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MSW Clinical Research Papers

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas
Saint Paul, Minnesota
In Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

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.
Perceptions of Social Work and Collaboration with Clinical Social Workers: Clergy Perspectives

By Susan C. Amann

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Shelley Lyksett, M.Div.; Kesha Marson, MSW, CAPSW, LGSW

Social workers provide services to meet the needs of individuals, communities and society. Due to limited funding and high need, social workers may need to collaborate with other professionals to meet the needs. The clergy are one such group of professionals. They encounter a variety of needs presented by their parishioners and the communities to which they belong. This qualitative research study sought to identify clergy persons’ perceptions of social workers and perspectives on collaborating with social workers. Individual interviews were held with eight Protestant clergy persons holding a Master of Divinity degree and serving in suburban parishes. The major themes that emerged from the data were: 1) social workers meet the needs of individuals and communities; 2) clergy have favorable perceptions of social workers; 3) clergy have collaborated with social workers in the past; 4) clergy desire collaboration with social workers; 5) clergy felt barriers to collaboration exist; 5) barriers could be overcome by social workers seeking out relationships with clergy. Implications for social work and recommendations for future research are discussed.
Psychosocial Development Perspective on Factors That Influence Decision to Pursue a Career in Social Work

By Hugh Armstrong Jr.

Research Chair: Karen Carlson, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Sharon Toll Johnson, MSW, LICSW; Natalie Skow, MSW, LICSW

The intent of this qualitative study is to examine life experiences that may influence an individual to pursue a career in social work. Past and contemporary literature has attempted to answer this question in some capacity, ranging from identifying the motives, incentives, and concerns of being a social worker to identifying what type of characteristics a potential social worker may possess. Eight licensed social workers working in various community agencies were interviewed to determine what events or experiences during childhood and adolescence may have influenced their decisions to become social workers later in life. The conceptual framework for the study was based on Erik Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development. The findings from the study identified four major themes consisting of: strong connection to significant caregivers, major life events, role of caregiver, and the ability to socialize with others. Implications for social work practice would suggest a strong emphasis on the concept of countertransference and self-awareness as part of the social work educational curriculum. The profession of social work could also benefit from partnering with local elementary and high schools to educate children and the general public about the profession of social work.
Walking Two Worlds: Healing from Trauma in the American Indian Community

By Sierra Yazzie Asamoatutu

Research Chair: Catherine L. Marrs Fuchsel, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: William Fullerton, M.Ed., MSW, LICSW; Gertrude Buckanaga, M.A., LGSW

American Indian populations are known to be affected by high rates of trauma, including the impact and perpetuating effects of historical trauma. In an effort to better understand effective ways of healing from trauma, this study explores the methods utilized by American Indian people to facilitate healing, specifically from symptoms of post-traumatic stress. Qualitative interviews were used to collect the stories and experiences of eight practitioners working with American Indian clients as they relate to the use of traditional healing practices and use of Western mental health services. Findings revealed four themes that are consistent with prior research, and yet build understanding of healing practices among American Indian people. These themes are the widespread rates of trauma, the importance of community, the spiritual realm as the context for healing, and a lack of appropriate mental health services in the American Indian community. These themes also point to the unique position of American Indian people as bridging two worlds and two routes to healing: traditional tribal beliefs and mainstream health services. Implications from this study for social work practice, policy, and research are also discussed.
Women’s Experiences of Birth Trauma and Postpartum Mental Health

By Ashley Ashbacher

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, PHD, LICSW
Committee Members: Maureen Campion, MS, LP; Jess Helle-Morrissey, MA, MSW, LGSW

Approximately a third of childbearing women report their birth experience as traumatic (Ford, Ayers, & Bradley, 2010). This experience is subjective and what qualifies as trauma varies among the women who report it. Research surrounding birth trauma is primarily quantitative in nature and does not fully address the personal and emotional experience of birth trauma. The goal of this study was to examine the thoughts and emotional experiences among women who self-identified as having a traumatic birth. Qualitative interviews were conducted with nine women who reported the birth of at least one child as traumatic. Interviews focused on participants’ birth stories, thoughts and feelings in labor; and experiences postpartum. Several themes were identified, such as: physical events in labor, control, thoughts and feelings during labor, relationship and interaction with medical staff, and postpartum experiences. The study suggests that the interactions between women and medical staff as well as the type of follow up care received has an impact on both perception of and recovery from trauma. While this research study is exploratory in nature, it holds implications for social work practice and identifies areas for future birth trauma research.
Cultural Competence in School Social Work: A Personal and Professional Learning Curve

By Michelle G. Baltus

Research Chair: Valandra, MBA, MSW, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Heather Alden-Pope, MSW, LICSW; Christy McCoy, MSW, LICSW

As the nation grows more diverse and the numbers of American youth with mental illness climb, the importance of culturally responsive school social work practice is critical. Research suggests cultural competence is a fluid concept but one that improves service and client outcomes. Studies link cultural competence to licensure levels and practice experience, as well as primary social work competencies. Studies also indicate practitioners consider professional development and a supportive school environment to aid in cultural competency efforts, while societal influences and personal lack of knowledge and self-awareness can impede the process. This study obtained primary data from a purposive sample (n = 7) of licensed school social workers in an urban school district. A semi-structured interview afforded quantitative and qualitative data regarding demographics and perceptions on knowledge, skills, influences, and evaluative measures deemed relevant to cultural competence. The findings echo previous research that suggests cultural competence involves adopting key social work principles and therapeutic skills in the aim to meet individual client needs, rather than those assumed to belong to an overt cultural group. Supports were seen as generally stemming from more immediate factors, while barriers were seen as stemming from larger, more removed influences; this also supports previous research. This study suggests social workers’ abilities to model cultural responsiveness and a willingness to assess their own competencies in diverse ways are important practice components. It also highlights the need for more balanced, behaviorally based cultural competency measures. Future research to explore clients’ perspectives of practitioners’ cultural competence and relevant case studies is recommended. While this study’s qualitative nature allowed for personal insight and experiences, it remains highly exploratory.
The Voices of Grandparents: Views on Support Services When Raising Grandchildren

By Kaitlin M. Barrett

Research Chair: Pa Der Vang, Ph.D, LICSW
Committee Members: Connie Booth, LICSW; Serene Thornton, MSW, LICSW

The current trend in foster care has shifted toward kinship care, also known as relatives caring for relatives. In many cases, this relationship involves grandparents caring for their grandchildren. While it is not the first time these grandparents are parenting, they face new challenges the second time around. The purpose of this study was to determine what support services grandparents viewed as most beneficial in caring for their grandchild. A total of four grandparents and two great grandparents were interviewed for this qualitative study in order to determine their personal experiences as a kinship caregiver reaching out for support. Data was then coded and several themes emerged. Types of services used included counseling, and reaching out to others for support. Other themes also surrounded positive and negative feelings and beliefs about being in the parenting role again. While some of the findings matched well with previous literature, new areas for future study were also discovered including fear for the future of a grandchild and facing rejection from others after taking in a grandchild. These findings suggest the need for a variety of formal and informal supports that address the needs of grandchildren and grandparents. Advocating for changes in the system and process can provide caregivers with the tools necessary to find their voice in this experience.
Acculturation and the Effects on Latino Children’s Emotional and Behavioral Well-Being

By Callister J. Benson

Research Chair: Catherine L. Marrs Fuchsel, PHD, LICSW
Committee Members: Elizabeth Franklin, LICSW; Christina Gonzalez, LICSW

This research project is designed to look at the relationship between Latino children’s emotional and behavioral well-being and their acculturation level. This quantitative study is designed to identify whether or not there is a relationship between the two variables. The data was collected from mental health professionals who currently work with Latino children between the ages of zero and thirteen. Each individual completed an online survey which included an Acculturation Scale and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire to help determine the relationship. This quantitative study and survey are meant to help researchers understand issues of acculturation and how such issues pertain to Latino children’s emotional and behavioral well-being.
A Systems View of Early Interventions for Vicarious Trauma: Managing Secondary Trauma Stress

By Kelly A. Berscheit

Research Chair: Dr. Felicia Sy, MSW, PhD, LICSW
Committee Members: Mikki J. Rothbauer, MSW, LICSW; Shari Kottke, MSW, LICSW

This is a heuristic study of the current prevention and intervention efforts of clinical social workers working with traumatized clients. The purpose of the research was to identify the best mechanisms of prevention and interventions for secondary trauma stress (STS) and vicarious trauma (VT) to develop a systems protocol to shield therapists from the impact of working with traumatized clients. The data was collected through interviews with eight practicing licensed clinical social workers. Findings in this study suggest STS is normal and to be expected if working with traumatized clients and that VT may be prevented. The results of this study indicate that these trauma therapists identified trauma informed clinical supervisors as the most effective intervention, along with consistently practicing an individually determined self-care regime for protection from STS and VT. This study supports the importance of a trauma care system that has a ‘culture’ that is aware, recognizes and normalizes STS and VT. This research project highlights that it is not the sole responsibility of the trauma therapist to bear the burden of helping traumatized clients but the entire system must work as a team to support the trauma therapist which parallels effective quality services for the client.
The Effect of a Therapy Rabbit on College Student Stress & Arousal

By Shelly Bjick

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, Ph.D., MSW, LISW
Committee Members: Patti Anderson, M.Ed., C.P.D.T.; Tanya Bailey, MSW, LICSW

Colleges are facing increasing levels of distressed students and need a wide variety of tools to assist them. One such modality is animal-assisted interaction; an integrative practice with minimal side effects. This study attempted to demonstrate that spending time with animals will decrease a college student’s stress level. It was based on a 2004 study by Charnetski, Brennan and Riggers which studied the effect of a dog on college students’ immune systems. This study consisted of four groups: the control group, a group that experienced explicit observation of a therapy rabbit, a group that experienced implicit observation of the therapy rabbit, and a group that stroked a stuffed rabbit. The 32 participants in this study were all female, primarily baccalaureate students between 18 – 20 years old, from a small, private, Midwestern university. Before and after the experience, students indicated their stress and arousal level using the Stress Arousal Checklist (MacKay, Cox, Burrows & Lazzerini, 1978). All four groups demonstrated a statistically significant decrease in stress level after their experience. An interesting pattern occurred in their arousal levels; the control groups’ arousal level decreased, the stuffed rabbit group experienced no change, and both of the groups who were exposed to the rabbit had an increase in their arousal level. The enthusiasm college students demonstrate toward animals may mitigate some of the excuses students use for not engaging in traditional mental health techniques. Incorporating registered therapy animals for this work offers an effective way to assist students who are experiencing stress.
Critique of the Group Home Model in Addressing Homelessness for People with a Mental Illness

By Brenda K. Blaisdell

Research Chair: Dr. Michael Chovanec, Ph.D
Committee Members: Rebecca Maciej, MSW, LICSW; Jannelle Prescott, BSE

The purpose of this study was to explore the strengths and limitations of the group home model in addressing homelessness for people diagnosed with a mental illness. This study attempted to collect qualitative data from group home owners who serve people who have a mental illness and have been or are at risk of homelessness. Researcher was unable to recruit a sample for this study due to barriers in recruiting a sample. The barriers to recruiting a sample include: low sample; inaccessibility of group home owners; lack of investment by group home owners in the research process and a lack of buy in to program evaluation of group homes by the owners. Research recommendations to address these barriers in the future are also discussed. Given the complex problem of housing shortage for people with a mental illness, it is important that we continue to research this issue with the hope of reducing homelessness.
Gender Role Conflict and Attitudes Toward Seeking Help

By Jennifer Boisjolie

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Mark Olson, MSW, LICSW; Naomi Ward, MSW, LGSW

This study examined how male gender role conflict related to attitudes toward seeking professional help in a sample of 68 men ages 26-75. The data was gathered using a self-administered survey. A quantitative, correlational research design was used to test the hypotheses that there is a relationship exists between the stated variables. The results of this study showed no relationship between gender role conflict and attitudes toward seeking help. The population of this research study was mostly highly educated, Caucasian men. There was no statistical significance related to gender role conflict and attitudes towards seeking help. And so gender role conflict may not need as much attention in this population in terms of how it affects help seeking. For this particular population it may be beneficial to find other influences affecting men seeking help. Future research studies could also include more diverse populations.
From Her Perspective: Reflections of Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood

By Stephanie J. Bowman

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, MPP, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Joan Demeules, LSW, MA; JaeRan Kim, MSW, LGSW

Teenage mothers face many challenges throughout their lives, challenges that prove to be both positive and negative. This study examines the lived experiences of seven women who were teen mothers. They have shared their stories here and reveal their experiences. Data was obtained through semi-structured qualitative interviews with seven women who became pregnant at age 20 or younger and who have been parenting for at least five years. Themes emerged from the interviews such as: family structure, education, personal goals and values, circumstances surrounding the pregnancy, support, the relationship and role of the father, the experience of becoming a young mother; resiliency, and thoughts on pregnancy prevention and sex education. Findings indicated that the women had a similar positive outcome to becoming teen mothers, that support was found to be the most important factor in obtaining goals and success, and the need for open communication regarding sexual activity between parents and their children. Findings also indicated a discrepancy between general perceptions of women who become teen parents and the reality of the women represented in this study. Furthermore, the importance of sharing one’s story was found to be powerful; having someone to listen to their story and to be able to contribute their thoughts to this project. This study reveals the need for future research and focus on supporting the strengths of teen mothers rather than treating teen pregnancy and parenthood only as a social problem; another need is education on effective communication between parents and children regarding sexual activity and pregnancy and breaking the barriers that create an uncomfortable atmosphere regarding the subject of sex and teens.
Linking EBD Student Achievement to Attachment: Exploring the Role of Relationship in Encouraging School Success

By Jennifer Braaten

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Mary Larscheid, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW; Jean Jordan, Ed. D.

Less than one half of students educationally labeled Emotionally or Behaviorally Disordered (EBD) graduate. Previous research findings suggest some reasons for this lack of success including: lack of educator training, mental health issues of students, the effect of poverty and how the nature of early childhood attachment impacts learning. Specific attention has been given to early childhood attachment patterns form the neurological pathways upon which a student may base future interactions. This qualitative study focused on the nature of the student-educator relationship and how that relationship can impact the learning of EBD students. There were ten participants interviewed for this study: four educators, one grandparent of a former EBD student and five former EBD students. The findings of this study suggest a need for increased teacher training to broaden understanding of mental health issues, the barriers EBD students face outside of an educational system, and the importance of the educator-student relationship as an essential component needed for EBD students to succeed. Additionally, the findings included the need for increased funding for education to decrease class size and a need for increased mental health supports in schools.
Success, Desistance and Relationships Between Probation Officers and Probationers: A Social Work Perspective

By Ariel Brinson

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Deric Jackson, LGSW; Phyllis Grubb, MSW

The number of individuals who are reentering communities from prison, jail, and on community supervision across the United States is vast and due to its size a limited number of programs are used on a regular basis. The purpose of this research was to better understand how adults on probation desist from reoffending. Specifically, this researcher asked both adults on probation and an accompanying sample of probation officers about how each: (1) define success, (2) challenges, and (3) how the relationships and services probation provides do and do not support efforts toward desistance, using a qualitative, exploratory design. Maruna (2001) defines desistance as “the long-term abstinence from crime among individuals who previously engaged in persistent patterns of criminal offending.” This study was exploratory and looked at the current approaches a sample of probation officers used with their clients, their prioritization of duties in this role, the factors that encourage success in this relationship, and how each understand and define “success”. The clients (probationers) were also interviewed using similar questions formatted to their point of view. The results show that the probation officers and probationers in this sample report having some similar answers in terms of several of the variables and point to the need for increased resources for probationers and involvement from probation officers.
Stigmatized Loss and Suicide

By Ann Brosnan

Research Chair: Richa Dhanju, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Miriam Itzkowitz, MSW, LICSW; Dianna Diers, MA, LMFT

Over the past ten years, suicide has increased at an alarming rate. A loss such as this leaves behind family members and friends who often have many unresolved questions and feelings. Suicide is often not discussed as openly as other types of loss and this can affect and limit the grieving process. A review of the literature indicates a higher incidence of complicated bereavement when compared to naturally occurring losses and difficulty in meaning making of the loss. This also includes a higher incidence of physical and mental health concerns. By studying what barriers, including stigma, affect the grieving process, those in the helping profession can help those individuals who have lost someone to suicide work through the grieving process and reduce the negative impact associated with it. The field of social work also has an obligation to educate the public on mental illness to eliminate negative stereotyping and encourage those who have been affected by it to seek help. Using a qualitative design, members of three suicide support groups in the Twin Cities were asked to complete a survey discussing perceptions regarding the loss of their loved one. This included their perception and dominant feelings toward the person who died, perceptions of themselves and how others may perceive them, and how this may have affected their World View. Members were also given an opportunity to make suggestions to practitioners how they can help an individual who has lost someone to suicide. Results indicate those who lost someone to suicide did not perceive the person who died differently, but felt others may perceive them differently. Their World View was maintained as generally positive, with an increased realization of life’s fragility and higher sense of spirituality. Implications for social work were also discussed in providing more education around mental health help as a means of reducing stigma.
Effectiveness of Animal-Assisted Therapy: Therapists’ Perspectives

By Nichole M. Budahn

Research Chair: Valandra, MBA, MSW, LISW, Ph.D.
Research Committee: Jennifer Gervias, MSW, LICSW; Traci Thompson, MSW, LICSW

Animal-assisted therapy has frequently been used with children who have autism spectrum disorder. This study examined animal-assisted therapists’ perceptions of effectiveness of animal-assisted therapy with children who have DSM-IV mental health diagnoses. The researcher recruited self-identified animal-assisted therapists using social media sites LinkedIn and Facebook. Two therapists completed the fourteen question qualitative survey in full. Three themes were found in this study; comfort, confidence, and benefits. While this study produced definite themes, more research needs to be conducted on animal-assisted therapy and children with DSM-IV mental health disorders. Very few studies have been conducted on the impacts of animal-assisted therapy with children who have a various DSM-IV mental health disorders.
EMDR: Promising Treatment for Co-Occurring Eating Disorders and Childhood Sexual Abuse

By Victoria L. Cameron

Research Chair: Lance Peterson, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Lisa Borneman, MSW, LICSW; Heather Libbey, Ph.D., LP

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) with clients who have an eating disorder co-occurring with a history of childhood sexual abuse. Qualitative interviews were conducted with nine mental health clinicians who work primarily in the outpatient setting using EMDR with their clients. These audio-recorded interviews took place over a period of three weeks and the data were analyzed using grounded theory methodology. The most common themes that emerged were client-therapist relationship, stabilization of eating disorder, chronology of treatment, grounding, and dissociation. Given the high co-occurrence of childhood sexual abuse and eating disorders, the serious and pernicious nature of eating disorders, and the growing body of research that points to EMDR as a highly successful method for treating a variety of conditions including trauma, it is important that research into the use of EMDR with this population be continued.
Social Workers’ Current Practice of Screening for Brain Injury

By Shawna L. Carey

Research Chair: Carol F. Kuechler, MSW, PhD., LISW
Committee Members: David Holewinski, MSW, LICSW, CBIS; Meghan Leach, MSW, LICSW

The purpose of this study was to determine if and to what extent LICSWs are screening for brain injury during intake. Licensed social workers were invited to participate in an online Qualtrics survey. Questions in the survey gauged participants’ use of assessments for physical, cognitive and emotional categories of symptomatology identified in the literature. Thirteen LICSWs completed the survey for a response rate of 5.1 percent. All participants in this study work with at least one population at-risk for brain injuries, yet over half of the LICSW respondents indicated not having training in brain injury. Respondents who had training in brain injury were significantly more likely to screen for the physical symptoms of ringing in ears, blurred vision, and numbness and the cognitive symptom of getting lost. There were no differences in the training and no training conditions on screening for emotional symptoms of brain injury. Since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have identified brain injury as a major public health problem, it is incumbent on social workers to be aware of this social issue and to learn about its symptoms and methods for assessment in order to address the 85 percent of individuals with brain injury who are undiagnosed. Further research is needed to determine if the findings apply in larger populations of clinical social workers. If so, it would be necessary to begin to understand the barriers social workers face in becoming aware of emerging public health concerns. Interviewing LICSWs regarding their perspectives on brain injury and their current knowledge, exposure to training, and/or use of brain injury screening tools would also be recommended to enrich our understanding of the in-vivo experience of social work clinicians.
The Risk and Protective Factors for Adolescents with an Addicted Parent

By Marne Chaput

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Jane Hurley-Johncox, MSW, LICSW; Amy Mellum, MSW, LICSW

This research project was a qualitative study that explored the risk and protective factors for adolescents who are growing up with a parent who is addicted to drugs and/or alcohol using a sample of eight participants. Specifically, this research looked at the possible protective factors that may help an adolescent from becoming addicted to drugs and/or alcohol themselves. Also, this research looked at the possible risk factors that may have helped an adolescent fall into addiction like his or her parents. In addition, the study explored possible behavioral patterns exhibited in adolescents who are growing up in a home with addiction and become addicted themselves. The themes that emerged from the data for risk factors for adolescents who grow up in a home with an addicted parent and who become addicted to drugs and/or alcohol themselves were a) parental chemical health modeling, b) traumatic experiences in adolescence and/or adulthood and c) genetic predisposition. In comparison, the themes that emerged for protective factors for adolescents who grow up in a home with an addicted parent and do not become addicted to drugs and/or alcohol were a) engagement with others and in activities, b) resilience and c) a faith in God. The predominant theme that emerged for the behavioral patterns of adolescents who grow up in an addicted home and become addicted to drugs and/or alcohol themselves was oppositional defiance. Overall, the data from this study had some similar findings as other research, but also provided new findings. It is imperative that clinicians continue to stay knowledgeable regarding the risk and protective factors for adolescents who are growing up in a home with parental addiction. Research showed that these factors are always changing and different for every adolescent. It is important for social workers to be aware of the diversity of these factors that could help or hinder an adolescent from following in their parent’s footsteps of addiction.
Effects of cancer are not limited to the ill child, but the entire family system. Current research has focused on the implications of cancer on the ill child, limiting clinical research on the effects of cancer on well siblings. The purpose of this research is to investigate the interventions mental health professionals use to increase adaptation of well siblings. Using a quantitative design, ten professionals completed an online survey regarding their practice with well siblings. Professionals reported normalizing home environment, sibling cancer camps, and increased knowledge of well siblings to be the most effective intervention in increasing adaptation of well siblings and decreasing emotional and psychologically effects. Sibling cancer camps and increasing sibling knowledge is congruent with current literature. Normalizing home environment is a new finding and a focus for further research.
Communication and End-of-Life Decision Making about Death with Children who have Terminal Cancer: The Social Worker's Perspective

By Jessica Convy

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph.D, LICSW
Committee Members: George Baboila, LICSW; Jane Hurley-Johncox, LICSW

The purpose of this study was to determine how parents address communication and decision making about death with their terminally ill child from social workers who work with these families. Methods: To add to the existing limited research studies on communication about death and end-of-life care decision making, the researcher conducted a qualitative study consisting of six interviews with social workers in a large, Midwestern pediatric hospital. The data was analyzed using thematic clustering. Results: The qualitative study focuses on two themes: discussing death with a terminally ill child and decision making. The researcher found that, with regards to discussing death with a terminally ill child, that parents had several reasons for either not telling their child about death or telling their child. The researcher also found that there were varying responses to whether or not parents experienced regret about not talking to their child about death and that most children would like to talk to their parents about death. In addition, the researcher found that, with regards to decision making, that parents are generally the principle decision makers. However, the researcher found that a child’s input in the decision-making process depends on the child’s age and development. The researcher also found that parents and children may disagree about end of life decisions, and when this happens, there are several tools in place to help a family reach a compromise. Implications: This study suggests that further research is needed on end-of-life decision making in order to address the emerging themes found. Social workers need to understand how families address end-of-life decisions in order to better help the families they serve.
Analyzing Alternative Learning Centers: Challenges and Opportunities for Maintaining Student Retention

By Princess Cramer-Drazkowski

Research Chair: Valandra, MBA, MSW, LISW, PhD (Chair)
Committee Members: Danny Porter, MSW, LICSW; Kent E. Rhein, MSW, Ed.S., LICSW

The purpose of this study was to examine what strategies alternative learning centers utilize for student retention. A case study was used to learn about the ways one public school located in the Upper Midwest provided resources and developed relationships with students in an alternative learning center setting. Students attending alternative learning centers are typically high-risk high-need students who do not have many social supports in their educational settings. The participant in this study is a high-level administrator who has over 30 years of experience in the public school system, including participation in the creation of the modern alternative learning center in their area. The findings imply that positive school environments as well as respectful positive relationships are necessary in the retention and maintenance of students at alternative learning centers. Environmental as well as social factors prohibit the typical alternative learning center student from being successful in school. If these relationships and environmental factors are not met students do not typically stay in school.
Sibshops: How Effective Are They in Helping Siblings?

By Amy M. Dailey

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph. D., LICSW
Committee Members: Angie Tomlinson, LISCW, Dawn Raadt, LSW

Having a brother or sister with special health needs not only impacts parents but siblings as well. Support available for these siblings has been found to be limited in the literature. One particular program designed to provide support to these children is a program called Sibshops. This study completed a program evaluation of Sibshops conducted at a Midwest Children's hospital between 2011-2012 in order to assess the effectiveness of this program. Qualitative and quantitative data were obtained using parent feedback surveys. Results from the surveys showed that parents felt Sibshops provided their children with a positive experience, allowed them a sense of feeling they were not alone, caused positive attitude changes, increased their child's knowledge about their brother or sister's disability, and allowed for their healthy children to feel recognized in a special way. Additionally, the data also suggested that the five goals in the Sibshop curriculum were being met. While this study would suggest that Sibshops may be effective in providing support to siblings, further research including direct feedback from the children themselves may be beneficial in allowing social workers as well as other professionals working with siblings additional knowledge and insight into the benefits and challenges of having a brother or sister with special health needs.
Clinical Social Workers’ Use of Self and the Impact of Personal Therapy on Practitioner Development

By Jessie C.W. Daley

Research Chair: Kendra J. Garrett, Ph.D, LICSW
Committee Members: Cara Carlson, Ph.D, LICSW; Lauren Nietz, LICSW

Social workers are as vulnerable as any human being to life’s challenges and must sometimes seek professional therapy services to process. This study quantitatively investigates Licensed Independent Clinical Social Workers’ (LICSWs) experiences with personal therapy on a personal and professional level. Qualitatively examined in this study are the following research questions: “How do LICSWs define “use of self” in clinical practice?” and “How do LICSWs’ experiences in personal therapy relate to their “use of self” in clinical practice?” Data was gathered from 57 participants through an anonymous online survey. Quantitative data analysis revealed themes that mirrored findings present in the literature on the use of personal therapy, such as a high rate of utilization and positive perceived impact on personal and professional development. Qualitative data analysis revealed the following main themes: “Use of self” means sharing myself with my clients through skillful self disclosure and empathy” and “Use of self” means authentically bringing all I’m made of into the therapeutic relationship for use as a therapeutic tool,” “Modeling of therapeutic behavior,” “Greater self-awareness and personal growth/Awareness of issues related to countertransference,” and “Having the experience of being a client.”
Non-Compliance Factors for Adolescents with Celiac Disease

By Alicia Darling

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Julie Salato; Heather Holt, MSW, LGSW

Individuals with celiac disease face many challenges when navigating the world around them. Adolescents with celiac disease must face the challenge of standing out in a world that is heavily influenced by peers and the pressure to fit in. The purpose of this project was to explore factors of non-compliance for adolescents with celiac disease. Using a qualitative design, two adolescent female volunteers participated in a focus group regarding factors in their lives that led them to not comply with the gluten-free diet. Data were analyzed and the focus group responses were then linked to previous related literature. The findings indicated that the respondents were in fact able to comply with the gluten-free diet based on the severity of their symptoms, support from others, knowledge of others about the gluten-free diet, and their own knowledge. These findings highlight the importance of support and knowledge and point out the need for a greater effort to offer continued support and research for celiac disease.
Burnout Among Child Protection Workers: The Role of Supervision

By Katelyn M. Davies

Research Chair: Pa Der Vang, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Colette Roesler, MSW, LGSW; Elizabeth Vu, MSW, LICSW

This paper explores supervision as it relates to a prevalent theme among child protection workers: burnout. Prominent research in the study of burnout identifies three components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal efficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). These three components are integrated and addressed in a qualitative exploratory study. The sample, consisting of eight child protection workers, participated in a 30-45 minute semi-structured interview. The interview was guided by an instrument developed by the researcher specifically to address supervision as it relates to the three dimensions of burnout. Grounded theory was used to code and identify themes in the data. Themes are identified and discussed as they relate to the research questions. Additionally, unanticipated themes – administration, length of tenure in job, and individual styles – that emerged are discussed. Finally, implications for future research are presented.
Cultivating Well-being: Horticulture Programming’s Effect on Youth’s Emotional Well-being

By Mitchell Demers

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph. D.
Committee Members: Cheryl Smetana McHugh, LICSW; Michelle McMonigal, Ed. S.

Although horticulture programming has been utilized in the form of activities for various populations for centuries, much is not known about the benefits that come from participating in such activities. Over the past few decades, several research studies have begun to explore and explain the benefit of using horticulture programming for several populations with most of the research focusing on the older adult and persons with physical disabilities populations. The purpose of the current study was to gather information on the effects horticulture programming has on the emotional well-being of the youth population. The study included a nationwide survey of horticulture youth program leaders. Within the survey, participants were asked to reflect on the youth they had worked with, and provide responses to three quantitative measures of emotional well-being, several qualitative questions to support the quantitative answers, and demographic questions to gather a better understanding of the programs included in the sample.

The findings of this study suggest that horticulture programming, on a whole, has positive impacts on the emotional well-being of youth. In particular, the findings highlight that horticulture programming enhances youths’ emotional well-being through improving pride, self-worth, coping skills, confidence, care for others and increased patience. Overall, future research to determine the extent and impact of the benefits suggested in this study would be beneficial. Future studies should aim to consider the impact of the design of the horticulture program, as well as provide a continued focus on the youth population. This study can provide a useful framework for determining populations of youth that need to be studied.
The Impact of Employee Wellness Programs on Mental Health Workers’ Reported Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

By Jessica Anton Dooley

Research Chair: Valandra, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Brooke Schultz, MSW, LICSW; Thomas F. Witheridge, Ph.D., LICSW

Burnout and Compassion fatigue are topics which are covered in the literature and academic programs. Wellness in order to combat these is also an important topic for helping professionals. This study examined employee wellness programs and their effect on mental health workers’ compassion fatigue and burnout. A mixed-methods model used the Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) survey and five open-ended questions relating to the wellness activities. Many barriers and incentives to use of the wellness programs were found and scores were compared with other demographic and programmatic information. Further research should continue to examine mental health workers, specifically, and the impact of environmental support. Continued use of Moos’ Work Environmental Scale (WES) would be beneficial to agencies employing a large number of mental health workers.
Dimensions of Positive Parent-Adolescent Dyads as Defined by Mexican American Sons

By Clare Dudzinski

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Zach Pruitt, MSW; Sarah Van den Akker

The unique relationship between parent and adolescent requires clinical attention as a means of promoting positive mental, emotional, and behavioral outcomes for adolescents. The dynamic identity and growing presence of the Mexican American male adolescent in American society add multiple layers to this already complex relationship. The purpose of this project was to explore features and definitions of closeness and care in parent-adolescent dyads to understand how Mexican American male adolescents build positive relationships with their resident parents. In this secondary data analysis, features of closeness and care were drawn from Wave I, Stage 2 of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), a longitudinal study following a nationally representative sample of adolescents from 1994 to 2008. Data were analyzed using SPSS software. The findings indicated similar features of closeness and care in relationships with both resident parents. Features associated with communication and warmth or emotional support corresponded most significantly with higher levels of closeness and care. These trends offer a foundation for fostering positive relationships between Mexican American male adolescents and the formative adult figures in their lives. Likewise, these results present important information about the process of developing a therapeutic alliance with this client population. In moving forward, this study points to the need for a more culturally specific, modernized, and qualitative investigation of these definitions and the implications of parental and adolescent gender.
Analysis of the Real World Application of Sensorimotor Psychotherapy for the Treatment of Complex Trauma

By Marie Elaine

Research Chair: David J. Roseborough, PhD, LICSW, ACT
Committee Members: Carrie H. Menk, MSW, LICSW; Ryan Van Wyk, Psy.D, L.P.

The focus of this research was to gain a better understanding of the challenges of working with clients who have experienced severe or chronic trauma. The conceptual framework used for this research project is based on neurologically informed attachment theory as it is presented by Daniel J. Siegel in his book *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology: An Integrative Handbook of the Mind (2012)*. The sample consisted of five professional mental health therapists who currently work with clients in the treatment of trauma. All participants also completed the Level I Trauma Training for Sensorimotor Psychotherapy. This sample of therapists reported that the majority of their cases were related to trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety and dissociative disorder. After analysis of the transcripts, three main themes emerged in the questioning: 1) Sensorimotor psychotherapy was explored due to perceived limitations with existing approaches for the treatment of some highly traumatized clients 2) Attention to the therapeutic relationship is extremely important when working with highly traumatized clients and 3) Insights regarding the therapists role in the treatment of traumatized clients. Strengths of this study included the relatively experienced sample and the qualitative nature of the study which allowed the participants’ voices and experiences to be heard. Limitations of this sample include the small sample size of five therapists and the homogeneity of the participants.
Is There an Increased Health Risk to Multi-generational Elderly Poor Not Found in First-Generation Elderly Poor?

By Donna E. Enfield

Research Chair: Colin F. Hollidge, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Madonna Waletzke, LICSW; Mary Kay Lannon, LISW

This study sought to discover whether or not there is an increased health risk to multi-generational elderly poor not found in first-generation elderly poor. The research design called for a convenience sampling of 100 adults attending community center programs within one of four geographic areas in two Midwestern metropolitan counties identified by the U.S. Census Bureau as being low income. All surveys were to be anonymous, printed in English and completed independently by the survey participants. Survey questions included topics such as belief in parental poverty, perceptions of current poverty status, health issues and barriers to obtaining health care. Older adults living in low-income areas were surveyed in an attempt to uncover a correlation between parental poverty and current affects to health. Survey data collection proved to be more difficult than anticipated due to the lack of community programming for older adults and the time available for data collection. Only twenty surveys were collected and from a single collection site. Study results were statistically insignificant but still provide results which some professionals may find interesting. Survey participant ages ranged between 54 and 91 with a mean age of 71.5. Participants were found to have a mean of 6.86 daily medications. One participant reported being admitted to a hospital or visiting a hospital emergency room nine or more times within the past year. Social workers, health care professionals, community program developers and policy researchers will be interested in the findings of this study for the implications of long-term poverty upon the health of current populations. The quality of life would obviously be significantly impacted by chronic health conditions reported in this study. The financial burden to individuals, supportive programs and greater society could also be affected. Programs designed to break the cycle of poverty and thus prevent the perpetuation of poverty and its impacts to health could make a significant contribution to the quality of life of older adults.
Social Workers’ Feminist Perspectives: Implications for Practice

By Jacqueline Enge

Research Chair: Carol Kuechler, MSW, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Miriam Itzkowitz, MSW, LICSW; Sherry Jordan, PhD

There have been few studies completed exploring the ideas of feminism in the current context of social work practice from the perspective of social workers. For this study, 23 licensed MN social workers completed a survey exploring to what level social workers relate to four perspectives of feminism (liberal, radical, socialist and women of color/womanist), and how these perspectives impact their problem identification, assessment, treatment strategies and treatment goals in social work practice. This research used a portion of the Feminist Perspective Scale (Henley, et al, 1998) to determine the feminist perspective used by the social workers. The feminist perspectives used in this study were liberal, radical, socialist and womanist. Additionally, practice methods hypothesized to be used by social workers based on their feminist perspectives as hypothesized by Nes and Iadicola, (1989) were used to create exploratory social work practice method subscales. Findings showed a statistically significant relationship between the radical, socialist and womanist feminist perspectives and the social work practice methods of problem identification, assessment, treatment strategies and treatment goals. These correlations and the limited recent research completed on this topic show the importance of completing updated research on the feminist perspectives used by social workers and the impact it has on social work practice.
Children who experience trauma often experience a disruption in the formation of attachment with their primary caregiver. This research aims to address how this disruption may lead to attachment disorders in children, and what developmental challenges children exposed to trauma may face. Using a qualitative interview case study of a children’s mental health professional, this study examines the impact of trauma on attachment, based on the experiences of this clinician. This study set out to investigate what treatment methods are currently used to treat children with histories of trauma and attachment disorders. From the qualitative interview 4 main themes were found and are labeled as the following: behavioral issues, reunification, awareness of attachment theory and trauma, and treatment methods. The research findings and current literature both address the importance of the clinician being aware of attachment theory and trauma informed care within current practice and treatment methods. However, the findings reveal some gaps in service and the need for a more systematic approach in how to work with children with attachment disorders and trauma histories. Further research is needed on practices used by mental health clinicians in a wide array of treatment settings in order to generalize findings.
Assessing Expressed Emotion Influences on Autistic Symptoms/Behaviors: A School Social Worker Perspective

By Mackenzie Flaherty

Research Chair: Michael Chovance, LICSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Amy Naleid, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW; Brenda Beyer, LICSW

This research paper explores how components of Expressed Emotion (Critical Comments, Emotional Over-involvement, Warmth) experienced in the classroom are influencing student behavior and symptoms for students with Autism. Qualitative data was collected from one school social worker. The study confirms and builds upon previous research on Critical Comments and Warmth. Critical Comments, especially when delivered by a staff member poorly, increased maladaptive behavior and decreased social interaction and communication. Warmth inversely decreased maladaptive behavior and while increasing communication and social interaction. Emotional Over-involvement was dependent upon the individual student and neither confirms or rejects previous research. Each member of the classroom group impacted how the Expressed Emotion components were expressed. Staff were well educated and/or experienced in working with students with Autism were described as displaying high levels of Warmth. Study limitations and recommendations for future research are also discussed.
Immediate and long-term effects of trauma result in mental, emotional, and physical symptoms that ultimately can inhibit normal daily functioning and cause dissociation and disorganized attachment. Previous studies highlight effective strategies in cognitive and physiological approaches to treating trauma. However, limited research has been found in the area of integrative approaches that include the use of touch. This qualitative study examines the professional attitudes around the integration of massage therapy and psychotherapy into a sound clinical practice for treating trauma. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five massage therapists and five licensed independent clinical social workers from Minnesota, all having clinical experience with trauma. Findings reveal that the multi-dimensional effects of trauma warrant a multi-dimensional approach. Therapeutically, benefits include providing comprehensive care, enhancing the therapeutic process, and saving time and money. This model would be professionally beneficial by promoting exceptional leadership in the healthcare industry and providing a sense of personal and professional gratification. However, therapeutic barriers include the client’s ability to handle touch, the client’s ability to understand the intent of treatment, and the potential for re-victimization. Professional barriers include personal and professional boundaries, professional identity related to scope of practice, fear of allegations, ambiguous laws and guidelines, and institutional resistance to change. These findings suggest a need for better advocacy, stronger laws and practicing guidelines, further research and practice models, continued dialogue among professions, and a shift in societal perspectives around the use of touch.
Risks and Supportive Factors of Burnout among School Social Workers in the Early Childhood Special Education Setting

By Veronica Vazquez Freeberg

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW.
Committee Members: Anissa Keyes, LMFT; Claire Kuennen-Jordan, MSW, LICSW

This qualitative study examined the risk and supportive factors of burnout among school social workers in the Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) setting. Data was collected through semi-structured standardized interviews with 7 licensed school social workers currently working in this area. Theme coding methods were used to inductively analyze codes in the data and to find common themes from the interviews. Themes that emerged were separated into six categories: personal, organizational, and job structural risks factors, and personal, organizational, and job structural supportive factors. The majority of the findings of this study were consistent with previous research. Other themes that were not consistent with previous research were found. Those themes included the importance of having a flexible work style, the impact of diminishing resources for families, and organizational support related to maintaining licensure requirements. Implications for this study suggest ideas for future research in this area, with hopes to enhance school social work education, research, and training.
Provider Opinions on Frequent Mental Health Hospitalizations

By Courtney Funke

Research Chair: Andrea Nesmith, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Karen Cooper, MSW, LICSW; Mary Larson, LSW

Frequent mental health hospitalizations are contingent on many variables. The purpose of this study was to gather provider opinions on frequent mental health hospitalizations. A qualitative design was utilized; ten providers participated in this study which explored factors of frequent mental health hospitalizations. Data were analyzed using content analysis. The findings indicated that all providers view medication management as a precipitating factor to psychiatric hospitalization. Findings indicate that support at discharge will greatly influence the success of the patron. The findings of this study indicate further need for education and advocacy in mental health. Findings suggest that stigma and limited community resources are key variables to frequent mental health hospitalizations. This study parallels data from previous research on this subject; however, patient opinions on frequent mental health hospitalizations are still absent.
Behind the Scenes: Correctional Officers’ Perceptions on Serious Mental Illness Training

By Teri Gerhardt

Research Chair: Dr. Felicia Washington-Sy
Committee Members: Shelly Richardson, LICSW; Anna Maija Lee, LSW

Correctional officers working within county jails are limited in training for mental health crisis intervention strategies. This study explored correctional officers’ insight after fulfilling training on SMI provided by the National Alliance on Mental Illness: Minnesota, in which insight was gained of professional attitudes and perceptions, evaluating program effectiveness. A focus group was employed with correctional officers who were purposefully invited to participate in this study as they have direct, firsthand knowledge of the strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement of the training. The findings indicate that correctional officers feel jail is not a place for individuals with a mental illness. The stigma of mental health behavior is another finding noted within the correctional officers discussion. Lastly, with the collected perceptions and judgments of correctional officers; it is duly noted that this training provided by NAMI: MN is a solution to overcoming barriers of increasing knowledge of SMI. Recommendations for the program include increasing knowledge on signs and symptoms of mental health behaviors, teaching ways to approach individuals who are not in crisis, collaboration techniques, and ensuring administrators are made aware of how important this training is for correctional officers and ways it benefits their jails, as an organization and a system. One last recommendation is that more correctional officers’ need to be taught about mental health, signs and symptoms, truths about mental illnesses and stigmas surrounding SMI, increasing knowledge.
Motivations, Skills and Rewards: Social Workers’ perspectives on practice with older adults

By Rachel L. Gilmore

Research Chair: Dr. Carol Kuechler, MSW, PhD., LISW
Committee Members: Gretchen Scheffel, MSW, LISW; Donna McElveen, MSW, LISW

This study explored social workers’ views about their motivations, skills and rewards in work with older adults and how to increase social workers’ interest in working with older adults. Seven masters level social workers who work with older adults and are members of an association of social workers who work with older adults in the community, participated in interviews about their practice. The participants emphasized the importance of empathy, listening and having knowledge about community resources as essential to competent work with older adults. The participants shared stories about how they developed an interest in working with older adults that reflected the importance of family, volunteer and work experiences. Each participant shared rewards they experienced such as being a resource in times of need, being present to listen, and being able to offer care and compassion. Implications for education and future research are highlighted as ways to engage future social workers in practice with older adults.
Birth Family Searching and Meaning: A Korean Transracial Adoptee Perspective

By Kathryn Eileen Goldstein

Research Chair: Kari L. Fletcher, PhD, LICSW
Committee Members: Lindsey Nelson Donnelly, MSW, LICSW; Elana M. Schuster, MSW, LGSW

The decision and process of initiating a birth family search is truly a unique journey for every adoptee. However, through examining the birth family search process of Korean transracial adoptees themes and patterns emerge surrounding the meaning making process within their own journey. This study sought out to understand how adult Korean transracial adoptees use the process of birth family searching to create meaning of their ambiguous loss and adoption experience. Additionally, this research aimed to give voice to the stories and perspectives of Korean transracial adoptees’ unique experiences and knowledge. Interviews were conducted with eight participants (n = 8) who are Korean transracial adoptees and had participated in a birth family search or been contact by their birth family through a reverse birth family search. This study found that the process of birth family searching effected participants’ experience of ambiguous loss, adoptee cultural citizenship, meaning making, and identity tension. In addition participants explored the experience of traveling to South Korea, navigating language barriers, using support systems, experiencing guilt in relation to the search process, and the use of Facebook for support and searching. The findings of this study indicate that social workers need to become more aware of the dynamics surrounding the experience of being a Korean transracial adoptee in order to support and advocate for the services that would be beneficial for adoptees who are completing birth family searches.
Disabled Sexual Assault Victims: Perceptions of sexual assault professionals on barriers to providing services to disabled sexual assault victims

By Melody L. Gorden

Research Chair: Felicia Sy, MSW, PhD., LICSW
Committee Members: Maryann Reitmeir, MSW, LISW; Jean Brown

Inspired by Dick Sobsey’s early work with disabled victims of abuse and the integrative ecological model, the current study addresses the barriers that sexual assault professionals encounter when working with developmentally disabled victims. The participants of this study are made up of 3 sexual assault female professionals, one being an advocate and two being Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners. This study is qualitative in nature and the data was obtained by using a semi-standardized interview. Using phenomenology as a research design, the investigator used qualitative questions to gain understanding of being a sexual assault professional. The data was analyzed by utilizing content analysis and themes were chosen that related to service barriers for the developmentally disabled victim and the perceptions of the sexual assault professional regarding what further training they felt they needed when working with the developmentally disabled.

The implications of this study indicate that barriers to providing services to the developmentally disabled victim can be communication, vulnerability as well as others. Further training was suggested for not only sexual assault professionals, but for all professionals that touch the lives of developmentally disabled.
Effective In-School Suspension Programming: An Exploratory Study

By Mariam Bashiri Graff

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Krista Armitage, MSW; Amanda Harrington, LICSW

Extensive research has shown out-of-school suspension as a deterrent to inappropriate behavior in school does not work. It further shows that the most frequently suspended populations are the same populations with the highest drop-out rates and that are most at-risk for becoming involved with the criminal justice system. This study seeks to look at the alternatives to out-of-school suspensions. A cross sectional survey was used to ask school professionals to describe their school suspension programming and to what extent they are using it. Twenty-eight respondents indicated results similar to what was found in the literature review; that while promising, in-school suspension lacks consistency, documentation, outcome data and enough funding to be successful. Implications for social work practice include school social workers working to build strong programs in the schools they are in, advocating for the implementation of in-school suspension programming and dissuading the use of out-of-school suspension. Also, promoting the importance of the maintenance of data to help support the future evidence of the successes of in-school suspension.
Impacts of Text Messaging on Adolescents’ Communication Skills: School Social Workers’ Perceptions

By Jacqueline Graham

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Jennifer Gervais, PhD, LICSW Lisa Richardson MSS, LICSW

The primary purpose of the present research was to gain a better understanding of how text messaging has affected adolescent communication skills. This research also explored school social workers’ perceptions of ways that texting has impacted adolescents’ lives. Qualitative interviews conducted with seven school social workers explored perceptions of adolescent communication with school social workers, peers, and families, along with benefits and challenges texting presents in adolescent lives. Findings from this study suggested that texting negatively affects adolescents’ communication skills, particularly with regard to face-to-face communication skills, bullying, and teasing. Social workers should be aware of positive and negative effects of texting and of how texting impacts adolescents’ communication skills and development.
Effects of Integral Health Care within LGBTQ Populations

By Megan M. Gramlow

Research Chair: Richa Dhanju, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Janet Dahlem, MA; Kathleen Fluegal, MSW, LICSW

LGBTQ populations are at a high risk to experience increased stress, due to a long history of oppressive circumstances (Alexander, 2002). Because increased stress levels raise the risk of experiencing a mental and physical illness, those identifying as LGBTQ are particularly more vulnerable to experiencing symptoms of illness (Johnson, 2007; Meyer, Dietrich, & Schwartz, 2008). A review of the literature indicates that LGBTQ populations face barriers within mainstream health care services, such as knowledgeable providers and culturally sensitive care. Additionally, little or no research has been done to explore the role of holistic, integral health services for LGBTQ populations. The aim of this research is to explore the effects of providing LGBTQ populations with alternative health care services. Mixed methods were used in conducting this research: qualitative interviews with holistic practitioners who work with LGBTQ identifying clients and surveys filled out by people identifying as LGBTQ. Inductive grounded theory and statistical analysis were used to compile and analyze the findings. Results indicate that those identifying as LGBTQ are more likely to engage in alternative health care modalities than the general population. Furthermore, it was found that benefits of utilizing alternative health care services include: overall wellbeing, stress relief, increased energy, clarity, balance, self-awareness, and mental, physical and spiritual health, as well as education, a lesser need to use pharmaceuticals and an increased awareness of the mind-body connection. Additionally, the findings show that alternative health care meets the needs of those who feel alienated within the mainstream health care system by providing an accepting, open environment and individualized care. Further research must be conducted to assess the physiological effects of oppression and the long-term benefits of specific alternative health care modalities.
Gender Differences in Treating Adolescents with Eating Disorders

By Cameron Green

Research Chair: Valandra, MBA, MSW, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Rebecca Sorenson, LICSW; Katie Murray, PsyD, LP

Previous research indicates that female and male adolescents have many differences and similarities in contributing factors to and treatment of eating disorders. The goal of this study was to further explore treatment differences between male and female adolescents with eating disorders. Other objectives in this study explored the contributing factors to eating disorders, treatment success rates among respondents, and treatment modalities used by respondents. The present study explored the following research question: What are the similarities and differences between genders in treating adolescents with eating disorders? This is an exploratory design with a quantitative research design. The findings of this study appear to be consistent with past literature. A combination of factors was listed as contributing the most to eating disorders in adolescents. Respondents indicated that treatment modalities for both genders are very similar as well as contributing factors to eating disorders. The treatment modalities indicated as most successful with adolescents with eating disorders were cognitive behavioral therapy and a multidisciplinary approach. Treatment approaches used by respondents were indicated as very successful with both male and female adolescents. Further research is needed to explore the racial differences within eating disorders as well as more research on males with eating disorders.
Emancipated Foster Care Youths’ Romantic Relationships as Observed by Social Workers

By Kelsey I. Hanson

Research Chair: Richa Dhanju, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Meghan Heffner, MSW, LISW; Sara A. Ward, MA

Past research has revealed that emancipated foster care youth are struggling as they leave care and enter into adulthood. Among other issues, this population is impacted by high rates of mental illness, substance abuse, pregnancy, and domestic violence. On top of these struggles they are also under-supported in their transition to adulthood and lack meaningful connections to the adult world and their communities. This research focuses on the romantic relationships of emancipated foster care youth as they attempt to make this difficult transition.

The research question asks: what is the observed experience of emancipated foster care youth with romantic relationships as they enter into adulthood? Due to a lack of past research on the topic, exploratory qualitative research methods were chosen to answer the question posed for this study. Ten social workers who worked closely with emancipated foster care youth took part in an individual semi-structured interview process.

Thematic Clustering was used in analysis of the interviews and revealed four major themes. These themes included: belonging, stability, and security; early pregnancy and domestic violence; influence of the past on current relationships; and life goals versus romantic relationships. The research also found that social workers believed emancipated foster care youth, compared to their peers, were less likely to view romantic relationships positively, more likely to be in a romantic relationship and to cohabitate with their partner, and equally likely to marry by the age of 21. Research also revealed that while there is support available for youth in the area of romantic relationships, knowledge of the availability of these resources was not equal among the social workers that were interviewed and in-depth assistance and support was limited.
Perceptions of Probation Officers Around Class and Racial Disparities in the Juvenile Justice System

By Jeffrey A. Hilliard

Research Chair: Valandra, Ph. D, MBA, MSW, LISW
Committee Members: Nancy Heitzig, Ph. D, and Jennifer Miller, MSW, LICSW

The pervasiveness of disparities related to race and class is an important topic in the juvenile justice systems. The current research examines perceptions of juvenile probation officers around disparities related to race and class in the juvenile justice system. A number of theoretical and methodological approaches are discussed in the literature review. A conceptual framework of intersectionality is used as an analytic technique to examine the simultaneous interplay of race and class and its impact on disparities related to race and class in the juvenile justice system. The sample of juvenile probation officers has been drawn from a department of corrections for a county employer located in an urban community with the Midwestern United States. A total of 17 juvenile probation officers responded to the 24-item survey. Descriptive and inferential statistics were generated for the collected data. Chi-square analyses were generated to examine the associations between the levels of agreeableness for variables. The findings yielded minimal contributions to the current research due to the low amount of participants. However, despite the low amount of participants, there were two significant associations between variables. The findings had implications for practice, policies, and research in the fields of social work and corrections. The limitations to this current research encourage new research designs capturing greater participation rates while the strengths provide groundwork for future research capturing data regarding disparities related to race and class in the juvenile justice system.
The purpose of this study was to learn how students at a small Midwestern college were utilizing the school’s counseling center. This quantitative study used a survey to learn about the mental health concerns and distress levels of students who had not used the college’s counseling center ($n = 127$). The survey results revealed that the overwhelming majority of “non-counseled” students were aware of the counseling center and that it provided free counseling services. However, many of these students had recently experienced significant levels of concern with various problem areas, including anxiety, depression, relationships, and eating/body image. These problem areas were further examined through the lens of gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation. This study also explored reasons why students had not sought counseling and whether they intended to do so in the future. This study also utilized secondary data reported by the college’s counseling center indicating problem areas reported by student clients (“counseled students”) on intake forms. This study compared non-counseled and counseled students and found that the difference in rates of reported problem types between these two groups was statistically significant for anxiety, depression, relationships, family, and victimization—indicating that students with significant concerns in those areas were most likely to utilize the counseling center. The study concludes with implications for practice, policy, and research.
Mitigating Compassion Fatigue among Child Protection Social Workers

By Jessica Hoeper

Research Chair: David Roseborough Ph.D.
Committee Members: Julie Krings, MSW; Mariann O'Keefe, M.S.

The purpose of this research project was to illuminate possible mitigating factors of compassion fatigue for child protection social workers. The level of trauma that child protection social workers intervene at increases the likelihood that the social worker will experience compassion fatigue. Past research has pointed out mitigating factors of compassion fatigue such as: learning about compassion fatigue, developing supportive relationships and emotional debriefing to name a few. Very little research has been done specific to this phenomenon in child protection. This study used a survey distributed to six Southern Minnesotan county child protection units, to ask questions about respondents’ understandings of compassion fatigue and what mitigates it and how can their workplaces help support this process in the future. All of the respondents were able to define what compassion fatigue meant to them and the large majority was able to recognize having experienced compassion fatigue within their child protection role. Less than half of the respondents reported currently experiencing compassion fatigue and the mitigating factors that the majority found helpful were developing and maintaining support networks inside and outside of work as well as emotional debriefing.
The Benefits and Barriers to Person Centered Planning for Adults with Developmental Disabilities

By Crystal Hughes

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, LICSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Joan Hlas, MSW; Michelle Bollinger, MSW

The purpose of this study was to explore the benefits and barriers to implementing Person Centered Planning as a replacement for, or in addition to traditional service planning for adults with developmental disabilities. Person Centered Planning was chosen because its main focus is on enhancing quality of life and putting the “client” into the expert role over their own life. Person centered planning, or as many people call it, “person centered thinking” is not a new concept, however it is only recently that people have become more aware of it and steps have been taken to train people to implement it. A qualitative exploratory design was used to hear from the voices of people who have first hand knowledge and experience with using person centered planning for individuals with DD/ID. The strongest theme that emerged from this study is that PCP is individualized planning that puts the client into the role of expert over his or her life. This expert role allows for increased self-determination because it increases choices in areas such as types of living arrangements, type of employment, and leisure activities. The circle of support may be the most important component of helping the focus person achieve their future vision. The limitations of this research, along with recommendations for future researchers are also included in this study.
Preschool Bullying: Does It Exist, What Does It Look Like, and What Can Be Done?

By Laura Humphrey

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, PhD, LICSW
Committee Members: Jessica Johnson, LGSW; Chris Kocinski, LISW

Bullying is a nationwide problem happening in our schools, homes, and workplaces. There have been numerous studies conducted to find out causes of bullying, prevention methods, and effects of bullying in children and adults. All of these studies have looked at children in kindergarten or older. This qualitative study had the goal of determining if bullying was happening in the preschool-age group, and if so, what was currently being done about it. In-person interviews and focus groups were done with seven preschool teachers. Through these interviews it was determined that bullying does happen as early as preschool and that there is no curriculum or consistency in how it is handled from center to center or even teacher to teacher. Implications of this research show a need for both bullying-prevention and language-development curriculum in preschools. Another implication is that teachers stated they specifically need social workers involvement in preventions and interventions. Finally, this research found the need for nation-wide polices and language surrounding bullying starting in preschool.
Addressing Physical Health in Social Work Practice

By Kristin K. Huskamp

Research Chair: Catherine L. Marrs Fuchsel, Ph.D., LICSW (Chair)
Committee Members: Gretchen Scheffel, MSW, LISW & Maureen R. Doran, RD, LD

The current base of literature highlights the importance of physical health and its impact on an individual’s mental health and overall well-being. The purpose of this research is to examine how often social workers target physical health in practice with clients and if there is an underutilization of the research regarding the impact of physical health on psychological health in practice with clients. The research specifically examines how physical health is incorporated into assessment, diagnosis, and over the course of treatment in clinical social work practice. This study used qualitative research, which includes data collection, data analysis, and using grounded theory to develop themes that arise from the data. Nine clinical social workers from a variety of practice settings were interviewed to gather data about the inclusion of physical health in social work practice. Themes found include the provision of psychoeducation about physical health into treatment, informal inclusion of physical health into treatment as the social worker and client see fit, and the impact of exercise, sleep, and dietary habits on an individual’s mental health. The current research findings have many similarities and contradictions with the various findings from the literature review. The present research project had many strengths and limitations alike. The results of the current research project indicate how clinical social workers are presently incorporating physical health into assessment, diagnosis, and treatment. Future research is needed that focuses on how physical health can be formally addressed and measured in clinical social work practice.
The Impact of a Mental Health Court on Participants: The Professional’s Perspective

By Allison A. Husman

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, Ph. LICSW
Committee Members: Shawn Hayward, LICSW; David Fundakowski, ACSW

People with mental illness do not receive the services they need while incarcerated. This leads to a revolving door where mentally ill inmates are released from custody no better off than they were when they went in and they frequently reoffend, putting them back in the criminal justice system. One alternative to the traditional criminal courts is mental health courts, diversion programs that steer offenders away from incarceration. They seek to reduce recidivism by connecting mentally ill offenders with community services and bettering the lives of the participants. This research examined one specific mental health court. Interviews were conducted with various professionals working at the court to determine the impact of this program on participants. There were many major findings from this research. First, the professionals felt there were many benefits for participants that come from participation in the mental health court. Second, the professionals felt the community benefited from increased safety and reduced recidivism. Third, the professionals thought that the biggest challenge for participants in the mental health court was the amount of work involved in participation. Finally, the professionals felt that the mental health court would benefit from increased resources.
The Nature of Buddhist-Informed Psychotherapy: A Qualitative Exploration

By Blaire M. Hysjulien

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Stacy Husebo, MSW, LICSW; Sydney Jay, Ph.D.

Buddhism has been increasingly integrated into approaches for psychological treatment; however, very little research has been done to investigate the application of Buddhism in psychotherapy. The present study is a qualitative exploration of the content, context, and process of Buddhist-informed psychotherapy. The researcher conducted nonschedule-standardized interviews with 9 Buddhist-informed psychotherapists licensed in clinical social work in the U.S. The transcripts were analyzed using a grounded theory approach and 11 themes emerged to describe the nature of participants’ work as Buddhist-informed psychotherapists. These themes included training, the cause of suffering, a strengths-based approach, the process of change, integration of Buddhism through its influence on the therapist, Buddhist-informed methods, integration of Buddhist concepts/philosophy, applications, support, the issue of religion, and hope for the future. The findings imply that the therapists’ personal practice of Buddhism is one of the most important elements of their work. In addition, mindfulness and meditation were commonly used methods to help facilitate change. Support for Buddhist-informed psychotherapy could be fostered through continued research, education, and training.
Effects of Mindfulness Meditation on Degree of Pain Experienced in Chronic Pain Patients

By Melissa B. Irisarri

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Jacqueline Moeller, Psy.D., LP; Geri Wilimek, MSW, LICSW

Chronic pain affects one-third to one-half of individuals living in the United States. Individuals with chronic pain incur billions of dollars in healthcare costs annually, and as a result of reduced productivity and sick days taken because of pain, companies lose billions of dollars annually. Chronic pain results in a decrease in quality of life, including limited physical functioning, compromised relationships, difficulty sleeping, and psychological issues. Chronic pain is both a physical and psychological issue, and the current biomedical approach falls short in addressing the intricate psychological components. This study investigated the impact of a half-day mindfulness meditation workshop on participants’ reported ability to self-manage pain. Eleven individuals voluntarily participated in the study. The researcher administered a pre-test and two post-tests that measured participants’ level of dispositional mindfulness, use of adaptive coping strategies, pain severity, and interference in daily life. The findings of the study were inconclusive. While small improvements were measured in all areas, the data could not be considered statistically significant. The findings suggest that more research needs to be conducted in order to better understand the effects mindfulness meditation can have on an individual’s perceived ability to self-manage pain.
Living on a Food Pantry Diet

By Kathryn M. Jackelen

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D., LICSW, ACT
Committee members: Courtney Flug, MSW and Lynn Vettel

In 2011, food insecurity affected one in six Americans. In order to achieve food security, many families turn to food pantries with options less healthy than traditional supermarkets. A survey with 32 multiple choice and short-answer questions was distributed at a food pantry in the Twin Cities area to measure food pantry usage and demographics. One hundred forty-six respondents participated in the survey. Seventy-five percent were female, with a mean age of 51, and almost half of the respondents reported having children. Just over half had someone in the home employed (either part- or full-time). Almost two-thirds of the respondents reported that at least half of their monthly groceries come from the food pantry. Nearly half of the food pantry users also receive government food assistance (SNAP—Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). Seventy-three percent of the respondents reported that the food pantry did not limit their ability to eat nutritiously. The findings indicate that food pantries are no longer for emergencies only. Additionally, findings suggest that clients could benefit from having access to healthy foods through SNAP. Other implications include changing the composition of food pantries (decreasing unhealthy foods and increasing produce and protein) and educating donors about the value of donating healthy foods.
For social workers, engagement refers to the process through which clients become active and involved in their treatment. Involuntary clients, or clients who are legally mandated or feel pressure to seek treatment, struggle with engagement and are often viewed as being resistant. This study examined the engagement process through interviews conducted with social workers who have experience in working with involuntary clients. Five social workers discussed the engagement process and strategies they use to encourage the engagement process with involuntary clients. They emphasized the importance of giving the clients choice and control over their treatment, and having the capacity to genuinely like the client. Motivational interviewing and relational approaches were cited as beneficial for fostering engagement with involuntary clients, a view that is consistent with previous research.
Educators’ Experiences with Disruptive Behavior in the Classroom

By Kari Jacobsen

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Bill Bedford MSW, LICSW; Ryanne Underhill MSW, LICSW

Disruptive behavior in the elementary school setting has become an increasing concern for educators, school personnel, and mental health professionals. There is more time spent on discipline and redirecting, which can impact the other students in the classroom. In particular, externalizing behaviors, aggressive or hyperactive acts, are at the forefront of concern for many teachers. This research further explores the educator’s description of disruptive behavior, insight to the sources of the behavior, and interventions available for child mental health services. This study also explored if behaviors differed for children who had a history of trauma versus other childhood mental health concerns. The experiences of seven elementary school educators were gathered through qualitative semi-structured interviews. The educators varied in length of teaching from 7 months to 4 years. The data was analyzed and then coded. The themes gathered from the data include: description of disruptive behavior, age related behavior, causes of disruptive behavior, trauma in the classroom, family support, teacher accommodations, and school mental health services. These findings suggest all of the educators have had experience working with children who have a history of trauma. It was reported that disruptive behavior in the younger lower grade levels were a product of traumatic experiences but the children in the upper grade levels (fourth and fifth) displayed behaviors not necessarily related to a history of trauma. The educators all noted the importance and use of the mental health services at their school. Further research is needed to explore the connection between Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD), trauma, and disruptive behavior in the classroom.
Clinical Master of Social Work Students: Personal Therapy’s Influence upon Professional Development

By Danielle Marie Janssen Von Bank

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Linnea Dumke, MSW, LICSW; Tracey Wilkins, MSW, LICSW

The purpose of this research was to better understand the perceptions, experiences, and opinions of Master of Social Work (MSW) students and recent graduates in regard to personal therapy. Specifically, this study sought to investigate the factors that are involved in the process of professional development through the use of personal therapy. This study utilized a mixed methods design to survey 82 MSW students or recent graduates. Data was collected through an online questionnaire that asked participants questions, in both a qualitative and quantitative format, regarding their perceptions of and experiences with personal therapy in reference to professional development. Findings reveal that the majority of MSW students and recent graduates report personal therapy to be important to their professional development, specifically in the areas of increased self-insight, increased emotional functioning, increased understanding of the therapeutic process, and increased efficacy in their own practice. Participants indicated that they found personal and professional development to be deeply interrelated. Findings also indicate that participants encounter a number of barriers in obtaining personal therapy, as well as a lack of discussion around the topic, during their MSW education. These findings highlight the need for further discussion among MSW students, educators, and professionals in regard to the use of personal therapy for professional development.
Use of Research Among Social Work Clinicians

By Justin Jeffrey

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph.D, LICSW
Committee Members: Thersa McPartlin, LICSW; Scott Washburn, M.A., LADC

This study used a quantitative research design to examine the extent to which clinical social workers (LICSW's) stay abreast of clinical social work research. This study also examined whether social workers who use different therapeutic approaches differ at all in their research behaviors. Participants responded to an online survey administered using SurveyMonkey (n=80).

The study found that clinical social workers engage in a variety of research behaviors, and that these behaviors closely mirror the findings of a recent study on this same topic. Nearly a quarter of licensed social workers report that they never or rarely read scholarly journal articles on social work, and more than half do not receive any formal supervision. The study did not find any relationship between preferred treatment approach and research behaviors. Findings suggest that social workers have room to improve in terms of their use of research. Future studies could include qualitative research on the reasons why many clinical social workers do not engage in various behaviors to stay abreast of clinical research.
Determining Maltreatment Substantiation According to Minnesota Child Protection Intake Workers

By Taryn E. Jensen

Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, Ph.D., LCSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Kathleen Caron, MSW, LICSW; Sharyn De Zelar, MSW, LICSW

Child protection intake workers are the initial points of contact for Child Protection Services (CPS). This worker documents reports of suspected child maltreatment and initiates the decision making processes involved when determining if investigative services are needed. In Minnesota in 2010, over 79% of the reports received by these workers were screened out due to a variety of factors. Six child protection intake workers were interviewed in this research. They described that endless work, teamwork, knowledge, emotions, detailed information, evidence, and vague definitions are factors involved that may account for the variability when determining if suspected child maltreatment requires investigation. The findings demonstrate a need for additional trainings to be offered to professionals in the field, as well as a need for making necessary changes to legislative policies.
How do School Social Workers Provide Support to Children of Divorce?

By A. Kimberly Johnson

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Lynn Schaefer MSW, LICSW; Gale Reina MSW, LICSW

The ongoing impact of divorce on elementary school-aged children has been associated with lower academic achievement, behavioral problems, relational issues, depression, and risk of developing short- and long-term mental health symptoms. School-based divorce support groups are one way children may receive support to cope with ongoing stressors associated with growing up in divorced or separated families. The purpose of this project was to explore elementary school social workers perspectives regarding what services they are able to provide to children who come from divorced, separated, or never married households and at what frequency. If divorce groups were offered in an elementary school setting questions were asked regarding what makes an effective group, and if groups were not run questions were asked regarding what services school social workers can provide. Using a qualitative design, interviews were conducted with nine elementary school social workers, located in the Twin-Cities area and greater Minnesota. This study found that elementary school social workers indicate the use of engagement activities such as group activities and play helpful components of engaging students in family change groups. Participants also shared benefits elementary school-aged children derive from group such as learning coping skills and normalizing divorce experiences. These findings indicate that further study into how elementary school social workers roles and funding may have changed the landscape of social services available to children from divorced, separated or never married families is needed. A larger sample size and nationwide sampling for participants is recommended.
Grieving Mental Illness: Individual Experiences of Grief, Loss, and Growth

By Alissa Kaasa

Research Chair: Andrea Nesmith, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Diane Bauer, MSW, LICSW; Mandie Kender, M.A., CPRP

The purpose of this study was to explore the grief experience of people who develop severe and persistent mental illnesses (SPMI). Group members and facilitators of a Grieving Mental Illness group that met at a suburban drop-in center were asked to voluntarily participate in semi-structured, qualitative, in-person interviews. Content analysis was used to find themes in the group member and facilitator interviews. The findings indicated that individuals with SPMI have a unique grief experience that is enhanced by many factors. Group participants expressed having cycling feelings of grief. These feelings were triggered by life events or reminders of the loss they experienced and were affected by outside factors, like negative reactions from family because of the mental illness. Group participants did not identify that they were grieving until they joined the Grieving Mental Illness group, but after addressing areas of grief they were able to accept themselves and their new reality. Facilitators identified the need for acknowledgement that mental illness exists and can cause grief. They also observed that gaining insight for ill individuals into the effects of having a mental illness can take time; connecting with other people can be an important healing component for grief; and feelings of grief cycle throughout a person’s life. Further research as well as grief services for individuals with SPMI diagnosis’ are needed to help individuals process areas of grief.
The Experience of Yoga on Children with Anxiety

By Lindsay J. Kaplan

Research Chair: Lance T. Peterson, Ph. D., LICSW
Committee Members: Kathy Flaminio, MSW, E-RYT, Chrissy Mignogna, RYT

This study sought to address how Yoga Calm instructors view yoga as a way to help children who may suffer from anxiety. Four interviews were conducted with trained Yoga Calm instructors to see how their use of Yoga Calm has impacted the children with whom they work. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed and six themes emerged: the importance of breathing, visualization, community and team building, ability to practice at home or on their own, self-esteem and self-confidence, and normalizing and having a safe environment. There were many similarities between the findings and the reviewed literature. Community and team building was a theme that was only found in the findings of the current study. This finding may lead to more research to be conducted on Yoga Calm or yoga in general and how a sense of community and team building does in fact impact children who may suffer from anxiety.
Sibling Relationships with an Autistic Sibling

By Lori M. Kaplan

Research Chair: Richa Dhanju, MSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Cristina Dobon-Claveau, MSW; Emily Honken, MSW, LICSW

This study was conducted to determine how typically developing siblings feel about their sibling with Autism or another related disorder. The methods used were a combination of quantitative data and qualitative interviews. The quantitative data consisted of basic demographic data about the family such as the parent’s marital status, household members, and the diagnosis of the Autistic child. The qualitative data consisted of interviews with one or two typical siblings from that family.

This study interviewed eight typical siblings from six different families with an Autistic child: two of the siblings were brothers and six were sisters of a child diagnosed with Autism, Asperger’s Disorder or PDD-NOS. Two of the children with Autism were twins with a typical twin. Plus three out of the six Autistic children were girls, which is not typical of Autism. In this study, the typical siblings expressed moments of frustration and fun with their Autistic sibling. Overall, the siblings were mostly empathetic, supportive and loving towards their Autistic sibling.
Clinicians’ Perspectives on the Developmental Repair Model

By Lauren Kelly

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Kayci Rush, MSW, LICSW; Molly Murphy, MSW, LGSW

This study gathered qualitative data on the Developmental Repair Model from clinicians working with it currently. The research question that guided this research was: What are clinicians’ perspectives on the Developmental Repair Model (DRM). The research was gathered by collecting data through standardized, structured interviews with clinicians from an inner-city agency in the Midwest. Findings of this research include themes of unique ways clinicians made the DRM their own by: creating special visuals or techniques; ways clinicians modeled fixing mistakes or narrating their own emotions; how clinicians used the strengths perspective while working with families by understanding individual struggles; how clinicians received support through peer consultation; ways in which clinicians used their sense of self while working with children such as kneeling on the floor instead of standing over a child; how clinicians integrated the four domains of the DRM into their daily practice; and finally how clinicians perceive the DRM as a strengths-based model. This information adds to the growing discussion on children’s mental health concerns and what evidence-based models are currently being used to address such concerns. Additionally, this research encourages the continuation of placing importance of the special needs of children with disrupted attachment.
A Practical Meta-Analysis of Prayer Efficacy in Coping with Mental Health

By Benjamin M. Kimball

Research Chair: Sarah M. Ferguson, MA, MSW, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Carol Geisler, PhD; Joe Hoops, MSW, LGSW

Given the large number of people who identify as religious in the United States and the large number of the overall population diagnosed with a mental illness, there is a need for linking an easily accessible practice like prayer to a common and often painful problem of managing mental health symptoms. Using a Practical Meta-Analysis, this research project examined prayer’s efficacy when used as a coping strategy to relieve mental health symptoms. A Practical Meta-Analysis is a statistical method that synthesizes findings from multiple research studies and provides a quantitative measure of an intervention’s efficacy as a whole. Of 598 articles located in five databases searched, the thirteen included studies produced thirty unique effect sizes that were used in the Practical Meta-Analysis calculations. The meta-analysis’ result was an average effect size of -0.0184 with a p-value of 0.3665, which is a small, yet insignificant magnitude. However, when considering the overall group of included studies, sixty percent of these studies showed prayer being associated with improved mental health symptoms. The findings of this study support the need for future research on how prayer can be a helpful intervention for people to use in coping with mental health symptoms.
Professionals’ Perceptions of Gender Differences in Grief after a Perinatal Loss

By Christine Knight

Research Chair: Richa Dhanju, MSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Kathleen Erb Caron, MSW, LICSW; Jean Brewer, LSW

This qualitative research study examined professionals’ perceptions of gender differences in grief following a perinatal loss. The participants for the current research were chosen through nonprobability sampling and consist of a mixture of eight professional social workers and non-social workers who have experience offering grief support for parents who have experienced a perinatal loss. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with a variety of professionals who provide grief support to these individuals; including social workers, chaplains, nurses, psychologists, and licensed counselors. Findings within the research have outlined important themes that revolve around differences seen in the grief process of mothers and fathers as well as the importance of understanding the couple relationship before and after the perinatal loss. Findings also address considerations for cultural, religious, and sexual orientation that are important to recognize when working individuals who have experienced a perinatal loss. Implications for social work practice and future research are also discussed.
Self-care is an essential component to the profession of social work. Introducing mindfulness practices is one way to promote self-care among social workers and social work students. Mindfulness is training your mind to enhance your well-being. This research study utilized a survey of graduate level social workers from the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, MN who participated and completed a course on mindfulness titled Integrative Psychotherapy. Students answered questions regarding the value and importance of taking a graduate level course on mindfulness. The results of this study support prior research regarding the positive outcomes of mindfulness among various populations. An important finding of this study was that the majority of the students found loving kindness to be the most helpful modality which contradicts prior research indicating the most widely used technique is sitting mediation. The results of this study suggested that a course on mindfulness for graduate level social workers was valuable and important and should perhaps even be offered as a course starting at the undergraduate level.
Early Onset of Social Work Burnout

By Dayse L. M. Koski

Research Chair: Richa Dhanju, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: George Baboila, MSW, Melissa Maaske, BSW

The issue of social worker burnout impacts the growth and sustainability of the social work industry. The purpose of this project was to determine if there is a connection between the amount of time as a social worker and level of burnout. Mailing addresses for 150 Minnesota social workers were randomly selected and mailed a survey. The survey included the Burnout Measurement Short (BMS) questionnaire, an established self-administered burnout assessment tool, and other pertinent burnout related questions. Data from 43 completed surveys were entered into a spreadsheet. The data was organized and analyzed using Minitab to perform ANOVA calculations. The project’s findings demonstrated that no correlation was found between the length of time as a social worker and amount of burnout. Other factors such as employer and client type appeared to have correlations. The project also introduced the topic of identifying the number of social workers who left the profession due to burnout. Initial results suggest that social workers who personally knew multiple former social workers who left the profession due to burnout are themselves more burned out. These findings suggest that all social workers, regardless of the number of years of experience, should receive anti-burnout support and resources. Additional research should be conducted to accurately determine the extreme cases of burnout among social workers that result in quitting the profession.
Reactions and Coping Strategies Utilized by Social Workers Following Client Suicidal Behavior

By Megan Kraemer

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Kerri Peck, LGSW; Emma Rosenthal, LICSW

The purpose of this study was to examine the reactions and coping strategies of clinical social workers after experiencing client suicidal behavior. This is an important subject because social work is a profession of high stress and high burn out rates. Working with clients who are suicidal is challenging and anxiety provoking. It is important to know how clinicians are handling their stress; this allows other clinicians to learn which coping mechanisms are most effective. It is also important for clinicians to understand common reactions to working under such stress as this may normalize their experiences.

This was a quantitative research study in which online surveys were distributed to a randomized list of clinical social workers. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the most common reactions and coping strategies among the respondents. Fear and sadness were the most common initial reactions following client suicidal behavior. The coping strategies utilized most often following client suicidal behavior were consultation with a colleague and supervision.
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Dealing with the death of a loved one can be a difficult time in the life of an individual, especially a child. In certain cases, adults and children can develop extreme grief responses as a result of this significant loss. An individual’s culture can play a major role in the way they understand and respond to the death of a loved one. To find out more information regarding the interplay between culture and grief responses, it was useful to interview professional grief therapists on this topic. These interviews sought to discern whether or not there was a useful connection between the positive coping strategies that seem to exist in multiple cultures and the grief therapy models used in Western culture. Once the data from these interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed, the researcher was able to discern several themes that related to cultural coping strategies having a useful connection with grief therapy modalities. This research provides important information for anyone attempting to use cultural coping strategies as a means to help individuals and children cope with the death of a loved one and increase their resiliency.
The Effectiveness of Preschool Mental Health Day Treatment on Attachment Pattern Skills

By Stefanie Kuhnmuench

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, LICSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Kathleen Fargione, MSW, LICSW; Brynn Smith, MSW, LICSW

Young children, age three to six, who have insecure or disorganized attachment styles are more likely to be diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder. Research implies that improving attachment can lead to improved functioning. One mode of treatment for young children with emotional and behavioral disorders is day treatment specifically, day treatment that focuses on attachment. In this study, a secondary data analysis was used to assess the effectiveness of a day treatment program in a community mental health agency in the Midwest for children age three to six. Scores from the Attachment Pattern Scale (APS) at three points in time, ten days into treatment, six months into treatment and at discharge were used. The data was analyzed to answer the question: do attachment pattern skills improve over time for young children enrolled in day treatment? The study used scores from 41 subjects that were previously enrolled in the day treatment program. Paired t tests were used to compare mean scores at ten days and six months as well as ten days and discharge. The analysis showed that improvements in APS scores between ten days and six months as well as ten days and discharge were statistically significant. Effect sizes were .85 for ten days to six months and 1.51 for ten days to discharge. The results imply that day treatment is effective in improving attachment pattern skills and possibly functioning.
The Impacts of Adolescent Parenthood on Latino Mother’s Educational Attainment

By Cassie LaBelle

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs-Fuchsel, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Jennifer Schnarr, MSW, LICSW; Kelly Volkmann, LICSW, LADC

Adolescent parenthood is an important topic that has been researched for many years. It has an overall effect on social work practice, policy, and research. Although teen parenthood has declined in the United States, birth rates remain high compared to other countries. This study examines the impacts of adolescent parenthood on the lives of seven Latina mother’s educational attainment. There were many factors that influenced the women's lives. Some of the factors included what their educational goals were prior to becoming pregnant, how their families reacted to their pregnancies, how the dynamics in their families changed, and how their education was directly impacted by their pregnancies. The mother's shared their experiences candidly. The findings of the study represent a very small sample size of women from a specific well known highly populated Latino neighborhood in the Metro area. Implications for policy, practice and social work research are reviewed.
The Impact of Childhood Chronic Illness on the Family: Psychosocial Adjustment of Siblings

By Heather L. La Clare

Research Chair: Lance Peterson, Ph.D, LICSW
Committee Members: Jenna Van Proosdy, MA, CCLS; Alison Boerner, LGSW

Chronic illness is a multifaceted concept that significantly impacts millions of families and siblings each year. The biopsychosocial model shows that illness involves more than the biological and medical processes; it includes psychosocial implications on families as well. The purpose of this qualitative and quantitative study was to examine the effects of childhood chronic illness on families and siblings by exploring the positive and negative consequences from parents’ perspectives, the extent to which families experienced illness-related stress and strain, as well as further examining the specific ways in which families adapt their lives. This study specifically sought to explore the relationship between the impact on siblings and the impact on the family. By surveying parents associated with supportive non-profit organizations, this research sought to answer those questions. This study found that illness severity and the level of stress were statistically significant in their impact on the family. This study also found a positive correlation that showed illness’ impact on the family invariably impacts the siblings. The qualitative portion of this study illustrates how parents convey thoughtful, enlightening, and unique perspectives from their day-to-day lives and experiences. Social workers, Child Life Specialists, and other health care professionals need to be aware of the psychosocial implications of illness and its impact on families so that they can properly assess and provide intervention when necessary. Professionals should also be aware of and utilize a family systems perspective when working with chronically ill children and their families.
Older Adults and Substance Abuse: A Program Evaluation

By L. LaCoursiere

Research Chair: Felicia Sy, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Gwen Lutz, MSW, LICSW; Carol Zierman, MS

In the year 2011, the first wave of the baby boom generation reached age 65, the age of retirement. Over the next 18 years the U. S. Administration on Aging (2010) reports that these boomers will turn 65 years old at the rate of approximately 8,000 per day. Substance abuse among this cohort has been called an invisible and silent epidemic. Many social service agencies will have to deal with the negative and complicating factors which substance abuse causes. Alcohol and substance misuse among the elderly is associated with many negative consequences, including functional impairment, increase risk of dementia, raised mortality and higher utilization of healthcare services. In addition, it is estimated that 4.4 million adults age 50 and older will be substance dependent and in need of treatment by the year 2020. The focus of this clinical research project was to evaluate the Senior Recovery Program and how effective the program is at meeting its goals through the eyes of its participants. The researcher measured former clients overall satisfaction with the Senior Recovery Program by assessing their perceptions of sobriety maintenance, age appropriate program design, relationship with family, social skills and support and overall program satisfaction. Findings of this program evaluation indicated the Senior Recovery Program is effective in delivering quality chemical health recovery services to older adults through the focus of five areas of service. This program evaluation will add to the research collection and improve understanding and needs of older adults who require substance abuse treatment.
Attitudes and Perceptions of Mental Disorders among Individuals from Nepal

By Sonam Lama

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Heather Vargo, MSW, LGSW, Hemlal Kafle, M.A., Nouchie Xiong, M.A.

The growing population of immigrants and refugees in the United States increases the need for culturally sensitive and appropriate mental health care. The purpose of this research project is to explore the attitudes and perceptions of mental disorders among individuals from Nepal who reside in the United States. Using a qualitative design, data was collected through an online survey. Thirty respondents completed the online survey. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to investigate the relationship between the participant’s level of education, their beliefs and perceptions about mental disorders and the participants’ length of stay in the United States. The findings showed no statistically significant relationship existed between these variables for the 30 participants who completed the survey.
Companion Animal Loss in a Clinical Veterinary Practice Medical Setting

By Robin A. Lambert

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph. D.
Committee Members: Corrie Schueller, LISW; Dr. Kristina Andrusko-Bipes, DVM

The majority of American households own a pet; however, despite the widespread popularity of companion animal ownership, modern society does not regard companion animal loss as “socially significant” loss, making this a form of disenfranchised grief. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how veterinarian interactions with companion animal owners at the time of their companion animal’s death impacted their grief process. Using a qualitative design, five bereaved companion animal owners were interviewed about their experience of companion animal loss in a clinical veterinary setting and the ways in which their veterinarian impacted their experience. The data was analyzed and coded using an inductive grounded method, and emerging themes and categories were identified. Themes were categorized as pre-loss experiences, time of loss experiences, and post-loss experiences. Key findings from the themes included the significant and unique relationship experienced between owner and animal, the powerful impact of veterinarian communication, and how the intensity level of owner caregiving demands prior to loss impacted the bereaved’s post loss adjustment period. These findings highlight the importance for social workers to widen their scope of practice to include companion animal losses.
Surrendering Safely: Increasing Clinicians’ Understandings of Kink

By Richard Laska

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D
Committee Members: Scott Jacoby, Ph.D, LP; James Stolz, MSW

Social workers may be uncertain of the appropriateness of asking about kink behaviors during a sexual health history and be concerned about their lack of knowledge or preparation to discuss kink with clients. Understanding the subjective experience of individuals engaging in kink could help professionals understand the variations, challenges, and benefits of kink. The purpose of this study was to learn of the benefits and challenges of engaging in kink that clients report to their clinicians. In addition to this, participating mental health clinicians were asked to report different outcomes from different kink practices and what internal processes occur that lead to these various outcomes from their perspective. Eight interviews were conducted and data were analyzed using both inductive and deductive approaches in which categories emerged and were then linked to the literature review. The findings suggest that there are specific qualifications practitioners should have to be kink culturally-competent. The findings also indicated there are potential physical, psychological, and interpersonal benefits to engaging in kink. This study lastly found that internal stigma, external stigma, community issues, and interpersonal issues were the primary reported challenges for those engaging in kink. This research suggests that engaging in kink can lead to empowerment and self-actualization.
The purpose of this research project was to explore how social workers use bibliotherapy with children, and how they consider issues of diversity in their selection of books. A mixed mode survey was sent through email to 270 social workers who work primarily with children. Sixty-eight surveys were completed and the data was analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings lend support to the widespread use of books as a therapeutic tool, with 99% of respondents reporting that they use books in therapy with children. Participants reported using books for a variety of therapeutic purposes, however, the majority (62%) reported having no formal training in bibliotherapy. Overall, respondents indicated that issues of diversity are taken into account when selecting books for their child clients, however, limited access to quality literature may constitute a barrier to this end. Future research is necessary to learn more about how social workers use books in therapy, the role of diversity in this intervention, and the role of education in preparing social workers to use books effectively in therapeutic settings.
Therapists and Personal Therapy

By Samantha J. Lundgren

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Jamie Schley, MSW, LGSW; Molly Tannuzzo, LMFT

Clinical social workers spend years in training and even more time ever refining their professional skill set as they work with clients. Personal therapy is another tool utilized by mental health professionals for personal and professional reasons. An array of research investigates the value of personal therapy for therapists. This study was designed for three reasons: 1) to examine the prevalence of personal therapy in the sample 2) to investigate the effect the practitioners experience of how therapy impacts their professional competence and 3) to evaluate perceptions of the role of personal therapy as a prerequisite to the profession. This researcher surveyed LICSW’s registered to the Minnesota board of social work (N=51). The findings indicate that personal therapy is prevalent and widely viewed as helpful amongst the participants. The results also show that that LICSW’s found personal therapy to be beneficial for some professional factors as well, including increased self awareness, increased awareness/validation of the therapeutic process, and that it provided a form of self care. Lastly, the findings indicate that while participants overall felt personal therapy would be beneficial for therapists in training, they did not believe it should be required in training programs or for licensure.
The topic of social work supervision has received a fair amount of attention in recent years, especially with new supervision training requirements for licensing supervisors recently implemented by the Minnesota Board of Social Work. However, the majority of the previous research on the topic of social work supervision training has been gathered from supervisors, rather than supervisees. The purpose of this survey research was to investigate the perceptions of social work supervisees surrounding the topic of supervision and supervision training. Using quantitative survey research, responses were received from thirty total survey respondents regarding their perceptions surrounding the topic of social work supervision and the possible need for additional training on the topic. The findings strongly supported previous research linking the provision of quality supervision to better service delivery and overall stress management for social workers. In addition, varying reported frequencies of supervision sessions indicated a concerning issue regarding the need for consistent provision of formal one-on-one supervision. The findings from this research study also provide implications for specific topics within social work supervision that may require additional training and also the need for supervision training for supervisees and supervisors alike.
Is there a correlation between building and/or strengthening developmental assets and the reduction in mental health symptoms in youth?

By Angela Marti Jedinak, LSW

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Dean Grace, Ed.D.; Crystal Brown, LGSW

The purpose of this study was to determine if developing or strengthening developmental assets in youth, can reduce mental health symptoms. Despite the multitude of risk factors youth may have in their life, if countered with a high amount of protective factors or assets; research shows that youth can still have positive youth development. In turn, this provides children with skills to become engaged, empathetic, compassionate adults. This study examines if there is a correlation between building and/or strengthening assets and the reduction of mental health symptoms in children residing at a residential facility in Northern Minnesota.
Evaluating a Mind-Body Approach for Military Veterans with Chronic Pain

By Leah M. Martin

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Glen Palmer, Ph.D.; Crystal Fritzlar, MSW, LGSW

The primary goal of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of an eight-week Mind-Body Pain Management group at a VA Health Care System in the Midwest. The Mind-Body Pain Management group is offered to Veterans who exhibit symptoms of chronic physical pain. Effectiveness was determined by examining Veterans’ pretest, posttest, and follow-up responses to the Quality of Life Inventory (QOLI), Pain Rating Scale, and the VA Pain Outcomes Questionnaire (VA-POQ). A secondary objective of this study was to investigate potential relationships between Veterans’ demographic information (gender, age, combat history, and service-connected disability status), as well as access to prescription narcotic pain medication with regard to the effectiveness of the Mind-Body Pain Management program. This study employed a quantitative design in the form of secondary analysis of available data. The study found no statistically significant results with regard to overall scores from the survey tools. Upon completion of the Mind-Body Pain Management group, participants reported improvement in QOLI subscales of Self-Esteem and Goals & Values. Likewise, the VA-POQ provided subscales and found improvements in the areas of Mobility and Negative Affect. Areas that remained unchanged or noted a decline in improvement after intervention for the QOLI included the subscale Health. Respondents reported worse scores for VA-POQ subscales: Activities of Daily Living, Vitality, and Fear after completing the Mind-Body Pain Management group. Regarding demographic information, participants’ gender and service-connected disability status played a role in the effectiveness of the Mind-Body Pain Management program. This study will afford the VA Health Care System information regarding the degree to which the Mind-Body Pain Management group is effective and explore potential correlations among individual characteristics of participants with regard to the effectiveness of the program in order to make appropriate recommendations for the group.
What Components of Bullying Prevention are Present Within Minnesota Schools and Communities?

By McKena Katherine Martin

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, PhD, LICSW
Committee Members: Julie Ann Porath, MSW, LICSW; Barton Erickson

The purpose of this study was to determine which components of bullying prevention are present within Minnesota schools and communities, according to Minnesota school social workers. This study was a quantitative study, which used surveys to collect data. Respondents answered 37 questions regarding bullying at their respective schools. Thirty-four (n = 34) Minnesota school social workers were recruited through the Minnesota School Social Work Association using email. The findings from this study demonstrated that Minnesota schools and communities are implicating most components needed for an effective bullying prevention program. The findings also implicated that continuing research needs to look at differences in rural versus urban settings and differing types of bullying among students. School social workers should be aware of the impact bullying has on students and continue implementing school bullying prevention programs.
Mental Health Practitioner’s Perspective of Early Intervention Treatment Barriers for Young Children and their Families

By Melissa J. McCanney

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Jane Hurley-Johncox, MSW, LICSW; Trisha Matter, MA, LMFT

Young children are showing an increase in behavioral and emotional disturbances. Children are showing precocious knowledge of information about drugs, sex and violence. This research project reviews previous findings for causes and intervention for these behaviors. Early intervention, family barriers and access barriers concerning mental health treatment were themes that were continuously discussed in the existing research. This study focused on those themes and surveyed 29 professionals about the family and access barriers that families and children face in regards to preschool mental health treatment. The participants were surveyed anonymously and the findings were analyzed for common themes. The results indicated that insurance, transportation, lack of family support and parent involvement are the main barriers that professionals encounter when working with families and children. Early intervention and parent involvement are the keys to a child’s future success according to current research. Implications for policy, practice and research can be drawn due to the lack of research focusing on specific interventions for the preschool population and the increase in mental health diagnosis in preschool aged children.
Prevalence of Gay Affirmative Practice among Bachelor's Level Licensed Social Workers

By Kjersta Mellom

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Carey Winkler, MSW, LICSW; Ross Aalgaard, MDiv, MSW, DSW Student, LICSW

This study sought to explore the extent to which Bachelor's level licensed social workers utilized Gay Affirmative Practice within their work with Lesbian, Gay, and Questioning clients. 300 Licensed Social Workers in the state of Minnesota were surveyed, with a total of 49 respondents. The survey used the Gay Affirmative Practice Scale developed by Crisp (2002) and a series of questions inquiring about respondent demographics. The scores of the respondents were measured against the demographics gathered in order to test hypotheses surrounding Gay Affirmative Practice Scale scores and the years elapsed since one's degree was earned; respondents sexual orientation and gender identity; primary geographic location of practice; and the faith-affiliation of one's undergraduate educational institution. None of the research hypotheses posed were supported with statistically significant findings, indicating that, overall, Bachelor's level licensed social workers practice affirmatively regardless of personal and practice characteristics. The findings in this study may not be as valid as hoped as data collected was skewed due to lack of completion by respondents, and/or the size of the sample. However, implications for future research include the need for continued effort to explore practice behaviors and abilities of Bachelor level social workers in their practice with Gay, Lesbian, and Questioning clients.
Therapists’ Thoughts on the Uniqueness of Animal Assisted Therapy that Engages Children

By Megan Marie Mensink

Research Chair: Sarah M. Ferguson, MA, MSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Stephanie Dibb, MSW, LGSW; Hannah Mulholland, MSW, LGSW

What do therapists believe is the uniqueness of animal assisted therapy that engages children? This is the main question this research aims to answer. The purpose of this study was to get the opinions of therapists on how animal assisted therapies benefit children. In this qualitative study, the researcher interviewed six therapists who actively practice Animal Assisted Therapies with clients. These therapists were able to identify the benefits that children encounter when participating in animal assisted therapies. The therapists have been educated and certified to practice AAT using the EAGALA model. The findings of this research produced five main themes: the use of animals, therapist’s description of AAT, diagnosis, unique benefits with children, and AAT with attachment disorders. According to the results of this research, therapists believe that the use of AAT has been found to be beneficial when working with children with attachment disorders. These findings indicate that the bond between the client, therapist, and animal is one that creates a safe space for the child to participate.
Hospice Social Work Methods and Interventions for Terminally Ill Patients Experiencing Anticipatory Grief

By Jolene Marie Metcalf

Research Chair: Dr. Karen Carlson, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Deborah Goulet LICSW, Joan Stauffer LICSW

Hospice patients who experience a terminal illness often experience psychosocial symptoms as well as physical symptoms. One common symptom is anticipatory grief, or the fear or anticipation of loss. Interventions for psychosocial symptoms in the terminally ill population have been minimally researched. This study is a qualitative study of the various methods and interventions hospice social workers use with terminal patients who are experiencing anticipatory grief. Semi-structured to unstructured interviews were done with currently employed and licensed hospice social workers in the Twin Cities metro area. Data collected from interviews were analyzed, coded, and organized into six different themes: a) hospice comfort and the social worker's role, b) anticipatory grief causes and symptoms, c) methods and interventions used by hospice social workers, d) methods and interventions not used by social workers, e) the signs of benefits, and f) the needs of social workers. The findings in this study provide an initial examination of the various techniques used by hospice social workers. More research on evidenced-based practices will be needed in the future for this fragile population.
Borderline Personality Disorder and Methadone Dosage Levels

By Daniel Monserud

Research Chair: Pa Der Vang Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Deb Patras LADC, LICSW; Nils Dyvig, LICSW

Methadone is the most commonly prescribed medication treatment in the U.S. for the treatment of opioid dependence. Past research has found that people diagnosed with personality disorders require a higher level of methadone to satisfy their feelings of distress, emptiness and need to feel special. The researcher hypothesized that participants diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder would receive a higher level of methadone dose in milligrams than their mentally ill colleagues at the same clinic. This quantitative study examines the influence of Borderline Personality Disorder, gender, age, and other mental health diagnoses has on the dosage levels of 184 clients who both receive methadone at a large metropolitan methadone clinic and have participated in mental health services offered by the same clinic. The results of the research indicate lower methadone dose levels in patients with Borderline Personality Disorder compared to the mean level of methadone given to other participants with different disorders. These findings indicate that new blood screening processes may play a role in the reducing the influence of self-report in determining the therapeutic level of methadone to the participants diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder and other mental illness disorders.
The Hmong Community: Acculturation and Utilization of Domestic Violence Services

By Hlee Moua

Research Chair: Dr. Pa Der Vang, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Sr. Stephanie Spandl, MSW, LICSW; Nina Lee, B.A.

This study examined the cultural beliefs surrounding domestic violence of those in the Hmong community and the role of acculturation and how these affect the utilization of domestic violence services. Domestic violence is an issue in many communities but often hidden or not spoken of in the Hmong community. Some of the overarching themes that have been identified to play a role in domestic violence in the Hmong community include various cultural norms, such as patriarchal values, traditional gender roles, and the value of family, with the addition of acculturation difficulties. A mixed method study was facilitated using the General Ethnicity Questionnaire (GEQ) (Tsai, 2001) to evaluate acculturation along with additional survey questions regarding perceived level of acculturation, beliefs about domestic violence in the Hmong community, values that the Hmong community holds, and beliefs about what women experiencing domestic violence should do. Although the role of acculturation was not found to be statistically significant, the findings indicate that domestic violence is a prevalent issue in the Hmong community in which needs to be better researched and addressed. The results suggest that regardless of acculturation, there is openness to utilizing domestic violence services. Implications for clinical social work practice and future research are discussed.
Health Care Professionals' Experiences Practicing Integrative Medicine

By Amanda Muenzenmeyer

Research Chair: Ande A. Nesmith, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Barbara Bradford, LICSW; Cindy Fredrickson

The practice of integrative medicine has regained popularity in recent years. As a theoretical framework, integrative medicine is a viable option to consider in place of a traditional medicine model from a patient satisfaction and cost savings viewpoint. The purpose of this paper was to explore the experiences and viewpoints of healthcare professionals in regards to practicing integrative medicine. The Health Belief Model was used as a conceptual framework. Using a quantitative design, health care professionals across a variety of disciplines were recruited from three agencies within the Midwest who currently provide services to patients with an integrative medicine model. A bivariate analysis of the findings was completed utilizing data gathered about health care professionals' length in practice, professional education experiences and beliefs about factors that contribute to patient's adherence to treatment plans. The findings reinforced existing research that in vivo educational experiences have great potential for providing health care professionals opportunities to practice integrative medicine across disciplines. The findings also confirmed that there is a further need for education about the integrative medicine model across all health care disciplines. These findings demonstrate the potential impact social workers can have in the field of integrative medicine through their holistic views of patients and their abilities to lead other health care professionals through promotion of patient health and satisfaction.
Complementary/Alternative Treatments for Cancer Patients with Depression and Anxiety: Critical Analysis

By Anna Murie

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Kate Pederson, MSW, LICSW, Patrick Clark, MSW, LICSW

Cancer is a life threatening disease that has many psychological and physical effects on the patient population. Fifty-five percent of cancer patients reported at least mild levels of depression and sixty-four percent reported at least mild levels of anxiety (Salvo et al., 2012). A review of the literature suggested that complementary and alternative therapies have positive effects on relieving depression and anxiety in cancer patients. This research is looking to address the importance of complementary and alternative therapy use with cancer patients. Qualitative interviews were conducted with seven oncology social workers. The research used an inductive grounded theory method. The transcripts were analyzed and coded for themes. There were similarities and differences between the research findings and the literature review. Similarities that were found were participant’s sense of control as a positive outcome and mental health relief for patients. Differences that were found were distraction as a positive outcome, stigma and preconceived notions and time limitations and interruptions affect practice. Further research is needed to address the differences between the findings and the literature review and to further explore time and stigma limitations complementary and alternative therapies face.
Working with Family Caregivers: Case Managers’ Perspectives

By K. Rae Myers

Research Chair: Carol F. Kuechler, MSW, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Shari Hornseth, MSW, LISW; Joan Stauffer, MSW, LICSW, CSW-G

The purpose of this study was to explore from the case managers’ perspective how they work with family caregivers. Eighteen social workers from 5 community based case management agencies completed an online survey about their work with family caregivers. Case managers indicated involvement with family caregivers in the areas of assessment, creating a care plan, education, making referrals, advocacy, and assistance with problem solving. Case managers indicated that they typically complete the assessment with a caregiver present and invite the caregiver to participate in creating the care plan. Respondents indicated they provide updates less than once a month and use email to provide those updates. Case managers provide education materials to caregivers about community resources and assist them with problem solving related to home care services. When offered the opportunity to comment on their work with family caregivers, case managers emphasized the importance of family involvement and the role of the client in making decisions about the nature and level of family involvement as they are able. Implications for practice and research are also addressed.
Behavior & Developmental Treatment Models for Autism Spectrum Disorders: Factors Guiding Clinician Preference and Perceptions

By J. E. Nee

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph.D
Committee Members: Meaghan Nelson, MA; Heidi Scheffler, MSW, LGSW

1 in 88 children are diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder; a condition that inhibits a person’s ability to communicate and relate socially to other people, as well as cause a person to partake in repetitive or stereotyped behaviors. There are several interventions parents and professionals can utilize to remediate the three core deficits of Autism, however the theories behind what should be focused on in these treatment models are very different. This qualitative study aimed to investigate the factors that guide clinicians’ preferences and perceptions of a behavioral and developmental model as well as analyzed the interventions for autistic symptoms employed by developmental and behavioral theories—specifically looking at the Developmental, Individual Difference, Relationship-based (DIR) model and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). A total of six experienced ASD clinicians were interviewed: three working under a development scope and three practicing under the behavioral scope. Each clinician was asked a series of questions concerning which model they prefer, their knowledge of both models, and how their knowledge was gained. Primary factors guiding participant’s perceptions stemmed from independent research, parent reports, and colleague reports. Strengths and deficits of each model identified by all participating clinicians were congruent with current literature but the rationale concerning the strengths and deficits differed depending on the participant’s theoretical lens. These themes were identified and explained in this clinical research.
Divorce Mediation and its Impact on Children

By Brianna Nelson

Research Chair: Lance Peterson, LICSW, Ph. D.
Committee Members: Jennifer Briest, MSW, LGSW; Marilyn McKnight, MA

The percentage of children experiencing divorce in the United States and around the world has dramatically increased in the last fifty years and currently affects one million children every year. Divorce mediation can be helpful and beneficial for families when resolving emotional and familial conflict, which could decrease the negative effects divorce can have on children. This research aims to address the decision making process that mediators use when deciding to include children in the mediation process. A qualitative study was conducted, in which professional mediators were interviewed regarding the decision making process used to determine whether or not children are included in the mediation process. Data were analyzed and coded using inductive grounded theory. Significant similarities between the literature and findings included mediators providing education to parents, parents deciding whether or not to include children in mediation, and the age of the child impacting the inclusion of the child in mediation. These findings were linked to research, but provided an additional focus on the age of children, how mediators can be mindful of children's developmental levels and how that would affect how and when they are included in the mediation process. Further research is needed to determine how mediators are being trained to work with children and provide developmentally appropriate and competent services.
Parental Involvement in Early Intervention Programs for Children with Autism

By Kaylee Nelson

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, Ph.D.
MSW Committee Members: Danny Porter, LICSW; Harriet Kohen, LICSW

Research shows that increased parental involvement has a positive impact on children with autism; however, there is a need for continued research pertaining to how their involvement improves and/or influences outcomes of their children with autism (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). This study set out to investigate the ways in which parents of children (ages 2-7) with autism are involved in their children's early intervention program(s) and how this involvement influences their child's social skills and behavior. More specifically, this study explored the association between parental involvement and the behavior and social skills of children with autism receiving services through an early intervention program. This Ecological Framework has been applied to this study and calls attention to the value of looking at more than just the individual. Rather than simply focusing only on the child with autism, there should be a focus on all interrelated systems that affect that child's development. In relation to this research, in order for parent involvement (a micro-system) to affect the social skills and behavior (another micro-system) of their child with autism, there needs to be involvement with the child's early intervention program (a meso-system). Thirty parents of children ages 2-7 with an autism diagnosis participated in this study. These participants also identified that their children are in an early intervention program. The subjects were recruited through an organization called Autism Speaks which is the world's leading autism science and advocacy organization. The chosen research design for this study was a quantitative survey which was posted on the Autism Speaks website. Participants responded voluntarily. This cross-sectional study focused on research pertaining to parental involvement in early intervention programs and the social skills and behavior of their children (ages 2-7) with autism.
The Key Elements of Dialectical Behavior Therapy

By Cheryl Ann Nickelson

Research Chair: Karen Carlson, Chair, MSW, LICSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Miriam Itzkowitz, MSW, LICSW, Sarah Cherwin, Psy.D.

The purpose of this study is to examine license social workers’ views on the key elements of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) that make it effective when working with clients diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). Six clinicians who have experience with using Dialectical Behavior Therapy when working with this population were interviewed. The interviews consisted of fourteen questions which aimed towards answering the research question. Results showed that there is not just one element to DBT that makes it an effective treatment model. There are several elements to this treatment model that make it effective when working with this population.
Understanding Acculturation: An Exploratory Study of Tibetan-American High
School Students

By Kunga Norzom

Research Chair: Pa Der Vang, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Katherine Wheeler, LICSW; Darcy Westermann, LICSW

The purpose of this research study was to understand how acculturation affects Tibetan-American high school students’ ability to develop a new identity considering many variables and how that identity relates to different parts of their life and issues related to that both at home with parents and other significant relationships in life. The aspects explored are the rate of acculturation, age of arrival, familial relationship, community involvement, and level of cultural practice at home. This research paper will integrate past studies about different Asian American communities and specific issues affecting youth in an attempt to understand the current group of Tibetan American high school student’s experience with acculturation. Factors such as cultural integration, defining Tibetan cultural identity, managing family roles and expectations, and managing two identities emerged from the data as primary themes. These findings support some of the past research studies about Asian American youths, yet it also shows the differences in cultural specific issues affecting immigrants and refugee populations within same racial background. The major findings indicate the need for further research to assess and understand the needs of cultural specific communities in order to provide effective assessment, service delivery, treatment planning, interventions and resources.
Older adults in long-term care: Fostering hope amidst loss

By Sarah J. Olsen

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Jeanne W. Schuller, MSW, LGSW; Sandra Traudt, MSW, LICSW

There are an increasing number of older adults who are facing major life transitions and significant losses as they age. Finding a sense of hope among the losses and changes these older adults face is one way they can maintain a quality of life or as some researchers have termed it – successfully age. Social workers are often the front line workers with these older adults and therefore can play an integral role in fostering a sense of hope. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand social workers’ perspectives on their role in fostering a sense of hope among older adults in long-term care facilities. Seven social workers participated in individual semi-structured, flexible interviews, answering ten questions regarding their perspectives of the needs, losses, strengths and hope of older adults in long-term care facilities and how their knowledge and perceptions of those categories influenced their practice. The interviews with these social workers uncovered themes of resilience, family, purpose, humor, time and physical presence and community. Developing an increased understanding of each of these areas will assist social workers as they continue to work with and prepare to work with the increasing population of older adults and their need for hope to maintain a quality life.
Mental Health Practitioners’ Views on Why Somatic Experiencing Works for Treating Trauma

By Michelle C. Olssen

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Member: Tamara Starkey, LICSW, SEP

Trauma is an issue that affects many people, and traditional trauma treatment techniques have fallen short of helping people to completely heal. The purpose of this project was to explore the views of mental health practitioners as to why Somatic Experiencing (SE) works in the treatment of trauma. Using a qualitative design, ten mental health practitioners currently utilizing SE techniques were interviewed about their experiences applying SE with trauma clients. Data was analyzed using content analysis and an inductive approach in which categories were first developed from the interview responses via open coding and then were linked to previous related literature. The findings of this study both supported and added to the existing literature by highlighting the themes of the client increasing body awareness, treatment proceeding at the client’s pace, and empowerment of the client in the therapeutic process. In addition, many subthemes were found, with building a positive resource toolbox, creating balance without overwhelm, and normalizing the client experience by emphasizing their survival particularly of note as being sparingly mentioned in previous literature or not at all. These findings underscore the importance of how social work practice can be enhanced through a continued emphasis on the mind-body connection when working with clients affected by trauma, as well as assisting clients in gaining body awareness, and the ongoing development of the therapeutic relationship.
This study explored school social workers’ attitudes about the learning disability diagnostic models, (severe achievement discrepancy model and response to intervention) which are currently used in schools. Specifically, it attempted to determine whether school social workers are satisfied with either of these models or if they think they need to be replaced. The study revealed school social workers overwhelmingly use only the severe achievement discrepancy model to diagnose learning disabled children, even though an alternative model, response to intervention, has been available for use for 9 years. In addition, another finding indicates that school social workers think the models need to be replaced. Finally, most of the school social workers who responded to the study reported they had been required to deny services to a child whom they thought could benefit from them, but did not qualify under the current guidelines. While this study revealed some important findings about school social workers opinions on learning disability diagnosis models, it also revealed that there are still many questions to answer with regard to the identification of learning disabled children.
Ethical Implications: End of Life Planning for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

By Kylie Otte

Research Chair: Katharine Hill Ph.D.
Committee Members: Joe Timmons, MSW, Duwey Jason-Vo

Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities need to engage in end of life planning, however it is essential to determine how their support networks fit into the process. As individuals with Intellectual Disabilities require support to live their daily lives, they too need support when making decisions surrounding medical treatments and end of life planning. The purpose of this study was to identify ethical implications for social workers, when working with Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities when engaging in end of life planning. Seven respondents participated in this study consisting of qualitative interviews. Each of the interviewees responded to similar question lists, written to elicit professional and personal opinions regarding end of life planning for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Respondents were identified through previous professional contacts of this researcher, and through professional contacts of faculty from the University of St. Thomas. The themes identified by this study were the importance of the care team relationship, individual client needs, communication, and discrimination in access to medical care. Each of the findings relate to implications for social work practice.
The Role of Community Based Programs in Reducing Recidivism in Ex-Offenders

By Paige Paulson

Research Chair: Richa Dhanju, PhD
Committee Members: Jean Evans-Williams, LICSW; Kris Miner, MS

This study aims focus and attention toward the growing social problem of recidivism among ex-offenders in the United States. The United States incarcerates more people than any other country and the numbers continue to grow. In addition, the United States has the highest rates of recidivism (Pew Center on the States, 2011). Recidivism is defined as a person's continued criminal behavior after receiving some sanctions or undergoing intervention for a previous crime (National Institute of Justice, 2010). The goal of this research is to highlight important literature that has impacted our views on recidivism, crime, and ex-offenders as well as why our current policies and laws are not helping the situation, but rather hindering. This study is qualitative in nature. Information was obtained through semi-structured interviews with employees currently working with ex-offenders in the community. The data was analyzed using thematic clustering and open coding. The following five themes emerged through data analysis: social stigma as a barrier, lack basic needs, effects of poverty, community ties, and unrealistic preparedness. All interview participants highlighted the general idea that offenders are not prepared for successful release due to societal and personal barriers. This study will highlight previous literature regarding recidivism and barriers to success as well as provide discussion around key findings.
The Impact of Parenting Styles on the Emotional Regulation of Adolescents

By Amber Pearson

Research Chair: Lance Peterson, LICSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Jennifer Dynes, Psy. D., L.P.; Colette Roesler, MSW, LICSW

Teenagers under the influence of strong emotions, without the tools to regulate them, can be identified as dangerous. Throughout the past decade many cases of poor emotional regulation in adolescents have been documented, including school shootings, murders, and suicides. The literature discussed the impact attachment and parenting styles have on the development of adolescents and the positive outcomes individual work with parents, in therapy, has had for family systems. This research aims to further the knowledge of the impact parenting styles have on the development of emotional regulation in adolescents and to describe effective means of helping adolescents develop the ability to regulate their emotions, through the use of family therapy. Data for this project was collected through a qualitative study, which interviewed four licensed marriage and family therapists. Each participant was asked seven semi-structured questions that focused on the association between caregiver and adolescent interactions and the ability for the adolescent to effectively regulate his or her emotions and also practical interventions to use in family therapy, to help repair the adolescent’s ability to regulate his or her emotions. The findings of this project were consistent with the literature and furthered current literature, by discussing specific interventions therapists could utilize while working with clients in therapy, such as using therapy as a model for effective interactions. This research could be furthered by investigating what happens to children, who have developed skills to regulate their emotions, when: 1) their parents are invested in the treatment process but then revert back to old behaviors; and 2) their parents never become invested in the treatment process and their natural home environment remains chaotic and dysfunctional.
Veterans’ Experiences with Combat-Related PTSD Treatment

By Heidi A. Priestley

Research Chair: Carol F. Kuechler, MSSW, PhD., LICSW
Committee Members: Sharyn DeZelar, MSW, LICSW; David R. Sepeda

The purpose of this study was to explore from Veterans’ perspectives, their experiences with combat-related post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) treatment and to report their advice to social workers involved in treating Veterans. This subject has particular importance given the increasing number of Veterans who have returned and are currently returning from deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan with this diagnosis. Interviews were conducted with four subjects, all of whom had been deployed to a combat zone, were diagnosed with combat-related PTSD, and completed outpatient treatment prior to July 1, 2012. The interviewees discussed their experiences with PTSD treatment and offered advice to social workers who treat Veterans with combat-related PTSD.

Two Veterans experienced more re-experiencing symptoms, such as dreams, after treatment. Avoidance symptoms among the Veterans in this study included avoiding treatment, avoiding people, and avoiding military duty. The findings confirmed that arousal symptoms, specifically irritability, are often triggered by common daily events, such as a camera flash, a tractor backfiring, or a neighbor’s knock on the front door. All participating Veterans reported that their treatment was positively affected by family or friend-based support systems.

The implications for social workers include providing liaison-type services between doctors and Veterans and engaging and supporting family members in the treatment and recovery process. Additionally, the Veterans in this study implied an importance to the social worker having shared experiences with the Veteran.
The Incorporation of Integrative Medicine to Assess and Address Diabetic Patients’ Psychosocial Needs

By Jennifer Ranallo

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, MSW, MPP, LISW
Committee Members: Lynn Manning, M.D.; Carissa Morris, M.A., MSW, LGSW

The purpose of this project was to increase the understanding of the assessment, implementation and referral of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) in order to meet psychosocial needs and decrease stress among diabetic patients. Using a mixed method design, both qualitative and quantitative research questions were incorporated into a survey distributed using a non-probability sample of healthcare professionals working in family medicine or general medicine practices within the metro area. The study attempted to answer the following questions: Is integrative medicine being conducted by healthcare professionals to address type 1 and type 2 diabetic patients’ psychosocial needs in family medicine and primary care settings? Is IM being assessed, referred and implemented in family medicine and primary care settings? Quantitative data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Qualitative data was interpreted using the content analysis technique. Findings indicated respondents who ask about CAM use during clinic appointments are more likely to implement CAM during office appointments. Respondents that ask about CAM during office visits were more likely to refer to CAM for additional care. Next, there was an increased likelihood of putting psychosocial interventions in the treatment plan when respondents assessed for diabetic patients’ psychosocial needs. The respondents who endorsed practicing CAM personally were more likely than those who have not to refer diabetic patients’ to CAM for additional needs. Findings suggested that implementing CAM is not a standard practice. Findings related to barriers were consistent with previous literature. Respondents endorsed an increase in blood sugars are a result of stress among diabetic patients. These findings emphasize the importance of assessing and addressing psychosocial needs among diabetics in order to decrease the harmful effects of stress.
Seriously Funny: The Clinical Role of Humor in the Grief Process

By Jessie Rae Rayle

Research Chair: Collin Hollidge, Ph.D., (Chair)
Committee Members: Elizabeth Rezek, LICSW, Kristi Johnson, LICSW

With the introduction of laughter therapy and laughter yoga to such distinguished medical facilities as the Mayo Clinic and Cancer Treatment Centers, the use of humor as a therapeutic tool is beginning to emerge. This study aims to gain an understanding of what motivates therapist’s to use humor while working with grieving clients through a qualitative approach. Four licensed therapists were interviewed on the topics of theoretical orientation, intentional use of humor with grieving clients, the clinical risks and benefits of using humor and the therapist's personal preferences of humor. The major themes found in this study were the role that humor plays in creating alliances, measuring safety, assessing the client and self care. This study concluded that humor could play a very significant role in the grief process by improving the therapeutic alliance, assessing the client’s recovery and acting as a tool for self-care on the part of the therapist.
Exploratory Evaluation of the Role of Social Workers During Adoption Disruption

By Elise K. Reding

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchs Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Sara Smit, MSW; Maria Kroupina, Ph.D.

This research study is a qualitative project exploring social workers’ experiences in working with adoption disruption. The literature covers adoption history, adoption statistics, disruption information, disruption risk factors, services and mental health aspects. Seven participants, including adoption social workers and a post adoption parent support specialist were interviewed from various adoption agencies. Findings include discovering there is a lack of a concrete definition for adoption disruption, the importance of expectations from adoptive parents, identifying struggles faced by adoption social workers, initial responses to a family wanting to disrupt, current services, barriers to services, and ways to reduce adoption disruption.
Gerotranscendence and Successful Aging: The Lived Experience

By Allyson R. Rempel

Research chair: Carol F. Kuechler, MSSW, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Rochelle Rottenberg, MSW, LISW; Sarah Anderson, MSW, LICSW

With the impending explosion in the number of older adults in this country, new ways of understanding and serving this population are vital to success in clinical social work practice. This study explored the lived aging experience from the perspective of older adults in the context of gerotranscendence and successful aging. Nine older adults over the age of 80 were interviewed by the researcher. The findings of the study indicate the presence of gerotranscendence, and confirmed that it coincided with the concept of successful aging in all nine participants. Implications include the need for a more holistic understanding of older adults, policy development to support older adults in the community, agency policies that acknowledge and foster the development of gerotranscendence, further research on gerotranscendence and the economics of aging, assessments of providers currently using the principles of gerotranscendence in practice, needs assessments for future program development, and the development of educated and skilled professionals to address the diverse needs of older adults.
The Effect of Animal-Assisted Therapy on Children with Disabilities

By Alison E. Ries.

Research Chair: Catherine L. Marrs Fuchsel, Ph.D., LICSW (Chair)
Committee Members: Kate Wessel, MSW, LICSW & Joyce M. Eckes,

This research project is a qualitative study that explores the effect of Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) on children with disabilities from the perspective of Animal-Assisted Therapists. One of the goals of this research project was to provide support for this holistic inclusion of AAT in therapeutic practice with children. Six in-depth interviews were conducted with licensed and practicing Animal-Assisted Therapists, who are working with the specified population, children with mental health and neurobiological disabilities. Data analysis occurred within a two-month period. The categories that emerged were: 1) client population, 2) clinician experience, 3) initial session, 4) family involvement, 5) social and physical improvements, 6) change in clients 7) connection/rapport building, 8) change as reported by clients and, 9) impact of AAT animal death on clients. The overarching research question asks: What are the effects of AAT on children with disabilities? After reviewing the literature, this research project has produced findings with similar results. This research had both strengths and limitations. The implications of this research project provide current and future social workers with information that supports the inclusion of AAT in clinical work with children with disabilities.
This study assessed clinical social workers’ beliefs and behaviors about working with gay and lesbian clients using the Gay Affirmative Practice Scale (GAPS) (Crisp, 2006). The survey, completed by 18 clinical social workers in Minnesota, consisted of the GAP Scale, demographic questions, and an open-ended question. The scores from this survey were slightly higher than those from previous studies (a higher score representing more affirmative practice with gay and lesbian clients). Respondents who had specific training related to working with gay and lesbian clients had lower GAPS scores than those who had no specific training. This study reinforced previous research which suggested that social workers are practicing affirmatively with gay and lesbian clients. Although respondents had high GAP scale scores, the answers to the open-ended questions suggested that the respondents are not considering sexuality as a component in the assessment of clients.
Therapists’ Perspectives of the Effects of Psychodynamic Psychotherapy on Problem-Drinking Behavior

By Sandra Mattson Ryan

Research Chair: Valandra, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Kathy Sampson, MSW, LICSW; Seth Tupper, MSW, LICSW

The goal of this research study is to provide knowledge of therapists’ perspectives of the effects of psychodynamic psychotherapy on problem-drinking behavior. Understanding the effects of psychodynamic psychotherapy on problem-drinking behavior increases clinical social workers’ success in facilitating long-term change for clients with problem-drinking behavior. This study gathered qualitative information using a twelve-question interview with six psychodynamic psychotherapists. The results were compared with a literature review of the effects of psychodynamic psychotherapy on problem-drinking behavior. Three main themes emerged from this study. First, through the development of transference, the psychodynamic therapeutic relationship helps problem drinkers work toward resolving the internal conflicts underlying their problem-drinking behavior. The second theme that became apparent is the importance of using psychodynamic therapeutic skills to build clients’ ego strength, which facilitates transformation. The third theme identified is how consistent and responsive psychodynamic interaction leads to more positive, authentic relationships with others. The implications of this study suggest that by providing psychodynamic psychotherapy, social work clinicians can facilitate long-lasting change in problem-drinking behavior through the development of transference, the building of ego strength, and increasing the ability to form positive relationships. Further implications for social work clinicians indicate psychodynamic psychotherapy can provide a framework for intervention for clients with problem-drinking behavior, along with other forms of behavioral therapy.
The Use of Creative Arts in Therapy

By Jamie Sanders

Research Chair: Karen Carlson, MSW, LICSW (MN) Ph.D.
Committee Members: Carole Madland, MSSW, LCSW, Ph.D; Heather Casper

Creative art has been used throughout time to foster interpersonal, community and cultural connections, and to explore the meaning of our existence and life experiences. Similar goals have formed the foundation of social work practice. Social work aims to not only support the development of each individual, but also encourages social, community and cultural connections. Additionally, clinical social work helps people create meaning-structures that they then use to understand their world and experiences, manage their relationships, and provide the basis for how they organize their behaviors, especially when working towards personal goals. Given the intersection of goals between art and clinical social work, the creative arts have been noted to be useful in clinical social work practice. Though research suggests clinical social workers use the creative arts, there is little research discussing how social workers practicing therapy make decisions about using art therapy in their practice. This exploratory research used a semi-structured questionnaire and grounded theory to discover if and how clinical social workers use the arts in therapy, their decision making process about using the arts, and if they integrate the arts with a particular therapeutic paradigm. Three factors were found to be critical for therapists’ in making this decision: predominant client age; therapist anxiety/comfort level with creative arts; therapist’s exposure to art in therapy. The study attempted to explore if therapists of a particular therapeutic framework were more or less likely to use the creative arts in therapy; however, no link was found.
Focused Practice: Exploring the Relationship Between Mindfulness and Empathy Among Clinical Social Workers

By Shannon Savageau

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MA, MSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Carey Winkler, MSW, LICSW; Merra Young, LICSW, LMFT

This research project explores the impact of mindfulness on the practice of clinical social work as it pertains to building the skill of empathy. Mindfulness, in practice, varies from clinician to clinician; however, mindfulness in general involves having an expanded sense of awareness and attunement to the greater experience of the client. As such, current research supports that those clinicians who practice mindfulness develop an increased compassion for self and others and thus are more empathic than those who do not practice mindfulness. This research is important to the field of clinical social work because of the implications for future education to include mindfulness training as part of developing the skill of using empathy with clients. Data collected for this research comes from 121 clinical social workers registered with the Minnesota Board of Social Work (MBOSW) and is based on their responses to the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) and a seven-question survey. The results of this study point to a relationship between mindfulness and empathy among clinical social workers, indicating that further research exploring this relationship should be done to support these findings.
Later Life Divorce & the Adult Child

By Kayla Schwartzhoff

Research Chair: Lance Peterson, LICSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Carol Schreier, LICSW; Michelle Erickstad, LICSW

Despite divorce rates decreasing by 5% every year since 1996, data has revealed that since 1991 people with marital longevity have had an increase in filing for divorce. The purpose of this study was to explore what measures are being taken to help adult children (17 years old and older) through their parent’s later-life divorce. The literature has found divorce has an impact on children, especially adult children going through their parents’ later life divorce. Using a systematic literature review, articles were analyzed using specific criteria. The findings produced no articles on services for adult children of divorce. Reasons why there is not literature on adult children impacted by their parents’ divorce were given. A case study of Al and Tipper Gore was examined as well, which highlights the cultural context of separating the institution of marriage from the needs of biological children. These findings emphasize the need of further research on how adult children are affected by their parent’s later-life divorce.
Adapting to change: Provider perspectives on the transition to long-term care

By Paige Elise Sorenson

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Susan Bollinger-Brown, MSSW, LICSW; Marjorie Spagl, MA, LSW

This study investigated the transition from independent living to long-term care settings from the perspective of social workers currently in the field. This study was carried out using qualitative interviews with semi-structured questions. The sample was made up of five participants. The primary purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the transitional process from independent living to long-term care from the perspective of social workers who are professionally-involved in this process. The secondary purpose of this study was to understand the dynamic issues faced by long-term care social workers and to better understand how their unique experience drives their own insight. The results of the study yielded three distinct themes. Theme one: reassurance, education, and insight on behalf of families. Theme two: admissions and screening. Theme three: administrative strain.
Investigating Techniques to Help Early English Language Learners Prepare for Kindergarten

By Gjenifer Stark

Research Chair: Felicia Sy, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Zach Pruitt, MSW; Angèle Sancho Passe, MA

This qualitative study examines the perspectives and efforts of Minnesota Reading Corps members and Master Coaches to help Early Language Learners become kindergarten ready. Minnesota Reading Corps is a statewide initiative to help every Minnesota child become a successful reader by the end of third grade. The program places Reading Corps members as literacy tutors in sites across Minnesota to implement a research-based early-literacy effort to help struggling readers. The Reading Corps strategies are designed for both preschool-aged children and students from kindergarten to third grade students. This phenomenological study looks at the stories and captures the essence of the interviewees’ experiences with the program and their efforts to help English Language Learners overcome the barriers that they face in order to become kindergarten ready. The findings included participants feeling well supported and trained in order to understand and overcome major challenges that English Language Learners encounter. By using their training, participants were able to better support their classroom teachers, and provide individual attention to the students who need it.
Emergency Department staff perception of the role of social work and the social worker in the Emergency Department

By Natasha Stepka

Research Chair: Richa Dhanju, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Greg Jones, BSN, FNE, MA; Molly Sheppard, MSW, LGSW

Changes to the healthcare system such as a decrease in resources, combined roles of emergency department personnel, and delivery of mental health treatment in emergency departments has necessitated further investigation of the role of social workers in the emergency department. The purpose of this project was to explore Emergency Department staff perception of the role of the social worker in the emergency department. Using a qualitative research design, eight participants from rural emergency departments were surveyed regarding how they perceived mental health emergencies and mental health crises within the emergency department, and their perceptions of the social work role. Findings of this study suggest that a social worker is a valuable addition to the interdisciplinary team in the emergency department. Additionally it indicated that mental health interventions and services remain stigmatized, caring for mental health patients impacts the care of other patients, the emergency department has become a point of entry for many resources, there is a lack of training in mental health services, and a lack of understanding in the specific skill set and role of social work. These findings support the importance for social work presence in the emergency department as well as the need for future research in various areas related to social work and mental health within hospital emergency departments.
**Burnout in the School Social Worker: Related Individual and Organizational Factors**

By Melissa A. Sutlief

Research Chair: Dr. Karen Carlson, Ph.D., LICSW  
Committee Members: Gretchen Halverson, LICSW, Nicole Beach, MSW

Having been linked to turnover, absenteeism, a reduction in the quality of services, numerous physical and psychological disorders, and a disruption in interpersonal relations, burnout is a major concern in many human service occupations. This qualitative study sought to identify the factors that either contributed to or prevented burnout in a school social worker. The author of this study analyzed data from a qualitative, semi-structured interview with eight school social workers who have worked in the field ranging from 8 to 33 years. Individual, organizational, and characteristics of the student population were assessed via open-ended questions, which sought to identify factors that might contribute to or prevent burnout in the school social worker. The data was analyzed using inductive, grounded theory methods, in which categories were developed from the interview responses and linked to previous literature. From the data analysis three themes emerged related to 'Individual Factors' that either contributed to or prevented burnout. Those themes were: Boundaries, Self-Care, and Attitude. These themes included the concepts of compartmentalization, mental health, and realistic expectations. Three themes also emerged related to 'Organizational Factors' that either contributed to or prevented burnout. Those themes were: Supervisory Relationship, School Climate, and Characteristics of Clientele. These themes included the concepts of micromanagement, support, and understanding the role of the school social worker. The findings of this study may inform curriculum development, enhance support structures, and help social workers develop key personal skills that will help them to enhance their resilience, well-being, personal effectiveness, and longevity in the field. The findings also demonstrate how effective supervision and a healthy climate provide a “safety net” for employees, especially when it includes the concepts of boundaries, support, and self-care.
Social Workers’ Perceptions of Teen Fathers: Differences Among Social Service Professionals

By Katelin A. Swanson

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, PhD, MPP, LISW, MSW
Committee Members: Jenny Javitch, MSW, LGSW; Clarence Jones, Med

Teen fathers are often left out of public conversation and social work interventions, and research with this population is minimal. The purpose of this project was to explore social workers’ perceptions of teen fathers, both how their perceptions are related to their practice and how they may differ from other social service professionals. Utilizing a mixed-mode questionnaire, 47 social service professionals from multiple work settings were surveyed about their perceptions and interventions with teen fathers. Quantitative data were analyzed using the data analysis software SPSS to produce descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis to discover common themes in responses. The findings demonstrated that social service professionals believed teen fathers play an important role in their child’s life and barriers exist in accessing services. Social workers and other social service professionals differed in the factors they consider when working with teen fathers, the importance of teen father’s involvement in intervention programs, and what prevents teen fathers from accessing interventions. Findings supported previous research that teen fathers are often neglected from social work interventions. Qualitative responses demonstrate the importance of further research with the teen father population to improve intervention efforts.
Non-custodial Minority Fathers Maintaining their Livelihood

By Erin Taylor

Research Chair: Karen T. Carlson Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Rebecca Sprenger LICSW; Kimberly Giles CNP

Fathers who are expected to pay child support is a topic that American policy makers need further education on, as more services are needed for this growing population. This is a growing population as American households continue to be increasingly divided. The important role fathers play in the lives of their children is also a topic that is gaining momentum. For many decades, the focus was on the role that mothers play in the lives of their children with services and support directed towards them. However, through recent research it is evident that children benefit holistically from father involvement. This research project examines multiple minority fathers who are currently paying child support while facing difficulties to maintain their daily lives, and how this has affected their relationships with their children. These fathers expressed difficulties they have encountered in several areas such as the court system, racial/gender bias, employment, perception of society towards non-custodial fathers, and lack of services/support for fathers. The fathers involved in this study showed that despite the obstacles they have faced, they have persevered and continue to make a positive impact in the lives of their children. Implications for social work practice, policy and further research are outlined.
Elderly Cancer Patients’ Use of Hope and Faith-Based Services: Social Workers’ Perspectives

By Kati Thayer

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, PhD, LICSW
Committee Members: Mary Beth Gustafson, MSW, LICSW, Sister Katarina Schuth, PhD, MTS

Due to the lack of research examining elderly cancer patients’ utilization of hope and faith-based services in healing, the current study explored this idea as viewed from the perspective of social workers (n = 7) that worked (past or present) with elderly patients in medical settings or with adult cancer patients. Participants spoke to their experiences with cancer patients of all ages and in all stages of illness, not only elderly individuals with terminal cancer. This study found that both hope and faith-based services are an important component of the healing process for cancer patients of any age. The findings of this study indicate the need for social workers to recognize and foster hope amongst cancer patients of any age, and formally assess a cancer patient’s hope throughout their medical journey, specifically in terms of what it is they are hoping for.
Foster Care Adoption: An Overview of Challenges Experienced by Parents

By Lisa C. Thibodeau

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D., (chair)
Committee Members: Kathleen Hiniker, MSW, LICSW; Susan J Murr, MSW, LICSW

Purpose: This research strives to understand challenges of parents adopting foster children. Design and Methods: A qualitative, semi-structured interview was used to collect data from 11 social workers on their experiences working with adoptive parents. Findings: Findings indicate clear challenges/needs for these adoptive parents pursuing. Identified needs include quality training/education, desirable parental qualities, adoption-competent professionals, support, and resources to help with challenges brought by adoptive parents, the child and system. Implications: Findings enforce the importance of best practices though continuing research and the need for improvements to policy and practice. Several policy suggestions are made include ensuring timely delivery of information to adoptive parents, listing of all available children on the state adoption exchange, and to eliminate adoption disincentives.
Victims of childhood sexual abuse can develop mental illness or maladaptive behaviors due to the traumatization. Although individual, group, and family psychotherapy are offered to victims of intrafamilial sexual abuse, few approaches include sessions where rebuilding a relationship between the perpetrator and the victim is emphasized. Given the importance of approaches to include the perpetrator, the focus of this qualitative research is to gain an understanding of how a clinician can help intrafamilial child sexual abuse victims rebuild and heal the relationship with their perpetrators. Individual, family, and group therapy are ways of delivering therapeutic services. Within these sessions, clinicians utilize a variety of approaches, techniques, and conceptual frameworks to guide their interventions. This study found that the child victim of intrafamilial sexual abuse must want to rebuild the relationship with his/her perpetrator, and that there is no identified preferred therapeutic approach in order to accomplish this task. This study also established the importance of individualized therapy sessions for the victim prior to therapy involving the perpetrator. For social workers, this study is imperative due to the fact that the child may remain in contact with his/her perpetrator following allegations of intrafamilial sexual abuse.
Influence of a Father’s Residential Status on the Development of Depression

By Tesia R. Vitale

Research Chair: Pa Der Vang, MSW, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Melissa A. J. Williams, MSW, LICSW Holley Hagen, MSW, LGSW

In recognition of society’s changing family dynamics, due to divorce, separation, and the adaptation of cohabitating relationships, a significant amount of children are growing up in homes separate from that of their biological fathers, and are subsequently experiencing the addition of an alternative father figure in their lives. Further, a significant amount of American children are growing up in single-parent homes, typically headed by a mother. The implications of these changes are important to examine in relation to how they affect children’s emotional development, as depression has been associated with early attachment relationships. The father-child dyad, is of particular significance to this study as they have been shown to be disproportionately residing in homes separate from their children, in comparison to mothers. This quantitative research design was conducted in an effort to understand the significance of a father’s residential status during childhood, on the development of depression. The data was collected by means of developing a survey and distributing them electronically via private Facebook messages sent out by the researcher and supporting committee. This survey collected information about the participants such as their socio-demographics, experience with their fathers and alternative father figures during childhood, their history of depression, and the ECR-R questionnaire to collect the participants’ attachment styles. The results of this study did not find a statistically significant association between a father’s residential status and the development of depression. However, other variables such as attachment style and father’s level of involvement as reported by the participants displayed significance. These results should be accepted with caution, as limitations in numbers and variations of participants were present.
The Impact of Attention and Interpretation Therapy on the Practitioner: Beneficial for Helping Professionals?

By Brady Voigt

Research Chair: Mike Chovanec, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Cara Carlson, Ph.D., LICSW; Stacy Husebo, LICSW

The topic of this research project is Attention and Interpretation Therapy (AIT), a mindfulness-based approach to stress reduction and increased resilience developed in 2009 by Dr. Amit Sood. The research question was: What is the impact of AIT on helping professionals? Eight qualitative interviews were conducted with licensed clinical social workers, counselors, and psychologists who have participated in six-month AIT courses. Grounded theory methodology and constant comparative analysis were used to analyze transcribed qualitative data. Seven major themes emerged, including gratitude, compassion, and acceptance; AIT principles; AIT and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT); client impacts; practitioner use; less stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue; and community connectedness. These findings parallel those of other studies of mindfulness-based approaches and helping professionals, suggesting that AIT is an effective intervention for practitioners and clients. Findings unique to this study are discussed. Recommendations for further research and implications for social work practice and policy are also discussed.
Gender Differences in Bereavement among Couples after Loss of a Child: A Professionals Perspective

By Teri M. Welte

Research Chair: Kendra J. Garrett, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Diane E. Bauer, MSW, LICSW; Kimberly Bauman, MSW, LICSW

This qualitative study examined gender differences in bereavement, particularly among couples after the loss of a child. Data were collected through semi-standardized interviews with four helping professionals that work with couples during the bereavement process following the death of a child. Common themes were found through an open coding method that analyzed the data for commonalities among the participants. There were four different themes that emerged from the data: reactions and coping mechanisms, family structure, external influences and effect on the marriage. The majority of the findings from this study coincided with previous research. Implications for this study suggest further research into the similarities and differences of bereavement that couples experience after the loss of a child. Further research will only strengthen the understanding of gender differences in bereavement and couples, and professionals can utilize that knowledge throughout the bereavement process.
Impact of Agency's Climate on Burnout

By Benjamin Widbin

Research Chair: Colin F. Hollidge, Ph.D
Committee Members: Laura Lundberg, MSW, LICSW; Rochelle Rottenberg, MSW, LISW

Social work agencies can play a vital role in reducing burnout of Social Workers today. Determining what agencies could do to lighten the emotional load on its workers is an important topic for Social Workers as well as the clients they serve. This quantitative study surveyed 48 licensed social workers to examine, which aspects of an agency’s culture contribute to its workers’ experience of burnout. Results indicate that the majority of the respondents, 52% (25) indicated that they have already experienced burnout in some form while working at their current agencies. Respondents also felt that the single most important factor in reducing burnout in social workers involved the support they received from their agencies regarding their work/life balance. This study indicated some clear steps that need to be taken by social work agencies. Creating a work environment where conversation and support between coworkers is encouraged and recommended, understanding the significance of workers taking time for their home lives and diversifying workloads can enhance the work experience for social workers and improve the quality of services clients receive. It is clear after analyzing the findings of this study that more research should be conducted on a larger scale to maintain the strongest social workers in the profession.
Spirituality in Social Work: Therapists’ Perspectives on the Role of Spirituality within their Practice

By Nancy Wiedmeyer

Research Chair: Karen Carlson, Ph.D., MSSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Elizabeth Anez, MSW, CAPSW, Michael Peterson, MA, LMFT

The pendulum has swung with relation to the use of spirituality within social work therapy practices. Fifteen to twenty years ago, religion and spirituality were taboo topics. Since then and more recently, religion and spirituality have been recognized as increasingly important components of therapy. With the growing interest in spirituality, further examination of how spirituality impacts social work practice is imperative. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of spiritual competence by asking the research questions: How do therapists’ view the role of spirituality within their clinical practice? and, What kind of religious and/or spiritual education do social workers report they have received? Using a qualitative design, nine participants of this study were interviewed and asked to answer fourteen open-ended questions. Fifty percent of the questions were focused towards influential factors which contribute to religion/spiritual competency as previously mentioned by researchers Hodge (2004) and Fluellen (2007). Findings of this study validate the importance for therapists to understand the role of religion &/or spirituality in a clients’ life. In addition, results indicate there is a positive difference in the recovery process for those clients who use religious &/or spiritual coping mechanisms versus those that do not. Further and more expansive research is needed with appropriate measurement options to determine how and in what ways religious and spiritual coping methods impact the recovery process. Further research may add to effective treatment options and techniques for clients who desire to utilize religion &/or spiritual support within the therapeutic setting.
Therapeutic Activities among Residents with Dementia at a Nursing Home

By Angelina Wiger

Research Chair: Pa Der Vang, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Mari Folwick, MSW, LGSW; Annie Shanahan, LSW

The purpose of this project was to examine nursing home staff perspectives through qualitative interviews on how therapeutic activities contribute to the well-being of residents diagnosed with dementia. The researcher conducted this study through analyzed data from qualitative, semi-structured interviews with an interdisciplinary team at a nursing home. All participants had experience working with residents with dementia that participated in therapeutic activities at the nursing home. The major themes that emerged from the data analysis include: a) staff perspective of meaningful therapeutic activities for residents with dementia, b) therapeutic activities contribute to mood improvement, c) therapeutic activities stimulate the mind, d) therapeutic activities impact stress and anxiety, e) room for improvement of therapeutic activities, f) therapeutic activities allow residents with dementia to grow, g) motivation of residents to participate and engage and, h) improved quality of life. The findings provided beneficial information through staff members' perspective about how therapeutic activities can contribute to the well-being of residents with dementia which assisted the researcher in examining ways that these findings can assist in implications for additional social work research.
The Courage to Speak: Breaking the Silence of Sexual Assault in the African American Community

By Kiana Williams

Chair: Katharine Hill, MPP, PhD, LISW
Cultural Advisor: Valandra, PhD, MSW, MBA, LISW
Committee Members: Theresa Neal, LICSW; Katie Sample, MSW

Sexual assault is a heinous crime that plagues individuals, families, and communities. The stigma associated with this crime often prevents those who are victimized, from telling anyone about these occurrences. Although both men and women, regardless of demographics, are sexually assaulted, the experiences of African American women were of particular interest to the researcher. African American survivors face cultural and societal pressures, which significantly inhibit them from breaking the silence after being assaulted. In response, the researcher investigated the following question: What empowers African American women to speak up after their sexual assault? This was a qualitative study; participants were interviewed using a semi-structured method. The sample for this study was identified as a non-probability, judgment, and snowball sample. Three different populations were interviewed to gain a holistic view on this topic: African American survivors, African American professionals/community advocates, and Non-African American professionals/community advocates. Three participants were included in this study. Respondent 1 (R1) was a White professional, Respondent 2 (R2) was an African American survivor, and Respondent 3 (R3) was an African American survivor and community advocate. It was discovered that the presence of social support and proper education about sexual assault are key components that can reduce stigma, liberate survivors, and empower African American women to speak up about being sexually assaulted. There are limitations to these findings due to having a non-representative population, non-probability sampling method, and small sample size. However, with more research on this topic, the implications can provide a guide for prevention programs and outreach within the African American community.
Parents’ Perspectives on Children with Cancer and their Adjustment to School after Treatment

By Lauren E. Woppert

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Diane Rowe, MSW, LGSW, Karen Jensen, MSW, LICSW

When a child is diagnosed with cancer, it impacts every facet of their life including their school experience and peer relationships. This research explored parents’ perspectives on how their child adjusted to school and peer relationships after a cancer diagnosis and treatment. This study distributed a survey that asked questions about the child’s cancer diagnosis, treatment, return to school, and peer relationships through quantitative and qualitative questions. Fifteen parents of children diagnosed with cancer completed the survey. Results indicated that parents educated the school and child’s class about their child’s diagnosis and sought help from different school support programs. Parent respondents wrote how their children were able to maintain peer relationships and were supported by their classmates during and after treatment for cancer. The findings of this study are limited because of the convenience sampling method and small sample size. The strengths and limitations of the study, implications for social work practice, and directions for future research are also outlined.
From Dyad to Triad: Parental Negotiation of First-Time Parents

By Danielle M. Yanez

Research Chair: Dr. David Roseborough, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Jackie Hagen, LGSW; Mary Solz, LSW

Becoming a first-time parent can be a major transition for a marital dyad as they begin a new journey in life with their child. While there is a lot of research already surrounding marriage and parenthood, there is little regarding parental negotiation. The purpose of this study was to find ways in which married couples who are first-time parents negotiate and make decisions related to values and making plans for their child’s future as examples. The research design for this study was qualitative, exploratory, and consisted of six in-person interviews that utilized open ended questions. Eleven adult participants were interviewed for this study. The findings of this study identified four emerging overall themes that came from the interviews. These themes include: the experience of transitioning into parenthood, dyad protection, beliefs and values based on family origin, and negotiation of decisions. It is important for social workers to understand how the role of first-time parents affects the marital dyad and the child.
Engaging Families to Prevent Chronic Truancy

By Christine Zins

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Avis Fink, MSW, LICSW; Eric Jayne, BSW, LSW

Truancy continues to be a nation-wide problem that is destroying the opportunity for educational success and future employment for countless adolescents. This complex social issue has been found to have many factors that contribute to it, while at the same time, this issue contributes to many other risk factors in a youth’s life. The purpose of this project was to explore the relationship between the professional school staff and families that have students experiencing chronic truancy and to distinguish effective interventions and the contributing factors to this social issue. Using a qualitative design, six volunteer middle school professional staff were interviewed regarding their perceptions about the effective way to engage a family in the intervention process of conquering the student’s absenteeism, while also looking at effectiveness in family engagement. The data was analyzed using grounded theory to analyze the data from the transcriptions. The interview responses were then linked to the literature review. The findings indicated that all of the professionals valued the importance of building a strong relationship with the families and engaging them in the process to eliminate the unexcused absences. In addition it was discovered that the school personnel found it beneficial to have some rigid systems in place, but at times these rigid systems could be detrimental to the engagement process with the school and family. These findings accentuate the importance of a positive school and family relationship to prevent chronic truancy.