are differences between how teachers and social workers go about making the report.
The Sources of Stress and Support: A Perspective by Rural Emergency Response Workers

by Susan Schwab

Research Chair: David J. Roseborough, Ph.D.  
Committee Members: Barbara E. Pierson, MSW, LICSW; Julie Glynn, MSW, CAPSW

Intense, gruesome and dangerous work situations are frequent for the emergency response worker (ERW's). Emergency response workers, including ambulance workers, paramedics, emergency medical technicians (EMT) and firefighters are regularly exposed to stressful situations. This exploratory and qualitative research offered an in-depth look, through the eyes of ERW's, into their day to day lives. The study asked rural ERW's to identify critical or stressful incidents, factors that contribute to their stress and their perspective on supports and coping mechanisms implemented to address these stressful events. Findings indicated that the ERW's most often identified stressful incidents as those involving children, situations involving significant injury and potential danger for the ERW's. Contributing factors of stress involved the reaction of the victim's family, hearing victim's personal stories and knowing the victim. Another significant contributing factor is exposure to prior trauma, both work related and personal. ERW's greatest support came from peers and critical incident stress debriefing. Based on these findings, the profession of social work has expanding opportunities to support ERW's. Social workers must expand their education about the impact of prior and current trauma and stress on functioning as well as effective treatment modalities to address stress symptoms. Consideration should also be given to expanding their availability to emergency departments that provide fire and emergency medical services in order for these important members of our community to access supportive services.
Does Facebook Influence Well-Being and Self-Esteem Among Early Adolescents?

by Sarah G. Schwartz

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Lisa Borneman, MSW, LICSW; Lisa Richardson, MSS, LICSW

In America today, adolescents are the most “wired in” group of individuals and the most well positioned to utilize new technologies. As technology expands and the use of the computer as a medium of communication increases, adolescents begin to use the internet to maintain more of their friendships through social media such as Facebook. The ability to stay socially connected is something that adolescents rely on and largely determines their self-esteem development as adolescents. This study examined how the use of Facebook plays a role in development of self-esteem and well-being in 13, 14, and 15 year old adolescents. Using a quantitative research design, participants of this study utilized skills of self-evaluation to answer an online survey comprised of 26 questions. Thirty (n=30) respondents were recruited through the use of an online bulletin article, Facebook event page and after school community youth program. Data was analyzed and descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Findings demonstrated that respondent groups value their ability to stay socially connected, and associate positive feelings with functions of Facebook such as photo tagging, friend requests, status updates and private messages. Respondents indicated that their Facebook friend networks were dominated by individuals they know in their life offline. They also indicated that they associate positive feelings with both their offline friend groups and Facebook friend networks. Implications for clinical social work practice and future research were discussed based on the findings of the study.
Adapting Dialectical Behavior Therapy for Clients with Developmental Disabilities and Borderline Personality Disorder

by Maija Seavey, LSW

Research Chair: Valandra, MSW, MBA, Ph.D. Candidate
Committee Members: Amy Jones, MSW, LGSW; Brooke Shultz, MSW, LICSW

The purpose of this study was to explore the research question: how should clinicians adapt and provide therapeutic interventions within the framework of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) while engaging in clinical practice with individuals diagnosed with both Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and a Developmental Disability (DD)? Using a qualitative design, seven participants from a Minnesota Department of Human Services Certified DBT Provider agency were interviewed. A semi-structured interview of twelve formal questions was used based on the literature review to further explore 1) occurrences of clinicians having clients with the identified co-morbid diagnoses, 2) barriers to treatment of this population, 3) attitudes and/or beliefs by clinicians of individuals diagnosed with this co-morbidity and 4) clinician’s perceived effectiveness with this population. Findings suggest an overall positive regard towards individuals diagnosed both with a Developmental Disability and Borderline Personality Disorder. Additionally, clinicians overall provided positive belief and supporting evidence that DBT is effective and can be provided to this population. This study’s findings indicate a need for further exploration and research with this population to better serve the needs of individuals with intellectual impairments and Developmental Disabilities in the mental health system.
What factors contribute to the identity development of international adoptees?

by Natalie Sinkler

Research Chair: Felicia Sy, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Bethany Almos, MSW, LGSW; Dr. Sarah Park, Ph.D.

International adoptees face a unique challenge in their ethnic identity development because they are raised in a different culture than they were born, usually by parents of a different race. Understanding what helps develop an adoptee's ethnic identity helps adoption professionals and adoptive parents facilitate a positive identity development among adoptees. The study consisted of four qualitative interviews with adult international adoptees regarding the factors that contributed to their ethnic identity development. Using a developmental framework and grounded theory, the interview were analyzed and coded for themes. Participants shared a common development over time starting at a pride of their adoptee status to avoidance during adolescence. In young adulthood learning about their birth country and better understanding their adoption was significant for all four participants. Other factors contributing to the participants' identity development include visiting birth country, meeting birth family, family support, family dynamics, mental health and disability. Data shows many factors influence an adoptee's identity development and each person is different. The data also shows support for pre-adoption services for adoptive families. Implications for further research are discussed.
The Spaces In-between: How the Art of Intuition Informs the Science of Evidence Based Practice in Psychotherapy

by Heather M. Smith

Research Chair: Felicia Sy, Ph.D.
Committee Members: George Baboila, MSW, LICSW; Elizabeth Wittenberg, JD, LICSW

Evidence-based practice methods are a central component in the psychotherapy profession and an important backdrop in the therapeutic endeavor. Yet a therapeutic relationship that leads to healing is often one that exists within an intersubjective space, one that is outside the field of manualized interventions. The purpose of this study seeks to explore the role that intuition plays in the therapeutic process, how it informs the use of evidence-based practice methods, and its contribution to the change process in psychotherapy. Scholarly research on the use of intuition in the therapeutic process is sparse and indicates a need for more in-depth inquiry. Data analyzed from 7 semi-structured interviews with psychotherapists showed that the use of intuition was indeed a central aspect in their work.
The Importance of Long Term Vocational Support for Persons with M.I

by Justin Swanson

Research Chair: Felicia Sy, PhD, MSW.
Committee Members: Ashley Trepp, LICSW; Erin Young Koernig, LICSW

Employment is an essential function in the process of recovery for persons with serious and persistent mental illness. Unfortunately the SPMI population has had a static unemployment rate of 90% since the 1970’s. This rate appears to be as such due to the difficulty many people have in retaining their employment and managing their symptoms. An intervention that has been shown to be successful is the integration of mental health supports in vocational programming for the mentally ill. With such supports clients have shown a higher likelihood to be able to maintain their job.

Many mental illnesses are chronic and symptoms can be cyclical, due to this factor long term support without time limitation has shown to be the most successful model in supportive employment. The purpose of this project was to evaluate long term supportive employment from a professional’s opinion. This project evaluated the opinions of professionals who were employed at a long term supportive vocational program. The project asked the mental health workers if they feel that their client’s job retention had increased due to the support. It also asked the workers if they felt the client’s reliance on other supports has changed since entering their program. The project evaluated on whether their clients appear to have improved feelings of self-efficacy and autonomy. In closing the project discussed how the professionals felt their client’s opinions were valued in their roles as workers.
The Outcomes of Illness Management and Recovery on Severe Mental Illness: A Client’s Perspective

by Angela I Thoreson

Research Chair: Jeong-Kyun (Evan) Choi, MSW, PhD
Committee Members: Al Holloway, PsyD, MSW, LICSW; Shannon Brewers, MSW, LGSW

This research project asked the question: What perceptions do individuals diagnosed with severe mental illness have of the treatment outcomes for the Illness Management and Recovery curriculum? This study confirms that individuals found the illness management and recovery curriculum had a positive impact on their treatment outcomes in the domains of coping skills and self-management, social functioning, along with recovery outcomes such as goal setting and obtainment, and dual recovery. This research project used a cross-sectional survey research design. The qualitative data collected utilized a structured interview; these items focused on perceptions of treatment outcomes. The research project sampled adults with severe mental illness who received IMR education based on the modules and handouts in the past. A non-probability, convenience sampling method was used. The primary strength of this design is that it was qualitative in nature and provided deeper understanding of outcomes of the IMR curriculum for the participants involved. The limitation associated with this is that the sample size was small (nine participants) and located in a small geographic location. Also the survey used is limited to face-validity, as the validity has not been tested internally, using test and retest, or comparability. Through the analysis of the data, seven inter-related themes were identified. These themes included: education, goals, improved mental health stability, increased self-value, improved relationships, more community involvement, and preexisting knowledge. There are multiple implications for social work practice, policy, and research.
Spirituality in Nursing Homes: A Social Work Perspective

by Cathleen Ann Tschida

Research Chair: Colin F Hollidge, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Leola Dyrud Furman, Ph.D., MSW, LISW; Cara Carlson, Ph.D., LICSW

Spirituality is an important issue in the field of nursing home social work. Research studies have shown that spirituality can improve nursing home residents’ physical and psychological health. The purpose of this study was to explore nursing home social workers’ perspectives on using spirituality. Using a quantitative design, 35 nursing home social workers were surveyed about how much spiritual education and training they received, if they believed that gathering spiritual information should be part of the intake process, and the spiritual activities they use with nursing home residents. The data revealed that 12 participants never received formal training in using spirituality in nursing homes. The majority of the respondents felt that taking a spirituality history of nursing home residents should be part of the intake and assessment process at nursing homes. The nursing home social workers surveyed in this study reported that they personally have completed some spiritual activities with their residents such as praying. The spiritual activity of helping residents assess the meaning and purpose of their current life situation was found to be the activity performed the most by the participants. From the findings, it was determined that there were a few spiritual activities some participants thought were unethical to perform with nursing home residents: meditating, using or recommending spirituality books or writings, and recommending prayer to a resident. These research findings reveal that continued effort is needed to ensure that social workers are being trained and educated on the topic of spirituality in order to assist nursing home residents with using this strength to benefit their health and well-being.
School-Based Adolescent Suicide Reduction

by Sabrina Ulrich

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Heidi Critchley, MS, Ed.S.; Deann Reese, MSW, LICSW

Adolescents spend the majority of their waking hours at school which provides schools with the opportunity and means to access and reach students for school-based adolescent suicide reduction. Schools offer adult supervision and potential monitoring of adolescent behavior and mental health. The purpose of this study was to examine school social workers’ beliefs and efforts in relation to school-based adolescent suicide reduction and to explore prevention strategies, risk factors, and protective factors to help primary, middle, and secondary schools reduce suicide ideation and behavior. This research asked what schools can do to reduce the number of adolescent students who die by suicide. The Developmental Assets Framework by Search Institute was utilized for the conceptual framework as this asset-building approach promotes positive youth development. Studies show the more assets a child or adolescent has the more likely they will do well and they are less likely to engage in at-risk behaviors. A mixed method was utilized including a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. Utilizing a convenience sample, a survey was sent to approximately 181 school social workers from the Minnesota School Social Work Association (MSSWA). Additionally, a school social worker and school counselor were interviewed. The surveys and interviews revealed the importance of utilizing prevention strategies, identifying and reducing risk factors, and identifying and enhancing protective factors which validated the research found in a literature review. The data also revealed that schools can and should provide mental health and suicide screenings, form connections with students, and educate students, staff, and gatekeepers about warning signs of suicide along with information regarding risk factors and protective factors of suicide. Additionally, the research showed schools can and should work with parents and the community to educate them about mental health and suicide to work together to support students. The data also suggested schools can increase awareness of mental health and suicidality and increase communication among students, staff, parents, and the community regarding suicide awareness. Strengths of this study included the sampling and data collection from across Minnesota and it sampled an entire professional organization. The study also included interviews which added richness and depth and the professionals interviewed are key stakeholders with experience in adolescent suicidality. Limitations of this study are that it only collected data from one state and the sample was not representative of all professionals who work with adolescent suicide in a school setting. Additionally, the sample of interviewees was small and interviewees were selected to take part in study by researcher. Implications from this study show the significance for social work practice in the school setting to train and educate staff and students about mental health and suicide and to reduce the stigma that is associated with both. Implications also point to the importance of implementing comprehensive kindergarten – 12th grade mental health curriculums, suicide prevention programs and strategies, and school-wide mental health and suicide screenings. Furthermore, implications assert the significance of decreasing risk factors and the value of enhancing protective factors with students as early as possible in the students’ elementary years. Factors identified and discussed in this study can be utilized for future practice and as a basis for school involvement in the reduction of adolescent suicide. This study found school social workers support the importance of school-based efforts to reduce the number of adolescents who die by suicide.
An Analysis of Violence in Teen Dating Relationships

by Jennifer I. Uttech

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Jane Hurley Johncox, MSW, LICSW; Shari DeZelar, MSW, LICSW

In an effort to better understand and prevent teen dating violence, this study examined the risk factors associated with teen dating violence as well as methods of intervention/prevention. Eight mental health practitioners who work with adolescents who are involved in teen dating violence or who work with teen dating violence prevention programs were interviewed regarding their experiences with these adolescents. Six themes were found from these interviews: (a) the prevalence of teen dating violence, (b) the negative effects of teen dating violence, (c) the risk factors of teen dating violence, (d) reasons victims stay in abusive relationships, (e) support systems for teen dating violence victims and perpetrators, (f) and methods of prevention and intervention. Comparison to previous research found that this study, overall, supported previous research regarding the importance of prevention and intervention programs based on minimizing risk factors due to the damaging effects of teen dating violence on adolescents’ lives. Implications for social work policy, practice, and research are also discussed.
Perspectives of Having Celiac Disease and Eating Disorders

by Heather M. Vargo

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Joan Benner, MD; Kyan Bodden, LICSW

The issue of eating disorders among individuals with celiac disease is a growing concern; yet, it receives little clinical research attention. The purpose of this project is to explore perspectives of individuals who have celiac disease and eating disorders. The research sought to learn more about the development of eating disorders and celiac disease for individuals, how individuals perceive the interaction between the two disorders, and what individuals think would be beneficial in treating these comorbid diseases? Using a qualitative design, nine individuals agreed to be interviewed about their experience of having celiac disease and an eating disorder. Data was analyzed using both inductive and deductive approaches which categories were first developed from the interview responses and linked to previous literature. The findings indicated that there is a significant interaction between celiac disease and eating disorders. The celiac disease often made it more “convenient” for participants to engage in their restrictive eating disorder symptoms. There is a continued need for ongoing research in this area of celiac disease and eating disorders.
Parental Divorce: Social Workers Reflect on Long-term Effects for Young Adults

By Amanda Vonbergen

Research Chair: Carol F. Kuechler MSW, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Cara Carlson, PhD, LICSW; Diane Rowe, MSW, LGSW

The purpose of this study was to examine the long-term effects of parental divorce on young adults from the perspective of social workers who have worked with this population. In 2002, the U.S. Census Bureau documented that one out of every two marriages ended in divorce. As children with divorced parents reach young adulthood, major concerns include thoughts of betrayal, abandonment and the fear of not being loved (Conway, Christensen & Herlihy, 2009). Eight licensed clinical social workers were interviewed to identify the common problems, needs and interventions relevant to their work with young adults who may be dealing with the effects of a parental divorce. Findings showed that young adults from divorced backgrounds may have problems related to modeling, social skills and romantic relationships. Recommendations for future practitioners to guide their work with this population include: using a client-centered approach, and avoiding assumptions about clients.
Filial Therapy: Clinicians Experience of the Untreated Sibling

by Amie J. Wagner

Research Chair: Andrea Nesmith, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Colleen Crockford, LGSW; Julie Gagne, LJCSW

This study examined clinicians providing filial therapy and their experience when working with untreated siblings. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data for this study. The interviewees were clinicians providing filial therapy services in Minnesota. The results highlight that treatment is focused on one identified child, clinicians have experienced untreated siblings exhibit their own difficulties, the relationship between the parent and untreated sibling often benefits from filial therapy, and the parent’s ability to generalize parental skills is an important component of filial therapy. The results showed varying experiences of the clinicians providing filial therapy. Clinicians often experience the untreated sibling as exhibiting their own difficulties, such as jealousy and relationship conflicts with their parents. The study also demonstrated that clinicians have experienced the parent’s ability to generalize skills and ultimately benefit the untreated sibling when providing filial therapy. Reliability and validity for this study was moderate to high. Questions were designed to answer the main research questions of how have clinicians providing filial therapy experienced untreated siblings? Further research should examine how at-risk untreated siblings are of developing maladaptive behaviors of their own and potentially needing their own services in the future. Research on parent’s perception of untreated siblings would provide more insight into the untreated siblings and how they are affected by filial therapy.
Self-Care Practices and Attitudes Toward CISD and Seeking Mental Health Services Among Firefighters: A Close Look at a Mid-Sized Midwestern Urban City

by Erin Wall

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D
Committee Members: Annette Semanchin-Jones, MSW; Mark Olson, MSW, LGSW, LICSW

Since September 11, 2001, a great deal of attention has been put on firefighters and their abilities to cope with the day to day stressors of their jobs. This study used a survey method to investigate the different ways firefighters in a mid-sized mid-western city take care of themselves mentally and physically. This study also explored the firefighters’ openness to the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) process and seeking formal mental health services if needed. It also examined whether all components of CISM are utilized by this department. The results indicated that overall the group was open to seeking mental health services if needed and feel that Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, a component of CISM, is beneficial. Further research could determine why this group is so open to the utilization of mental health services when compared to their peers previously studied in the literature and also the reasons behind the lack of retention of women within this department. Additionally, due to the camaraderie amongst the firefighters, other critical incident debriefings and ongoing support may be more beneficial for this department.
The Experiences of Caregivers Caring for Loved Ones with Dementia

by Molly E. Wassman

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Ted Bowman, MDiv; Kristi Murray, LSW

The Alzheimer's Association indicates there are almost 15 million caregivers providing care to those diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and dementia (2011). Oftentimes family members willingly assume the role of caregiver for their loved ones as dementia progresses and cognitive abilities begin to fail. As a result, this qualitative research sought to explore the experiences of caregivers caring for a loved one with dementia. Seven participants were asked open-ended questions designed to elicit responses that explained their experiences caring for a loved one with dementia. The research participants were the primary caregivers for their loved ones for whom they were either providing in-home care or were the primary contact for the facility where their loved one was residing. Research participants' loved ones had a diagnosis of dementia of the Alzheimer's type, frontotemporal dementia, or dementia - unknown, and participants were the primary caregiver caring for their loved one for a time period of two to five years. The findings indicated caregiving does contribute to relationship and life changes and has its challenges; however, it was found that caregiving can also be a rewarding experience and caregivers do continue to participate in self-care activities, despite their important responsibilities. It was also found that caregivers today are still in need of help and support from other family members and friends.
The Experiences of Older Adults Who Have Completed Advance Directives

by Lisa M. Watts

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Rochelle Rottenberg, MSW, LISW; Jennifer L. Wright, JD

This project is a qualitative research study used to explore the experiences of older adults who have written advance directives. Advance directives are an often underutilized tool used by individuals to outline plans for end-of-life care, in the anticipation that the individual may not be able to verbalize his or her decisions when the time comes for choices to be made regarding care. The experiences of individuals who have written an advance directive may help clinical social workers when working with clients who are considering writing a directive. For the purpose of this study, six participants were recruited for a single focus groups in a Midwestern city using flyers posted at the focus group location. Participants were required to be at 65 years old and had completed a form of an advance directive. The focus group found that participants had a positive experience writing an advance directive and that their family members, namely children, were involved in the decision making process. Respondents agreed that they wrote advance directives to decrease potential burden to family members and had certain wishes that he or she wanted carried-out in the case that he or she become unable to verbalize them. Overall, focus group respondents agreed with literature review findings, but spoke of themes in a more personal and individual manner. Further research should be conducted with multiple focus groups in a larger geographic area with more varied demographics. Also, further research comparing similar individuals without an advance directive may help identify barrier to completion of directives with older adults.
Social Workers’ Role in the Delivery of Play Therapy to Children

by Sara B. Weil

Research Chair: Keith DeRaad, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Colleen Mens, MSW, LICSW; Lynn Starr, MSW, LICSW

The purpose of this project was to explore the role that social workers play in the delivery of play therapy services to children. This study used a quantitative design to survey 51 licensed social workers on their use of and perceptions of the effectiveness of play therapy. Data were collected through an online survey and analyzed to determine how frequently social workers use play therapy, what level of training they have in play therapy techniques, how effective social workers feel play therapy is with children and what factors are believed to contribute to its effectiveness. Findings revealed that the majority of social workers do not use play therapy with their clients, but do feel it is an effective form of intervention. Additionally, findings showed that social workers had minimal exposure to play therapy in graduate school or through continuing education; yet a majority of respondents indicated that they felt basic training in play therapy interventions should be a part of all social workers’ undergraduate/graduate education. This highlights the necessity of further research on the role social workers play in the delivery of play therapy services and the need for schools of social work to better prepare students to practice play therapy in the field.
Spirituality and Religion in Social Work: Respondent Definitions

by Courtney Wilkinson

Research Chair: Colin F. Hollidge Ph.D.
Committee Members: Janet Marinelli; MS Tanya Rand, LICSW

The following study seeks to discover how potential clients define and view the concepts of religion and spirituality. Research questions include: How do respondents define the concepts of religion and spirituality? What interventions do respondents consider religious and/or spiritual? Finally, what interventions would respondents want incorporated into their mental and physical health care? The study is comprised of forty-five respondents who participated in a Survey Monkey survey. Results indicated that while respondent definitions of religion and spirituality differ, themes emerged. Themes that emerged when describing religion included: an organized set of rules, worshiping a God/Higher Power, and a community of followers. Themes that emerged when describing spirituality included: belief in God/Higher Power; an individual, personal experience, and rules/morals dictating how one should live life. Most respondents reported that meditation, yoga, guided imagery, and spending time in nature are spiritual activities. Prayer and music were found to be both religious and spiritual. Majority of respondents indicated they would want mediation, yoga, guided imagery, music, and spending time in nature incorporated into their mental and physical health care. Prayer was the only intervention the majority of respondents reported they did not want incorporated into their care.
The prevalence of psychosocial issues in primary medical care

by Malinda J. Wise

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Carolyn Wall, LICSW; Summer Berg, LICSW

The primary medical setting is a large and important part of a vast system within the medical profession. This study looked to explore; what are the psychosocial needs of patients presenting in rural and mid-sized primary care settings, and how are providers responding to the expectations that patients have, and could there be improvements to their present systems, if so, how? A brief review of the literature looked at primary care in its historical and present forms and how economics have impacted the ways primary care is provided in the United States. Previous review of the literature also included the prevalence of psychosocial problems in the primary care setting and how collaborative interdisciplinary efforts affect responses to these issues. The biopsychosocial model was used as a framework with which to compare and analyze data in this study. A qualitative research study was conducted which looked specifically at the prevalence of psychosocial issues in two primary care clinics (one rural-one mid-sized). A sample of nine medical professionals consented to a 1:1 interview. The questionnaire consisted of eleven semi-structured open ended questions asking how they as providers identify and address psychosocial issues in their clinic. Themes identified from participants were consistent amongst the two clinics that psychosocial issues were a large part of their practice. Issues identified were often around insurance issues, social issues, transportation, treatment of anxiety, and depression. Responses to the management of psychosocial issues were defined very different. The rural clinic was self-sufficient stating it lacked resources, time and skills to manage these needs. The mid-sized clinic defined itself as resource rich and used an interdisciplinary team approach to the management of patient’s psychosocial issues. The results were consistent with previous research in this area. Implications for social work within primary care were indicated with the hope of assistance in the management patient’s psychosocial issues that present each day. That medical professionals expressed that social work would be an advantageous profession that could assist them and the patients they see, not only at the micro-level of day to day care but at the higher macro-level reducing potential economic implications to the system as a whole while achieving their goal of holistic patient care.
The United States ranks number one as the principal country that receives the most international adoptees (Bergquist, 2009). The agencies that organize the adoptions are the primary source of information for the prospective parents. Many internationally adopted children who are institutionalized experience abuse, neglect, malnutrition and poor medical care prior to adoption, which can lead to problematic transitions to new families (Mathias, Petrill, Viana & Welsh, 2007). These research questions examined the emotional challenges of parents regarding attachment to their internationally adopted child. Using a qualitative design, eight participants who are parents of internationally adopted children were interviewed by audiotape. The method used was grounded theory and content analysis. The research and the data suggest that the quality of care that an internationally adopted child received before being adopted has a major effect on the development that will take place later in his life. Social work interventions need to address the principles of social justice for the poor and vulnerable women and children who are affected by international adoptions and the institutions they are adopted from.
Countertransference Knowledge and Substance Abuse Treatment

by Samantha Yerks, LADC

Research Chair: Philip Auclaire, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Melissa Brogger, MA, LADC; James Stolz, MA, LICSW

This research sought to understand the relationship between educational background, levels of education and understanding of countertransference concepts, in relation to substance abuse treatment. Previous research has identified knowledge of countertransference as a factor increasing a therapist’s ability to manage countertransference and increase client success in substance abuse treatment (Seiden, Chandler & Davis, 1994). It was hypothesized that there would be a positive relationship between therapist level of education, and understanding of countertransference. It was also hypothesized that those who have an education specifically in addiction would have a poorer understanding of countertransference than those trained in social work, psychology or marriage and family therapy. This hypothesis was based on educational licensing standards in the state of Minnesota, as addiction counselors in Minnesota prior to 2008 could receive a 2 year certificate in counseling (Office of the Revisor of Statutes, 2010). This research used the Countertransference Measure developed by Hofsess and Tracey (2010). It was found that all therapists, regardless of educational background or level of education had a similar understanding of countertransference concepts. A major limitation of this research included a very small sample size (N=29) and therefore recommended that future research should obtain a larger sample size.
Childhood Sexual Abuse and Obesity in Adult Women: Exploring the Mitigating Mechanisms

by Emily B. Yokiel

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Jean McCue, RN; Tracy Williams, LICSW

A substantial amount of research has been dedicated to investigating the potential relationship between childhood sexual abuse (CSA) and subsequent obesity in adulthood among female survivors. While a significant body of literature supports this association, identifying prospective causes, confounding factors, or mitigating elements, has not been fully solidified and requires further research. Qualitative interviews with clinicians working within an eating disorder treatment center were conducted to gather data regarding professional opinions of such a relationship. Utilizing content analysis, the data was coded and materializing themes identified. Significant similarities between existing literature and the present research findings emerged, including recognition of the long-term emotional and physical implications of CSA, emotional-behavioral influences as mitigating mechanisms, and the importance of a multi-faceted approach to treating those presenting with CSA and eating disorders. Further, the present research emphasized certain therapeutic qualities essential to providing the best course of treatment for women presenting with each of these long-term health sequelae. Notably absent, however, was widespread awareness of biological mechanisms as potential mitigating factors. Such research findings support the need for further study to elucidate the causal mechanisms between childhood sexual abuse and subsequent obesity, as well as highlight the need to increase awareness and understanding of this relationship to improve treatment approaches and outcomes.
This qualitative study examined the experiences of clinicians at an eating disorder clinic who are recovered from their own eating disorders. The literature covered topics such as eating disorder types and symptoms, etiology, onset and duration, causes and risk factors, treatment interventions, therapeutic alliance, self-disclosure and burnout. The research questions for this study were: (1) what are the experiences of clinicians who treat clients with eating disorders after having recovered from their own? (2) How much self-disclosure is appropriate in the therapeutic relationship? (3) what type of accountability or support is in place for the clinician to be prepared for triggers or other emotions that may come up in sessions to prevent relapse? The research conducted for this study involved in-depth interviews of eight clinicians working in the same eating disorder agency who all self-identified as having had an eating disorder. The data was analyzed using open coding and developed into eight themes. The themes included: (a) body image acceptance, (b) views on the terms “recovered” versus “in recovery,” (c) a desire to provide hope, (d) perceived higher levels of compassion, empathy and/or understanding, (e) approaching self-disclosure carefully, (f) lack of countertransference around the eating disorder, (g) agency support and use of humor and (h) the importance of self-care to avoid burnout. Implications for future practice included agency emphasis on staff self-care, vacation time, consultation, ongoing trainings, staff retreats and support groups. Implications for future research included a larger-scale study with more specific questions, lack of a time limit, and more diversity among participants. Implications for policy included listening to the voices of recovered clinicians in order to gain perspective and understanding on the best treatment for clients with eating disorders.
The purpose of this research study is to explore whether the participating mothers were able to identify if an increase in their child’s behavior has a connection with their depressive symptoms. Using a quantitative design, thirty two mothers were surveyed on their depressive symptoms in the previous two weeks as well as their child’s behavior problems exhibited in the previous two weeks. All of the mothers surveyed have children who attend a therapeutic day program for school-aged children with a mental health diagnosis. Data was analyzed using frequency, correlations, T-tests and one-way ANOVA. The findings indicated that mothers who felt increased depressive symptoms were likely to have children with increased behavior problems. Also significant in the data is that mothers in this study who had suicidal thoughts had children who are also likely to have recurring thoughts of death or suicide. These findings highlight the need for increased programs to support families, mothers with depression, and increased access to mental health resources.
Exploring Possible Connections Between Traumatic Brain Injury and Homelessness

by Stacy Zimmer

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D.
Committee Members: David Holewinski, LICSW, CBIS; Elizabeth Todd Cowan, MLS

The incidence and awareness of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) in the general population has become more prevalent in recent times; however, limited public knowledge and research exists regarding the prevalence of TBI among the homeless population. Through an exploratory, qualitative pilot study, this research investigated possible connections that might exist between TBI and homelessness. Nine expert respondents from various disciplines, ranging from social work to neuropsychology, were interviewed to solicit their professional impressions, opinions and experiences about this subject. Findings indicate that there is a significant connection between TBI and homelessness. Specifically, TBI is believed to be both a causal factor contributing to the onset of homelessness as well as a consequence of homelessness. Findings also indicate that there are significant correlations among TBI, chemical dependency and mental illness. Potential implications for practice include that social workers and other health care professionals need to be asking their clients specifically about histories of any head trauma. Thus, with proper screening, diagnosis and linkage to appropriate services, individuals with TBI have a much better chance of becoming stabilized so as to experience improved level of functioning and quality of life.
Primary Care Provider Management of Anxiety and Depression in Palliative Patients

by Colette Zunk

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Barbara Pierson, MSW, LICSW; Dr. Christopher Koeppl

Anxiety and depression are common psychological experiences in patients who have advanced disease and are often unrecognized and undertreated. This study examined how primary care providers assess, identify, and treat anxiety and depression in patients who have advanced disease, as well as to illustrate to what extent social work and mental health services are currently being utilized to address these psychological issues. Nine primary care providers from two rural clinics participated, including Family Practice and Internal Medicine Physicians, Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants. Data was gathered using a one-time, qualitative semi-structured interview. Inductive grounded theory methods were used to analyze the data. Several themes were identified: the need for additional physician education; lack of standard screening tools; and the issue of primary care providers’ time constraints to identify and treat anxiety and depression in palliative care patients. There were two surprise findings: a lack of a clear definition of palliative care may affect the identification of palliative care patients, and the high utilization and support for social workers in the primary care setting. The findings of this research support the need to implement social work services in the clinic setting to assist the primary care providers with many psychosocial issues including the emotional needs of patients who have advanced disease.