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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.
What is the Phenomenology of Complicated Grief in Parentally Bereaved Children and Adolescents?

By Jeanne Abicht

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: George Baboila, MSW, LICSW and Cecile Kudela, MSW, LGSW

The experience of parental loss in childhood and adolescence is often a trauma unparalleled as the most stressful period during the first decades of life. The literature cites contributory factors in the etiology of parentally bereaved children's grief experience as relationship to the deceased parent, circumstances of parental death, and adjustment of the surviving parent. The research explored the contextual variables that are protective or increase the risk of vulnerability of complicated grief. Eight adults who experienced the death of a parent or custodial grandparent during childhood or adolescence were interviewed. Primary themes related to complicated grief include the surviving parent's grief response, pre-existing internal toolbox, normalization and affirmation of the grief experience, and meaning making. The secondary themes include isolation and disenfranchised grief, grief as a unique experience, sibling, family, and other support, and experiences of professional support. The relatively small sample size and dearth of cultural diversity is a limitation. Implications for future research include early intervention for at risk children and surviving parents and improved therapeutic modalities for parentally bereaved families.
Preparation of Students with an EBD for Life Post-Graduation: The School Social Worker Perspective

By Stephanie Adix

Research Chair: Kendra J. Garrett, PhD
Committee Members: Morgan Ashwell, MSW, LICSW; Nick Vruno, M.A.

The purpose of this study was to collect data from the perspective of licensed school social workers regarding the preparation of students with an EBD for life post-graduation. This study conducted six interviews with licensed school social workers to learn about their perceptions of post-graduation preparation, strengths, weakness, transition planning and unmet needs. This research study, like other studies found that students with an EBD are unprepared for life post-graduation. Themes noted were the overall lack of preparation, the skill of survival skills, the lack of preparation for further education, lack of realistic goals and expectations, skills learned, lack of parent involvement and unmet needs in the areas of resources, programming and overall communication and connection. Implications for social workers and recommendations for future research are to define a more universal social work role, to connect skills learned in high school to adult life, the need for more resources and programming for this group of students and to gain the perspective of other key stakeholders, such as students, parents and teachers.
Spirituality and Posttraumatic Growth after Sexual Assault

by Richelle Amundson

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, PhD, MSW
Committee Members: Deborah Organ, LICSW; Eva Solomonson, LICSW

The interpersonal nature of sexual assault has been theorized to negatively impact recovery. Access to supportive others is critical to positive outcomes and in particular, to posttraumatic growth. Spirituality may provide access to supportive social and spiritual relationships; however, spirituality can also be a source of increased distress when accessed in less adaptive ways. This research sought to understand how spirituality impacts posttraumatic growth after a sexual assault. The research design was an exploratory, non-probability sample. Respondents were primarily Caucasian and of young adult age. Respondents were more likely to access personal spirituality than communal spirituality. Participants were reached through word-of-mouth and online forums. An online survey was completed by respondents which provided information about demographics, spirituality prior to and after the sexual assault, and the resulting psychological change. Quantitative results were analyzed for descriptive statistics, and qualitative results were analyzed using a grounded theory method. Overall, posttraumatic growth was lower than would be expected among those who have experienced trauma. A positive style of spiritual coping was associated with positive relationships and the strongest posttraumatic growth outcomes, whereas a negative style of spiritual coping was associated with difficulty in relationships and the weakest posttraumatic growth outcomes. Clinical social workers need to consider the influence of spirituality when it is used by clients as a coping strategy after sexual assault and, where necessary, provide additional relational support and motivation to remain engaged in the recovery process.
The Use of Technology Assisted Methods in Therapy: Clinical Social Workers’ Perspectives

By Lilyanna B. Anderson

Research Chair: Sarah M. Ferguson, MA, MSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Rhonda Martin, LICSW; Franki Rezek, MSSW, LICSW, LADC

Technology Assisted Therapy can be considered any form of therapy that uses technology as a mediating force. This could include things such as videoconferencing or Skype, online support groups, text messaging or other media devices. As technology becomes more and more influential in our society, it only makes sense that it would seep into the clinical social work setting and the therapy setting. There is little current research on this topic that focuses on what clinicians’ think about this developing trend. The study set out to determine clinical social workers’ perspectives on the use of technology assisted methods in therapy. A survey was sent to practicing clinical social workers in the state of Minnesota asking questions about their experience with technology assisted methods, positives and negatives of these methods, their willingness to use these methods in their own practice and whether they believed these methods might affect the role of stigma surrounding mental health treatment seeking. The findings showed a great deal of ambivalence and uncertainty about this topic. They were also consistent with the research citing concerns about the therapeutic relationship and pointing out the benefits of wider accessibility. It is clear that more research is needed on this topic and that the field of social work has some growth to accomplish in this area.
Interracial Relationships: Stressors Among Races

By Samuel Anderson

Research Chair: Abel Knochel, Ph.D., MSW, LGSW
Committee Members: George Baboila, MSW, LICSW; Perish Caldwell, MA

This study explored the similarities and differences in stressors that individuals in interracial unions come across, based on the racial makeup of the couple. This study investigated the following research question: What are the fundamental stressors that impact a heterosexual non-White individual that marries a White partner? How, if at all, do these stressors vary by the race of the non-White individual? Twenty videos posted on YouTube under the search term “interracial marriage stress” were found using quota sampling. Ten of the videos had a White male and a non-White female and ten of the videos had a White female and a non-White male. The study used content analysis and found that many individuals in interracial marriage dealt with stress from families’ views on interracial marriage and their geographic location. Historic events (e.g. legacy of slavery and lynchings) affected some of the couples within this data set. Time was a theme; it played a role in healing wounds and participants learned over time ways to deal with the added stress that comes from interracial relationships. This study suggests that more research needs to be conducted on interracial relationships and the different variations of interracial relationships. Educating those that work with interracial couples or their children is needed to address this issue in a more systemic manner.
Parental alcohol use disorder can impact parent-child relationships yet when sober parents become involved in twelve step recovery programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), the AA theoretical philosophies they learn can proactively influence their parent-child relationships. The purpose of this research study was to investigate if twelve step recovery helped sober mothers with their inner healing process, self-discovery of authenticity and improved parent-child relationships when parenting in sobriety. Eight sober mothers were interviewed who attended a twelve step program and were parenting children, or had previous parenting experiences. Sober mothers reflected on how their own twelve step recovery experiences helped them to discover their ‘true’ selves. The utilization of open coding along with inductive and deductive data analysis techniques were used. This study found that twelve step recovery endorsed the inner healing and self-discovery process for the participants who engaged in this research study. Also, the participants articulated how they incorporated twelve step philosophies with their children, which cultivated a reciprocal cycle of inner healing and authenticity, and how personalized inner healing and authenticity further promoted and improved parent-child relationships. This research study demonstrates how AA ideologies reflect a holistic philosophy. These findings emphasized holistic perspectives on the benefits of parenting in sobriety and demonstrated how twelve step philosophies can be used in all aspects of life. This research study highlights the need for continued efforts to support and partner with recovering parents to formulate effective approaches that enhance the protective factors associated with parenting in sobriety.
Social Workers' Perspectives of Psychotropic Drug Use on Children and Adolescents

By Erika Bauer

Research Chair: Karen Carlson, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Amanda Thooft, LICSW; Sharon Gabriel, LISW

Every year in the United States more children are receiving psychotropic medication to deal with mood and behavior interruptions. In fact, more children in the United States are being prescribed these medications than any other country in the world. Even though the long-term consequences of these medications are yet unknown, medical professionals are still prescribing them to children, an age demographic they were not originally approved for, and for longer periods of time than intended. The purpose of this study was to explore social workers’ attitudes about the use of psychotropic drugs on children and adolescents, paying particular attention to the influence past legislation has had on prescription increases, social workers’ perceptions of the harms and benefits associated with medicating youth, and their identified theoretical orientations. Using a quantitative design, 43 social workers registered with the Minnesota Board of Social Workers completed the survey which consisted of eight general information questions and 14 questions from the Social Workers’ General Attitudes about Use of Psychotropic Medication with Youths scale created by Moses and Kirk (2006). Data was analyzed using SPSS to find univariate descriptive and bivariate inferential statistics. The findings from this study were consistent with current research, that social workers view psychotropic drug use on children and adolescents as both beneficial and harmful and helpful, but not necessary. However, unlike existing research, this study lacked a statistically significant relationship between social workers’ theoretical orientation and their attitudes toward medicating youth. This study calls for more extensive research on child psychopharmacology and more attention and emphasis on psychopharmacology in social work educational settings.
How is Social Media Used by Military Families to Communicate During Deployment?

By Lisa Bittner

Research Chair: Kari L. Fletcher, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Brianna Loop, MSW, LICSW; Mary Gehrke, MA, LMFT

As the construct of today’s military has progressed and changed over time to include a more diverse representation of the United States culture, so have families progressed in how to maintain connectedness during periods of absence. The challenge of maintaining communication despite distance and extensive time differentials is often subsidized today through the utilization of social media or electronic forms of communication. This form of communication often serves as a supplement to traditional mediums of communication such as letters, care packages, and telephone calls, offering a more immediate and interactive communicative process to occur between deployed service members and their families. Using a mixed methods online survey, twenty eight service members and their family members responded to questions regarding their current utilization of social media to maintain communication during periods of absence due to deployment. This research specifically examined the Post 9-11 conflicts of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn. Topics explored were respondents’ access to social media mediums, their utilization and frequency of use, barriers to use, and how conflict and difficult conversations are negated through utilization, as well as overall satisfaction. The findings indicated that most respondents had access to social media and utilized its mediums to maintain communication with their family members during deployment. These findings emphasize the importance of having the ability to communicate through difficult conversations or conflict during periods of absence. Emphasis throughout this research pointed to the importance of having access to immediate and interactive communication, pointing to the need for ongoing evaluation and development of technological advances and accessibility for military connected families.
Grief, Loss, and Sexually Transmitted Infections

By Erin Blase

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Benjamin Wolf, MSW, LICSW; Jan Boehlke

Having a sexually transmitted infection (STI) affects people of all ages, races, and cultural backgrounds. Being diagnosed with an STI has implications across the lifespan. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of grief and loss on having a sexually transmitted infection and how these effects manifest across the lifespan of an individual. Using a mixed-methods design, ten individuals responded to an anonymous Qualtrics survey and answered a series of questions related to grief, loss, and having an STI. Data was analyzed using descriptive and open-coding techniques from the survey responses and then linked to the existing literature. The findings indicated that the majority of respondents experienced some type of loss related to having an STI, as well as stigma from society. Also, the findings indicated that several of the respondents experienced some type of positive growth and change as a result of being diagnosed with an STI. These findings outline the need for further research in this area to develop effective social work intervention strategies on a micro, mezzo, and macro level.
Autism Spectrum Disorder: How Parents use Behavior Modification With Their Children

By Jessica M. Boner

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

This qualitative research study explores how parents use behavior modifications with their children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Seven participants, who are mothers of children diagnosed with autism, were interviewed for this study. This research found that essentially, parents use different techniques applied in various ways in specific situations based on the uniqueness of their child and the behaviors displayed. Several themes emerged from this study which includes: challenging behaviors, behavior modifications used, behavior modification becomes a way of life, the need to individualize behavior modifications, behavior modifications will change as the child changes, challenges of having a child with autism, coping strategies, advice to professionals, and finding the joys. The respondents displayed creativity and resiliency in their use of behavior modifications for their children. The challenging behaviors displayed varied among different types of behaviors such as sensory-related, verbally and physically aggressive conduct, lack of social skills, and obsessive behaviors. Additionally, each child had unique characteristics which required techniques to be tailored to him/her. This research study provides further implications to social work practice, in that autism spectrum disorder affects the entire family and supports and resources should encompass the system as a whole. Additionally, social workers must stay abreast on the newest research regarding autism spectrum disorder to provide the best practices.
Renewing Life as a Complementary Approach to Healing

By Linnea Borer

Research Chair: Pa Der Vang, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Liz Peterson, MSW, LICSW; Mary Johnson, Ph.D, R.N.

The Renewing Life program is offered through Pathways Health Crisis Resource Center. It is a unique approach designed to complement conventional medical care for individuals with life-threatening or chronic illness, such as breast cancer. Renewing Life utilizes a manual that participants use as a tool throughout the sessions. Renewing Life has a specifically developed curriculum to assist participants in better understanding and processing the management of their life-threatening disease or chronic illness. It teaches participants to live their lives genuinely in order to get the quality of life they may be seeking.

Pathways Health Crisis Resource Center received a grant from Susan G. Komen to offer the Renewing Life program to low-income women managing a breast cancer diagnosis. Pathways utilized this support to offer the Renewing Life program over the course of an inspirational retreat weekend. This research is meant examine, from the participant’s perspective, how Renewing Life impacted them.

This was a mixed methods study that comprised of a focus group and a survey. The focus group results revealed three consistent themes. It was found that Renewing Life increased self-confidence, increased the feeling of connectedness and a sense of community, and allowed for individuals to better let go of fear they carried and find peace. The survey utilized the Self-Assessment of Change tool, a scale containing word pairs. The word pairs consisted of a positive word and a negative word, for example depressed and hopeful. The results revealed a significant positive difference from the negative word to the positive word; therefore, participants felt more positive feelings about their life after participating in Renewing Life. These results illustrate the impact the Renewing Life program has on participants.
Attitude of Gratitude: Clinician Views on Fostering Gratitude in One Homecare and Hospice Agency

By Amie M. Brandtjen

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, Ph.D., LICSW, L.M.F.T.
Committee Members: Jane Yank Redmond, Ph.D., LICSW, Sarah Olsen, LGSW

The topic of this research project is the facilitation of gratitude-focused interventions into clinical treatment plans with clients facing debility or end of life. This is based on the notion that gratitude is a concept of positive psychology and is consistent with the strengths based approach of the social work profession. Gratitude focused interventions encourage the patient to focus on the positives versus negatives. Five qualitative interviews were conducted with clinical social work professionals. Grounded theory methodology and constant comparative analysis were used to analyze transcribed data. Responses to open ended questions regarding preferred therapy modality, positive and negative aspects of the use of gratitude, how the participants felt they could integrate gratitude focused therapies into their practice, and what might help or hinder the use of gratitude in practice, generated the four major themes. These included 1) universality of gratitude, 2) gratitude in practice that included the use of Life Review techniques and modeling grateful behavior, 3) the importance of caregiver support with the use of gratitude, and 4) assessment needs and common barriers to the facilitation of gratitude. Participant responses are highlighted with the use of direct quotes. Some findings are consistent with best practices in the homecare and hospice setting that identifies the need for Life Review and assessment of patient status. Recommendations for future research and implications for social work practice are also discussed.
The Impact of Personal Therapy on Therapists’ Use of Self-Disclosure

By Anne L. Breckbill

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Karen F. Heegaard, MA, LP; Diane E. Bauer, MSW, LICSW

This study explored how therapists’ subjective experiences as client recipients of therapist self-disclosure impact their attitudes about therapist self-disclosure. Additionally, it investigated how therapists’ personal therapy and theoretical orientation impact their use of self-disclosure with clients. Two specific types of therapist self-disclosure were studied: 1) emotional disclosures – or self-involving/transparent disclosures – in which therapists allow clients to see their emotional responses or reactions to the dynamics of the therapy session, and 2) personal disclosures – or self-disclosing/self-revealing disclosures – in which therapists share non-immediate personal information with clients. The nonprobability sample consisted of licensed psychotherapists who themselves had been psychotherapy clients. In an anonymous online survey, participants (n=101) reported on their experiences with therapist self-disclosure as clients and their subsequent use of self-disclosure as therapists. Data were analyzed using Spearman’s Rank Order Correlations (quantitative) and Grounded Theory method (qualitative). Findings indicated both moderate and strong significant correlations between therapists’ experiences as recipients of therapist self-disclosure and their use of self-disclosure with clients. Regarding both disclosure types, respondents were distinctly positive about their experiences of their therapists self-disclosing to them and identified the therapeutic alliance as the primary beneficiary of such disclosures. While respondents reported experiencing emotional disclosures negatively less frequently than personal disclosures, there is some indication that – when a disclosure is experienced negatively – the risk of damaging the therapeutic alliance may be greater for emotional disclosures than for personal disclosures. No significant relationships were found between theoretical orientation and respondents’ experiences or use of therapist self-disclosure. Based on the findings in this exploratory study, further study into the impact of personal therapy on therapists’ use of self-disclosure is warranted.
The Impact of Electronic Communication and Social Media on Child Welfare Practice

By Sarah. K. Breyette

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, Ph.D., MSW, MPP, LISW
Committee Members: Tracy Crudo, MSW; Faith Jaspersen, LICSW, MSW; Mary Lennick, MSW

The present literature regarding the intersection of technology and child welfare practice has primarily focused on the impact of these technologies on youth and families. There has been very little research that has focused on how child welfare workers perceive the direct impact that electronic communication and social media use has had on their practice. The research questions guiding this exploratory study asked child welfare workers whether or not the use of electronic communication and social media has made working with youth easier, if use of these technologies has introduced any difficulties, and if any challenges and/or benefits of using these technologies have emerged that have not previously been discovered in the literature. One hundred and thirty-six child welfare workers completed an anonymous online survey addressing their experiences regarding the impact that electronic communication and social media use has had on their practice. The findings indicate that e-mail and text message use have made work with youth easier, yet distinct difficulties have emerged for practitioners in relation to electronic communication and social media use. Within the qualitative findings, new elements have emerged including issues with harassment and the ethics related to monitoring clients’ online activities. Future research is necessary in order to address the limitations of this study and to stay current with the impact that emerging technologies might have on social work practice.
Barriers of Using Illness Management and Recovery with Adults with Severe Mental Illness

By Jennifer Anne Brummer

Research Chair: Rejean Moone, PhD
Committee Members: Lindy Fortin, LICSW, Steve Carlson, PhD.

Adults living with severe mental illness experience a broad spectrum of difficulties, such as visual and olfactory hallucinations, internal dialogue or hearing voices, depression, anxiety, homelessness, substance use, and difficulty managing daily activities and relationships. The Illness Management and Recovery curriculum has been revealed to be a useful evidence-based practice or approach to working with individuals with severe mental illness. The Illness Management and Recovery workbook promotes symptom management in adults by creating a vision and following a step-by-step problem solving process. This recovery model is tailor to the individual and requires their input on a step-by-step path to recovery. However, little research has been done to explore the barriers for practitioners when implementing Illness Management and Recovery with adults with severe mental illness. This study investigated the practitioner’s barriers of using Illness Management and Recovery with individuals living with severe mental illness. By conducting a semi-structured interview with a mental health practitioners that specializes in utilizing IMR when working with individuals seeking recovery from a mental health diagnosis. Five major themes emerged from this data analysis: 1. training and supervision, 2. initiating mental health services with IMR, 3. practitioner and client engagement strategies, 4. the role of the practitioner, and 5. organizational support. The findings act as support to previous findings regarding Illness Management and Recovery. However, the findings also relate the barriers directly to the successful recovery of adults that have experienced severe mental illness and point to the need for continued efforts to provide effective training and supervision to practitioners in a national capacity.
Promoting Hope and Resilience in Individuals with Parkinson’s Disease

By Emily Brunner

Research Chair: Mike Chovanec, Ph.D., LICSW (Chair)
Committee Members: Gretchen Scheffel, MSW, LISW; Ted Bowman, MDiv

The purpose of this project was to explore how or if social workers promote hope and resiliency in individuals’ with Parkinson’s disease. Using a qualitative design, eight licensed social workers throughout the United States, who had two to thirty years of experience working with individuals with Parkinson’s disease. The participants reflected on their experiences and observations of hope and resiliency in individuals with Parkinson’s disease. The researcher analyzed data by looking for themes and commonalities between the participant responses during the interviews. The interviews were transcribed and linked to previous related literature. The findings indicated that all of the participants did discuss hope and resilience with their clients. However, the participants address hope and resilience in variety of ways. The participants discussed how positivity, education, depression, and unrealistic hope could influence individuals, families and the community. The findings of the study demonstrated a need for future research in promoting hope and resilience in other chronic conditions.
Modifying Psychotherapy When Working with an Adult Diagnosed with a Co-Occurring Intellectual Disability and Mental Disorder

By Jesse Virgil Buchner

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D., LICSW, ACT
Committee Members: Stacey Bishofsky, LICSW, LADC, LCSW; Steven Bingner, MS, LP

Adults diagnosed with an intellectual disability are three to four times more likely than the general population to be diagnosed with a mental disorder. There are traditionally four classifications of intellectual disability: mild, moderate, severe, and profound. Each classification has characteristics that limit the cognitive functioning and abilities of the individual affected. This qualitative research was developed to explore the question of what might constitute some emerging best practices used in modifying psychotherapy when working with adults with a diagnosed intellectual disability and mental disorder. Five current and former psychotherapists and one psychiatrist served as respondents for the project. The psychotherapists were all asked the same semi-structured questions; however the questions most specifically geared toward the psychotherapists were modified for the interview with the psychiatrist. After the interviews were transcribed and coded, four initial themes emerged. These themes spoke to strengths, collaboration and the caregiving process, the role of groups, and “a variety of approaches used.” The respondents agreed that looking for clients’ strengths and collaborating with caregivers, family and guardians of their clients were the most important aspects of finding effective ways to work with adult clients diagnosed with a co-occurring intellectual disability and mental disorder. Other findings are explored as well and suggestions for future studies are offered to build upon this pilot.
Mandated Reporting and Child Maltreatment: Training and Experiences of Minnesota Teachers

By Allison N. Butts

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, Ph.D., MPP, LISW, MSW
Committee Members: Lisa Grant, M.S.E, L.S.W; Laura Eiden, M.A.

The state of Minnesota has no requirement for the training of mandated reporters for child maltreatment and teachers account for nearly 24% of child protection reports (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2013b). This study looks to gain perspective on teachers’ experiences with mandated reporting, if and where they have received training on mandated reporting and child maltreatment, where they believe they should be receiving training and what they feel it should include. A mixed-mode online questionnaire with questions from the Teachers and Child Abuse Questionnaire, ECAQ and created by the author were used to survey 65 Minnesota teachers (Kenny 2001a; Kenny, 2004). This study found that over half of teachers surveyed have had minimal or inadequate preparation about mandated reporting and child maltreatment in their preservice education or within a school district they work. Findings also suggest that many teachers feel prepared in their role as a mandated reporter; however evidence of how they would report indicates that they may not be as prepared as they believe to be. Responses also show that some school districts may have their own mandated reporting procedures that may not be congruent with the state law. Teachers felt they should have additional training in their school districts and preservice education that includes awareness of symptoms of abuse and neglect and the process of filing a report. Findings indicate that a more uniform training system should be implemented for teachers about mandated reporting and child maltreatment due to the discrepancies in knowledge across the profession.
Research suggests that when a patient experiences a stroke, the lives of the patient and family of the patient can be impacted in many different ways. The purpose of this project was to identify the ways social workers work with stroke patients in the hospital, and how do they identify mental health symptoms in these patients. Using a qualitative design, four social workers, currently providing services in hospitals were interviewed. Data was analyzed using deductive approaches in which themes were developed from the interview responses. The findings indicated that most mental health symptoms are identified in patients, and then treated once the patient leaves hospitalization. Also, social workers have ways to identify general mental health themes, but do not have a standard mental health inventory or screen. The findings demonstrate that stroke patients and families of the patients may be overwhelmed, but still need support and compassion. This support could come from the social worker assigned to the family, or possibly from a volunteer in order to help normalize and care for the patient.
Social Worker and Teacher Perceptions of the Achievement Gap in Minnesota

By Paul W. Collier

Research Chair: Dr. Rajean P. Moone, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Theresa Neal, MSW, LICSW; Theresa Pease, MSW, LICSW

The ongoing impact of the achievement gap has become an increasing issue in Minnesota. The purpose of this research project was to explore the attitudes of school social workers and teachers to see if there were any significant differences in the perception of the professionals who work with children directly affected by the gap. Using quantitative data analysis, 51 respondents, including 13 licensed social workers and 38 licensed teachers, were surveyed electronically, via Qualtrics, survey creation/distribution software. All of the questions were created based on findings in the research. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings indicated that race and experience did not affect attitudes toward the achievement gap. However, the research did find significance in social workers being unanimous in believing African American students were treated differently. While a greater number of teachers were surveyed, the findings did evoke implications for further research.
Perspectives on Living Situations for Children with Classic Autism

By Meghan Constantini

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, PhD, MSW, MPP, LISW
Committee Members: Georgia Lane, MSW, LGSW; Kent E. Rhein, MSW, Ed.S., LICSW

The purpose of this qualitative study was to interview parents of children with severe autism and professionals work in residential settings to understand their perspectives of living situations for children with severe autism. Challenging behaviors occur with more frequency and intensity in children with severe autism. Living situations have been shown to have a negative impact on behaviors and the quality of life of a child with autism, as a typical home setting can be over stimulating and overwhelming to children with autism due to the nature of their diagnosis. (Nasir & Tahir, 2012). Findings from previous research show that children with autism have individualized needs and thrive in settings that are designed to meet the unique needs of autism (Feinberg & Vacca, 2000). This study found that challenging behaviors in autism increase parental stress and that more public awareness is needed. Additionally, ideal living situations and suggestions for social workers who work with families impacted by autism were described.
The Pursuit of Social Justice: Narratives from Clinical Social Workers

By Kate Cowley

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph.D. LICSW
Committee Members: Mari Ann Graham, Ph.D.; Chelle York, LICSW

Clinical social workers today face increasingly complex social justice issues. An ongoing discourse around the principle of social justice in clinical social work is critical in order for the clinical social work profession to meet its' social justice goals. Studies indicate the importance of having a conceptual framework of social justice to effectively apply social justice to practice, and the need for continual reevaluation and creation of new methods of applying social justice in clinical practice. This study obtained data from a purpose sample (n = 6) of licensed clinical social workers in a range of mental health settings. Semi-structured interviews produced qualitative data regarding participants’ demographics, their conceptualizations of social justice, and ways that they applied social justice to clinical practice. The findings support previous research that suggests that a conceptual framework is necessary for effective social justice interventions in clinical social work. Participants in this study linked the pursuit of social justice with increasing access to resources, as well as a non-pathologizing, person-in-environment perspective. Participants also indicated that the principle of social justice is a source of pride for the social work profession and should be preserved and encouraged. Future research to explore more creative and effective interventions to further social justice goals in the social work profession, as well as an examination of barriers to the pursuit of social justice in clinical social work, is recommended.
An Analysis of Religious and Spiritual Beliefs and Behaviors in College Students

By Allison Culey

Research Chair: Lisa R. Kiesel, PhD, MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Renee Hepperlen, LICSW, Sarah Hoverson, M.A.Ed.

There has been a trend of moving toward less dogmatic approaches to religion in the United States and young adults infrequently acknowledging religion and spirituality. The current study was designed to understand the religious and spiritual behaviors in university students in order to develop methods to better cultivate religious and spiritual growth. Using a quantitative design, thirty participants recruited from a historically female, religiously-affiliated university reported on their religious and spiritual beliefs and behaviors. Data were analyzed with the use of statistical tests, such as Pearson R correlation and Chi Squared analysis. The results supported a change in the ways in which young adults practice religion and spirituality in comparison to previous generations. However, the results showed that students viewed religiosity as a form of strength and comfort. These findings highlight the ways in which changes in religious and spiritual practices should be addressed in university students, as well as how professionals who work with university students can use religion and spirituality as a source of strength and comfort.
Loss of the Parent-Child Relationship after Divorce: Does Custodial Arrangement Matter?

By Sara M. Czapiewski

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Harriet Kohen, LICSW; Linda Van Ryn, B.S.N.

Today about 50 percent of marriages end in divorce and 40 percent of these divorces have children involved. Divorce can be a traumatic event and because of this divorce can be considered an ambiguous loss. This study looked at the losses that could be experienced by children from a parental divorce. Using attachment theory as the lens, literature was reviewed surrounding the effects of divorce on children. After completing the literature review the loss of the parent-child relationship was the primary focus for this study. A quantitative study was conducted to answer the question: does the custodial arrangement alleviate or exacerbate the loss of the parent-child relationship after a parental divorce? A total of 74 respondents, who experienced a parental divorce as a child, completed a survey to determine their legal custodial arrangement after the divorce and their Parent Child Relationship Survey (PCRS) scale score for both mother and father. The findings of this study concluded that there is a significant difference between a respondent in one legal custodial arrangement to a respondent with a different legal custodial arrangement and their mean PCRS scale score for father but not for mother.

Recommendations for further research of other factors that can influence respondent’s parent-child relationship and research before and after the divorce occurred would be beneficial. Implications for social workers were also discussed in providing more education to parents and children experiencing a divorce to support resilience.
Effectiveness of Adult Rehabilitative Mental Health Services in Mental Health Recovery

By Katie L. DeFelice

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Steve Carlson, Psy.D.; Martha Quick, MSW, LGSW

Adult Rehabilitative Mental Health Services (ARMHS) is a Minnesota based psychiatric rehabilitation program for adults whose ability to function in daily life has been impaired due to the symptoms of mental illness. The goals set and actual outcomes achieved by clients during participation in ARMHS were examined in a secondary data analysis using the CHIME recovery model (Connectedness, Hope, Identity, Meaning in life, and Empowerment) to determine the effectiveness of the program in assisting clients recover from mental illness. Outcomes described were largely mapped to the areas of Connectedness, Meaningful activity, and Empowerment, which may be related to the behavioral orientation of goal development. Overall, the majority of outcomes described successful achievement of goals, supporting ARMHS as an effective service for assisting in recovery from mental illness. Implications for this study are the continued need to use consumer driven measurement tools like CHIME to assess recovery from the perspective of the client rather than assessments driven by the medical model. The improvement of outcome evaluation forms to integrate more accurate ways of measuring the components of recovery would improve the type and quality of data collected during the reassessment process.
Betrayed partners experience a great amount of changes, losses, and grief following the discovery of an extramarital affair. The following study examines the stories of two women and four men from various areas across the United States who were the betrayed partner in a marriage that experienced extramarital affairs. A qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain information to answer the following research question: What are the betrayed partner’s experiences with grief and loss following the discovery of an extramarital affair within their marriage? Several themes arose from the findings including: 1) immediate thoughts, feelings, and behaviors such as shock, confusion, anger, and disbelief, 2) wanting to fix the relationship using counseling and salvaging the relationship, 3) life alterations caused by the affair including increase in self-esteem, not wanting to marry again, having to continue interactions with the betrayer, learning that not everyone is untrustworthy, emotional instability, and legal action, 4) grief and loss including loss of the relationship, divorce, shared custody of the children, loss of their partner’s family, loss of friends, shattered dreams and expectations, physical and emotional losses, loss of trust, adjusting to being primary custody provider, and financial hardships. Participants identified several coping strategies such as: family, religion, friends, individual counseling, reading books, granting forgiveness, and attending support groups. This study provides a broad look at the losses and grief, which are often times overlooked aspects of infidelity.
Christian Therapists’ Perceptions on the Use of Prayer in Therapy

By Paul J. Dirkse

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Kerin Logstrom, MA, LMFT; Ben Kimball, MA, LGSW

Research has been demonstrating the benefits of utilizing spiritual and religious interventions to mitigate symptoms of emotional difficulties in clients that enter therapy. This study specifically aims to investigate Christian therapists’ perceptions on the use of prayer in psychotherapy. Four licensed Christian therapists were interviewed in regard to the following areas: demographics, how prayer is used in therapy, therapist’s perceptions on the use of prayer in therapy, and therapist’s perceptions on the effectiveness of prayer in mitigating symptoms of emotional difficulty. The major themes from the data demonstrate that Christian therapists approach the use of prayer in a client-focused and non-directive way, the use and efficacy of prayer is dependent upon the client, and that prayer has positive outcomes for the client in regard to mitigating symptoms of emotional difficulties. The findings of the current study highlights the sensitive nature of utilizing prayer in therapy with clients, and that it can also be beneficial, both for the therapeutic relationship and in mitigating symptoms of emotional difficulties in clients.
Reconceptualizing Autism Spectrum within Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition: Clinicians’ Perspectives

By Lori A. Dobson

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Danny Porter, MSW, LICSW; Danae Lund, Ph.D., LP

This qualitative study examined the clinicians’ perspectives on the reconceptualization of Autism Spectrum Disorder within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (2013), also referred to as DSM-5. Data were collected through six semi-structured interviews (n = 6) with clinical professionals who work directly with children and adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), otherwise known as Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD). Clinical professionals included licensed independent clinical social workers, licensed clinical social workers, and licensed psychologists. Grounded theory method was used with open coding to analyze various themes and subthemes within transcribed interviews. This study examined participants’ perceptions on overall changes to ASD criterion in DSM-5, participants’ views on strengths and challenges with new ASD criterion in DSM-5, and participants’ perspectives on implications of DSM-5. The findings from this study were consistent with similar literature and research on the changes of ASD from DSM-IV to DSM-5 and provided additional information. Professionals both support and criticize changes to the ASD diagnostic criteria in DSM-5.
Empirically tested research suggests the effectiveness and applicability of mindfulness interventions in psychotherapy to treat or provide supplemental treatment to a variety of mental health disorders, to improve the therapeutic alliance, and to promote self-care and use of self in clinicians. Despite the successes of mindfulness in the mental health community, only a select culture of clinicians utilize mindfulness techniques in their practice. In order to explore how mindfulness can impact the therapeutic process, a qualitative study was conducted. Seven clinicians who currently practice mindfulness and who utilize mindfulness-based and mindfulness-informed interventions in clinical practice were interviewed. The interviews explored the use of mindfulness in psychotherapy in four sub-topics: 1. How mindfulness can impact the clinician in terms of self-care and perceived therapeutic ability; 2. How mindfulness education/techniques can impact the client; 3. How relational mindfulness can affect the therapeutic relationship between clinician and client; and 4. The challenges and implications of using mindfulness in a therapeutic setting. Using grounded-theory to analyze the data, seven major themes were suggested in the findings. The themes consisted of the following: self-care; affect regulation in the clinician and the client; populations with sub themes of anxiety, trauma, and psychosis; client and clinician relationship/connection; language; access; and culture. The findings imply that mindfulness is beneficial for clinician self-care and as an intervention for a variety of mental health populations by allowing for greater affect regulation. The findings also imply that mindfulness can positively impact the therapeutic relationship by allowing the therapist to remain grounded, present, and authentic in interactions with clients. However, the findings identified that language and cultural aspects may create barriers to the effectiveness of mindfulness. Despite the identified themes, the limited sample size did not allow for generalization of the findings. Further research should be directed towards the understanding of how mindfulness can impact the clinician, client, and therapeutic relationship in clinical education and practice.
Narrative Therapy: Similarities Among Clinicians and Practice Implications

By Mikaela R. Dunn

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MA, MSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Laura Nespbor, MSSW, LICSW; Naomi Schwenke, MA, Ph.D Candidate

Narrative therapy is a philosophy-based approach to therapy that emerged in the 1980's, and has been incorporated into various practice settings. The purpose of this study was to identify if there are commonalities among those who practice narrative therapy. In addition, this study inquired whether there are commonalities in the application of narrative therapy. Eleven mental health clinicians in the Twin Cities filled out an online mixed quantitative and qualitative survey, via Qualtrics. Survey responses indicated similarities among those who practice narrative therapy with the following identified themes: formation of clinical identity, power of words, belief in the possibility of multiple stories, and positioning of the therapist. Survey responses indicated differences in the application of narrative therapy with the following identified themes: training and range of practice incorporation. Further research would be beneficial to explore the settings in which narrative therapy is being utilized and how clinicians incorporate narrative therapy with other therapeutic modalities.
This research study was interested in assessing school social workers’ attitudes towards strength–based education. It was hypothesized that school social workers would demonstrate favorability towards strength–based educational principles, but not without some initial hesitations. Identifying these attitudes would highlight receptivity of social work professionals within the school systems towards strength–based education. An informed consent letter along with a research questionnaire was emailed out to 140 school social workers within the Minneapolis School District. The questionnaire included inclusionary and demographic questions in addition to nine strength–based questions that attempted to assess for the participant’s attitude towards these variables. Qualtrics was used to organize and analyze the data. Out of 140 participants, four completed the survey; causing the results to not be statistically significant. The results, however, did demonstrate favorability towards strength–based variables among all participants. The results also found correlations among licensure and employment status: LICSW participants and those employed for 1–2 years rated strength–based variables more favorable when compared to the other groups. Due to the small sample size and the lack of available research within this area, additional studies should be conducted.
Mindfulness and Well-Being

By Shawn R. Englund-Helmeke

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MA, MSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Carey Winkler, MSW, LICSW; Leslie Colerin, MSW, LISW

Mindfulness practices, including sitting meditation, walking meditation, yoga, and qigong, have been used to promote mental health and physical well-being in general populations. Mindfulness practices are also being incorporated into therapies used to treat mental illness, and to promote mental health and well-being (Carmody & Baer, 2007; Miller et al., 1995; Reibel et al., 2001). This study attempts to determine if there is an association between mindfulness practices, levels of measured mindfulness, and physical and psychological well-being. These variables were examined in a sample of 25 adults from a large Midwestern city who were predominately female, in their 50s and 60s, and who practiced various forms of mindfulness such as sitting meditation, walking meditation, yoga, or qigong for an average of 6 hours per week. Results of this study indicate that an increased mindfulness history is associated with increased emotional functioning and emotional well-being. Specifically, it suggests that the longer someone has had a mindfulness practice, the healthier they are in terms of emotional functioning and well-being. Emotional functioning is defined by the extent to which emotional problems affect the amount and quality of work, the amount and quality of other activities, and how much one has accomplished within the past 4 weeks. Emotional well-being is defined by how much time someone has felt nervousness, cheerfulness, calmness, peace, sadness, and happiness within the past 4 weeks. Overall, this study suggests that mindfulness practices are relevant to clinical social work practice since social work serves populations that struggle with psychological problems and with social and occupational functioning.
Hospice Social Workers’ Perspectives on Contributing Factors Influencing Compassion Satisfaction

By C. Apryl Falk

Research Chair: Rajean Moone, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Gretchen Scheffel, MSW, LISW; Deborah M. Goulet, MSW, LICSW

This paper explores hospice social workers’ experiences with regards to compassion satisfaction and their work. Existing research on the topic of compassion satisfaction recognizes that it could be the mitigating factor in preventing compassion fatigue, or even worse burnout among individuals with highly stressful professions. The proposed factors that help increase compassion satisfaction are utilizing self-care methods, education, training material, supervision, and organizational support (Alkema, Linton & Davies, 2008; Adams, Boscarino & Figley, 2006; Harr 2013; & Slocum et al., 2013; Conrad & Kellar-Guenther, 2006). The sample of this study, which included eight hospice social workers, participated in a thirty to forty-five minute semi-structured interview. Data was analyzed using grounded theory for theme development. The findings indicate the personal and professional aspects influencing professionals’ satisfaction with their work. Findings also suggest expanding the research to other aspects of social work and the possibility of implementing the results for greater amounts of satisfaction.
Health Care Professionals’ Perspectives on Their Patients’ Access to Hospice Care

By Tammy Ferderer

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Beth Bouman, MSW, LGSW; Sarah Clough, RN

Hospice is available to those who have been diagnosed with a terminal prognosis and have less than six months of life left. Although these benefits are available for much longer, most people are only utilizing hospice care during their very last days of life, less than 20 days. This short length of stay also does not allow the patient time to take full advantage of all the services that hospice has to offer. There seems to be barriers for individuals to receive a timely enrollment into hospice, whether it is the healthcare providers, the patients themselves, or their families. The purpose of this study was to take a look at ways doctors, nurses, and social workers promote or hinder access to hospice for their patients. If patients are eligible for hospice when they have less than six months to live, why are the majority waiting until the last few days or hours? The researcher utilized a mixed methods research design. An online survey through Qualtrics was available to doctors, nurses, and social workers. The final sample consisted of 14 doctors, nurses, and social workers. The researcher used computer software, Qualtrics, for descriptive data analysis. A qualitative content analysis was utilized to determine emerging patterns and themes gathered from the online survey. The findings indicated the same percentage of the respondents, agreed their professional education and training trained them to help patients understand their terminal diagnosis, yet they disagreed that their professional education and training prepared them to know when a hospice referral would be appropriate for those same patients. These findings also indicated that the majority of respondents still feel that the physician is responsible for making a referral to hospice. The social work profession needs to find a way to show the doctors and nurses that they are capable to assist with these patients and might even be a better choice to have these hard discussions with these patients and families as social workers are trained to work with these difficult issues.
The Metaphors They Carry: Exploring How Veterans Use Metaphor to Describe Experiences of PTSD and the Implications for Social Work Practice

By Patrick S. Foley

Research Chair: Collin Hollidge, Ph.D., LICSW

Working with military veterans poses significant challenges for social work practitioners. Among the most notable are learning to appreciate military culture, understanding military jargon, and engaging veterans who have experienced Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The purpose of this project was to explore veterans’ use of metaphor in describing experiences of PTSD and to consider the therapeutic value of metaphor for social work practitioners. Using a secondary data analysis design, 359 online video interview segments of 56 veterans were reviewed with respect to the way that metaphor was used to describe experiences of PTSD. The metaphors identified in the secondary data were analyzed inductively and deductively by deriving themes from the metaphors that veterans used and associating them to conceptual themes identified in the literature on military culture. The findings indicate that veterans make use of metaphor to describe how PTSD once dominated their life, how they came to manage their PTSD symptoms, and how they used their experience of PTSD to promote a survivor’s mission. The findings also suggest that the metaphors that veterans use can also be associated with the conceptual themes identified by the research. These findings underscore the value of using metaphor in therapy with veterans who have PTSD as metaphor has been shown to facilitate cultural accommodation, symptom mitigation, and narrative integration.
The Relationship Between Child Protection Workers and School Social Workers

By Daniel S. Gibbel

Research Chair: Karen Carlson, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Dana Hagemann, LSW; Tricia Sedlacek MSW, LGSW

This study explored how both school social workers and child welfare workers communicated with one another. By using Qualtrics as a data collection method, both school social workers and child welfare workers from a variety of school districts were surveyed. Qualitative and quantitative questions were asked in order to discover whether there is a lack of professional communication between child welfare workers and school social workers. The information learned from the study will help both school social workers and child welfare workers discover how their roles could be improved or possibly changed for the betterment of the field and the clients. All the data collected was compared and contrasted with the literature review, and by members of a committee. The themes discovered was a difference of opinions on confidentiality and cultural attunement. Also, discussion regarding frustrations between child welfare workers and school social workers were highlighted. Possible solutions to these problems were given in the findings.
Spirituality, Religiosity, and Gerotranscendence

By Rachael C. Girard

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Mari Ann Graham, Ph.D., MSW; Leola Furman, Ph.D., MSW

Gerotranscendence is a new theory of human development that extends to old age. This developmental process is characterized by a shift in metaperspective from a realistic view of the world to a more transcendent or cosmic perspective. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between age, gender, spirituality, and religiosity on gerotranscendence. Qualitative surveys were distributed to 174 residents of an independent living unit in the Midwest. The survey was used to measure respondents’ age, gender, spirituality, religiosity, and gerotranscendence. The finding did not support the hypothesis that age correlated with level of gerotranscendence. Demographic characteristics of the sample could have skewed the statistics. The relationship between gender and gerotranscendence could not be analyzed due to the lack of responses from males. Both spirituality and religiosity had a significant, positive correlate to gerotranscendence, with spirituality showing a slightly stronger correlation. These results indicate that although both variables are important contributing factors to one’s sense of gerotranscendence, spirituality seems to be the broader concept that incorporates characteristics of religiosity. Implications for developing spirituality and religiosity in the elderly such as staff education, spiritual/religious diversity training, and including spirituality and religiosity as part of a holistic treatment plan, are discussed.
How Does Education and Experience Impact Therapist Self-Disclosure Among Clinical Social Workers?

By Ashley Grahek

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Daniel Porter, MSW, LICSW; Jon Koll, MS, LP

This mixed methods study asks clinical social workers about their experience with therapist self-disclosure. Clinical social workers (n=86) completed an online survey asking them about their understanding and use of self-disclosure, their comfort and competence in using self-disclosure, their experience and education regarding self-disclosure, and how education, licensure, training, and supervision might be strengthened or expanded to address the use of self-disclosure in clinical practice. Findings suggested that clinical social workers are comfortable and confident in their use of therapist self-disclosure. The majority of respondents believed education, training, and supervision could be strengthened or expanded to better address the use of therapist self-disclosure in clinical practice. Implications for social work practice and suggestions for future research are discussed.
Mental Health Professionals' Use of Adventure Therapy with Couples and Families

By Jason Griswold

Research Chair: Dr. Karen Carlson, MSSW, PhD, LICSW
Committee Members: Franki Rezek, MSSW, LICSW, LADC; Peter Delong, MSW, LICSW

Adventure therapy (AT) is an emerging model of therapy that is being used for work with individuals and families. AT combines experiential education with therapy in a single program (Crisp, 1998). The purpose of this research paper is to explore how social workers integrate adventure therapy into their work with families. The research also explored the current status and implications of AT in terms of being accepted as an evidence based practice. A total of eight mental health professionals who have experience facilitating adventure or wilderness therapy were interviewed. The results of the research support the literature suggesting the field of adventure therapy does not have a standardized approach to program facilitation and training requirements in both therapy and adventure based or wilderness activities (Gillis & Bonney, 1986; Newes & Bandoroff, 2004; Tucker & Norton, 2012). The programs did integrate the core components of adventure therapy as defined in the literature review in this paper. The majority of participants suggested the field of AT is a valid form of therapy considered to be supported by research. Participants acknowledged the difficulty in conducting research using control groups in AT due to the countless variables; participants also questioned the need for quantitative rather than qualitative research to be considered empirically supported therapy. The findings contradict the literature that states a challenge for the field of AT for broader acceptance is the lack of empirical research that contains information that is both valid and reliable (Newes, 2001).
Mental Health in the African American Community and the Impact of Historical Trauma: Systematic Barriers

By Jamie Rose Hackett

Research Chair: Lisa Kiesel, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Stephanie Spandl MSW, LICSW; Cincere Burns

African Americans are overrepresented in high-risk populations and are known to experience disadvantages in mental health services. The purpose of this project was to explore systematic barriers and the implications for clinical practice. This study also explored the relevance and impact of historical trauma. Using a qualitative design, five African American mental health therapists were interviewed regarding their perceptions about the barriers that impact mental health in the African American community. Findings revealed twelve themes that are consistent with previous research. These themes are: historical trauma, stigma, cultural stereotypes, cultural mistrust, informal support, lack of African American professionals, lack of cultural competency, issues in assessment, misdiagnosis, cultural paranoia, treatment, and economic inequality. These themes show the systematic issues that prevent African Americans from seeking and receiving adequate mental health services. Implications from this study, for social work practice, and opportunities for change are also discussed.
The Effects of Interpreter Services on Client Satisfaction in Social Services

By RaeAnn Catherine Hagen

Research Chair: Dr. Pa Der Vang, Ph. D., MSW, LICSW, LCSW
Committee Members: Clare Thompson, MSW, LICSW; Sandra Acuna, Spanish Interpreter

To fulfill a commitment to the social work profession, practitioners must be cognizant of social injustices including factors that inhibit access to information, services, and resources. The purpose of this quantitative study is to examine a current and prevalent concern within American and international societies, the availability of qualified, professional interpreters in social service settings. The research seeks to explore how language barriers affect social work practice. In particular, the research question is to determine the relationship between interpreter service type and client satisfaction. Using a quantitative design, 50 randomly selected native Hmong speakers were polled regarding their satisfaction with social services when using professional interpreters and/or ad hoc (family, friends and community members). The questionnaire designed to measure this relationship emerged through themes in the literature including confidentiality issues and type of interpreter service. Other factors that were examined are demographic information such as age, gender, race, primary language spoken at home, years of education in America, and income. This research is grounded in a conceptual framework emphasizing the ecological paradigm, systems theory and oppression theory. Consideration of environmental factors and beliefs regarding the effects of systemic interactions and personal experience of oppression were examined in the procedural, sampling, and collection processes. The results indicate a significant association between client satisfaction with professional interpreters in social service settings and the degree to which they are confident that the professional interpreter will protect their privacy and confidentiality. Similarly, it was also resulted in a significant association between client satisfaction with ad hoc interpreters in social service settings and the degree to which they are confident that the ad hoc interpreter will protect their privacy and confidentiality. These findings support a need for advancing all interpreter services, professional and ad hoc, accessed in social service agencies including culturally competent education with an emphasis on transparency as well as ethical standards to ensure client’s rights to privacy and confidentiality.
Just don’t take it so seriously: Definitions of Psychological Abuse

By Heather J. Hall

Research Chair: Pa Der Vang, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Hector Matascastillo, MSW, LICSW, LSSW; Trista Matascastillo

The ongoing impact of parental alcoholism on children and adults reflects the interaction of multiple variables. The purpose of this study was to how individuals define psychological abuse, and whether personal experience impacts that definition. Using a qualitative design, ten individuals were interviewed regarding their perceptions about psychological abuse with questions about characteristics, consequences and causes. Content analysis was performed including approaches in which themes were first identified from the interview responses and then viewed in light of prior literature and in light of labeling theory, narrative theory and internalization through object-relations theory. The findings supported prior research and indicated that while there were many varying opinions of how to define psychological abuse, all of them emphasized themes of control, dominance, and manipulation. In addition, participants saw psychological abuse as related (but not necessarily positively) to physical abuse, as sometimes perpetrated with intent and sometimes out of ignorance, as culturally subjective, as taking time to inflict and recover from, as stigmatizing, and as sometimes co-occurring with chemical use. These findings underscore the importance of continuing research to gain results that can be applied more generally, and point to the need for sensitivity around issues of control when working with individuals who have experienced psychological abuse.
Visual Media and ASD: Impact on Social Interactions of Adolescents

By Audra Hanly

Research Chair: Abel Knochel, Ph.D., MSW, LGSW
Committee Members: Kent E. Rhein, MSW, Ed.S., LICSW; Hannah Cushing, MA.E.

There’s a wealth of research that provides evidence of an association between visual media and behavior problems among typically developing children. However, no research was located that examines the association between these variables in adolescents with ASDs. This current study begins to fill this gap in literature while examining possible positive effects of visual media on social behavior through the following research question: What effect does visual media have on the social interactions of adolescents with autism spectrum disorders? The design of the present study was a cross-sectional, quantitative study in which twenty participants completed an online questionnaire. The present study found that adolescents with ASDs who had high language skills more frequently interacted with peers than adolescents with low language skills. This study also found that of adolescents who engage in visual media use weekly or more, 90% play video games, 85% use computers, 80% engage with Apps (via iPad/iPod/Kindle), 75% watch television, 35% use social media and 25% engage with other forms of visual media (DVDs, DS, and using iPad for Wikipedia) which is more than twice as often as another study (Mazurek et al., 2011). This study also showed that adolescents with ASDs who frequently use the computer have fewer interactions about visual media with their siblings. Future research should continue to explore the relationship between visual media and the social interactions of adolescents with ASDs. Interventions using visual media with adolescents with ASDs to help improve their social interactions, should be explored by social workers and other mental health professionals as an intervention.
Joining the Circle: Exploring the Biopsychosocial and Spiritual Effects of Hoop Dance

By Ruth M. Harrington

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Kristy Schutt, MSW, LISW; Jeanna Hensler

An increasing number of people around the world are joining a blossoming community of hoop dancers and reporting positive holistic benefits and sharing stories of transformation and healing attributed to their hooping practice. The hoop is being reported to provide relief and support for people with depression, anxiety, addiction, and PTSD by igniting their bodies and providing a soothing rhythm and a pathway to dance, movement, self-expression, social connections, personal insight, and meditational benefits. This qualitative study explores the biopsychosocial and spiritual effects of hooping reported during seven non-scheduled standardized interviews with professional hoopers. Stories of change and healing are consistently reported and thematic contextualizing and categorizing data analysis revealed significant effects of hooping on participants’ physical, mental, social, and spiritual wellbeing. Significant improvements in participants’ mental health are described, including decreased symptoms of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder, and increased feelings of happiness, meaning and purpose. Participants report achieving self-acceptance, and the repair of the mind-body-spirit connection. The hoop is reported to reduce personal competitive tendencies, and bring people together to create open and accepting communities. The data reveals insight into the therapeutic elements of hooping that are helping people achieve embodiment, transcendence, integration, and healing. The implications of these findings are far reaching and contain deep wells for clinical and community social work practices to draw upon for insight into the nature of emotion, bringing people together for a common good, and the development of affordable, enjoyable, resiliency and holistically-based alternatives to deficits-based models of mental health care.
Young Adult Experiences of Homelessness: Retrospective Explorations of Strengths and Resilience

By Renee Hauwiller

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Lily Tharoor, LICSW; Renette McParland, L.P., LICSW

Homelessness is a devastating experience, regardless of the stage of life in which it is experienced. For homeless young adults, the experience is particularly challenging, as what ought to be a time of exploration and self-discovery becomes a time focused on basic survival. In this research study, I explored the first-hand, lived experiences of young adults \( n = 6 \) who experienced homelessness between the ages of 16 and 24. Using qualitative methods and a strengths perspective focus, I interviewed six young adults about the way they managed and survived homelessness. I analyzed resulting data from interview transcriptions and developed themes, which included the participants’ personal experiences and feelings about “getting through” homelessness, recognition of resources and supports which contributed to their ability to survive and exit homelessness and future hopes and dreams. My findings revealed common themes: study participants drew on internal experiences and coping skills, along with experiences learned from personal history and from homelessness, in order to exit homelessness. The findings also showed participants drew on common resources and supports, including “adopting” a trusted adult for support and taking advantage of more formal systems of support.
The Sibling Experience: Grief and Coping with Sibling Incarceration

By Katie Heaton

Research Chair: Lisa Kiesel, Ph.D
Committee Members: Janet Issacson, MSW, LISW; Pam Bellrichard

To date, the majority of studies examining grief and loss in relation to the impact of incarceration on family members has observed the impact of incarceration on children and parents; primarily how imprisonment affects child attachment to their adult providers. Most often overlooked within these studies have been the siblings of brothers and sisters who have been adjudicated. Specifically of interest to this study was how professionals working with adjudicated youth and their families understand the impact of sibling adjudication on grief and coping styles of their non-offending siblings. Furthermore, how does this knowledge impact working relationships between professionals and these family members? Using a qualitative design, this study examined the impact of sibling incarceration from the professional’s perspective. Six professionals working through some capacity with the criminal justice were interviewed and asked to share their perceptions about the impact incarceration has on non-offending siblings. A total of four themes were identified including: the continual identification of parental over sibling relationships, sibling involvement related to program length, the various feelings and roles non-offending siblings take on, and the types of communication non-offending siblings’ use when incorporated into the treatment or reconciliation process. The findings of this study indicated a continued need for future research to explore the impact of sibling imprisonment on both offending and non-offending siblings. Implications for future social work practice were also discussed.
Addressing Traumatic Loss and Grief within Inner City High Schools

By Jena L. Henry

Research Chair: Karen Carlson, Ph. D., MSW
Committee Members: Nina McGarry, MSW, LICSW; Theresa Pease, MSW, LICSW

Experiences of trauma, loss, and grief have been shown to increase the likelihood of developing serious mental health difficulties and to decrease academic performance, which in turn can be harmful to an individual’s success. This research study examined the perceived prevalence of traumatic loss and grief within inner city high schools, as well as the methods used by inner city high school social workers to address traumatic loss and grief experienced by students, through the use of an online mixed-methods survey. Results showed that all participants perceive a percentage of their student population have experienced traumatic loss and grief, some reporting rates as high as 95%. Findings also showed the sample frequently identifies students in need of traumatic loss and grief services through referral, assessment, and building relationships. However, school social workers lack a standardized method for identifying youth in need of services. Many participants reported providing school-based traumatic loss and grief interventions that were brief in nature, however also reported referring students on to other school professionals or to outside resources. Lastly, findings demonstrated that participants find school-based traumatic loss and grief services to be beneficial to the student population. There are implications to the research findings, including the small sample size and low response rate, however the research sparks numerous questions regarding school-based services for trauma, loss, and grief.
The use of Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy with Children who have Experienced Trauma to Improve Social Functioning

By Danielle Hernandez

Research Chair: Felicia Sy, MSW, PHD., LICSW
Committee Members: Arlene Schatz, LICSW; Jennifer Gozy, Psy.D., LP

Children who have experienced trauma are often affected socially, relationally and personally. Some children will require therapeutic interventions to improve these symptoms and functioning, while others will recover with no therapeutic intervention at all. One evidence based intervention to treat trauma in children is Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TFCBT), however current research on TFCBT primarily focuses on how it improves PTSD symptoms, not necessarily its effect on improving a child’s social or relational functioning. Therefore, the present study focuses on the clinician’s perspective of how the use of TFCBT improves social functioning. The findings indicate that the use of TFCBT helps to reduce trauma symptoms that affect a child socially, relationally and personally. However, the findings also indicated reasons why participants chose not to use TFCBT even when the child was experiencing trauma symptoms. Further research is needed to better address the benefits of a broader use of TFCBT.
Challenges Specific to Women in Detoxification Settings: Providers’ Perspectives

By Danielle S. Iano

Research Chair: Dr. Kari Fletcher, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Maggie Freiberg, MSW, LSW

Within detox settings, women with substance use disorders may present with a myriad of risk factors and consequences related to their use. This research explored biopsychosocial issues specific to women using detoxification services and how medical concerns, comorbid mental health issues, trauma history, and pregnancy/children affected subsequent linkages to treatment by interviewing professionals who worked with this population within detoxification settings. Licensed professionals (n=8) were interviewed regarding their experiences with women in detox settings. The resulting data from interview transcriptions were analyzed, and themes that developed included admission contexts, vulnerability, comorbidity, barriers to treatment, and integrated care. Findings revealed common themes with vulnerabilities unique to women in detox settings, including significant physical and sexual trauma, medical and mental health comorbidity, and barriers to treatment such as being a custodial parent. The need for integrated care also arose as a common theme amongst participants. Awareness of these needs allows social workers to develop a deep understanding of the complexities that women with substance use disorders present with, especially those that access detox services, and acquire the skills to effectively work with this population to improve recovery outcomes.
Better Mental Health Service Provision for Somali Youth: Overcoming the Barriers

By Megan Jacobs

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchs, PhD, LICSW
Committee Members: David McGraw-Schuchman, MSW, LICSW; Eva Solomonson, MSW, LICSW

It is estimated that there are over 50,000 Somali refugees currently living in Minnesota, making Minnesota the largest resettlement location for Somalis in the United States (World Relief Minnesota, 2013). Research has shown that refugees, including the Somali community, experience higher rates of mental health concerns and seek less mental health treatment than any group. This phenomenon is even more prominent in refugee youth (Ellis, Lincoln, Charney, Ford-Paz, Benson & Strunin, 2010). There is a gap in the current research on Somali youth mental health and how to overcome the current barriers to treatment. This study examines the data from eight qualitative interviews with human service personnel with experience working with Somali youth. These interviews explored the participants’ understanding of Somali youth mental health, the Somali cultural view of mental health and its treatment, current barriers that keep Somali youth out of the mental health service delivery system, and strategies to overcome those barriers in order to provide better mental health services for Somali youth. The themes from the data suggest that it is critical to understand the Somali worldview, as well as the unique stressors Somali youth face, in order to engage in more effective mental health treatment with this population. The data also identifies current barriers, as well as various approaches to overcoming those barriers. The implications of this research may be used to inform micro level practice changes for human service personnel, as well as mezzo and macro level policy changes within our mental health service delivery system.
Infertility, Reproductive Loss and the Adoption Home Study Process

By Emily Jacobsma

Research Chair: K. Abel Knochel, PhD, MSW, LGSW
Committee Members: Emily Alewine MSW, LISW; Kyan Bodden, MSW, LICSW

The purpose of this research was to explore how a history of infertility and reproductive loss impacts an individual’s experience of the adoption home study process. Many individuals use adoption to expand their family after losing the ability to have a child biologically. This study examined the prevalence of grief in individuals with infertility and reproductive loss as well as how that grief is currently addressed by social work professionals in the adoption home study assessment. Participants were gathered through social media groups online as well as various adoption support organizations. Participants were asked to fill out a confidential survey with both qualitative and quantitative aspects. Findings show that the experiences of these individuals are diverse, and while some felt that their adoption social worker professionally addressed their grief in the home study, others felt that their social worker was not empathetic and provided too little resources for their needs in preparation for parenting a child through adoption. Equally diverse were the respondents’ experiences with grief and loss related to their infertility. While some felt that the loss of a biological child was profound, ambiguous and sad, others stated they felt little grief due to their interest in and commitment to building their family through adoption. It is important for the profession of social work to understand the losses related to infertility in order to properly assess families and prepare them for the task of parenting a child through adoption.
Addressing Mental Health with the Somali Population in the Twin Cities Area

By Kristopher Steven Jaeger

Research Chair: Lisa Kiesel, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: David Schuchman, MSW, LICSW; Rahama Nuura, RN

Minnesota is home to one of the highest populations of Somali heritage in North America. Mental illness is reported to be prevalent in this population and there is an underutilization of available mental health services. The purpose of this study was to see how health providers can better identify and discuss mental illness with the Somali community to improve utilization rates of mental health clinics in the Twin Cities area. To do this, six qualitative interviews were conducted with participants who at the time were currently working with Somalis, in a hospital, clinic, or health care agency setting. Content Analysis was used as a method of analysis to identify and interpret themes found from the recorded interviews. The main themes that emerged were: 1) prevalence and recognizing mental illness; 2) the stigma of mental illness; 3) impact of interpreters; and, 4) dialoging about mental health. Findings confirm previous research studies in that there is little uniformity between health professionals on what treatments to recommend to improve utilization. However, findings showed that being culturally aware, building rapport, and discussing mental illness in terms of physical symptoms, all improve utilization rates of Mental Health Services. Somali Americans access medical health through hospitals, clinics, and health care agencies. Because of this, it is important for health care professionals to be culturally aware of Somalis and how to mutually discuss mental illness due to their access to this population.
Addressing Secondary Trauma in Social Workers Counseling Trauma Survivors

By Karen James

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, Ph.D, LICSW
Committee Member: Jennifer Ranallo, MSW, LGSW

Many individuals who seek therapeutic services from social workers have experienced trauma in their lives. Social workers who counsel trauma survivors may develop physical and emotional symptoms similar to those endured by their clients in a phenomenon known as secondary trauma. A qualitative study was done with 15 social workers exploring the risk factors for secondary trauma, its effects, and the measures that can be taken to prevent or respond to its manifestation. Themes found in participant answers included experiencing negative feelings, anxiety, not having enough time for effective self-care and needing support from others in the field. It is important for social workers to be aware of secondary trauma so they can recognize it happening in themselves and others. Findings in this study can help arm social workers with important self-care strategies and the awareness necessary to address secondary trauma.
Birthmothers Today: The Post Adoption Experience

By Angela R. Jansen

Research Chair: Catherine L. Marrs-Fuchsel, PHD, LICSW
Committee Members: Pamela Baker, MS, LISW, LMFT; Suzanne O’Hara, LSW

This research project is a qualitative study that identified what birthmothers experience emotionally, physically, and psychologically once a domestic adoption has been finalized. Also, the study looked at the reasons why support services for birthmothers are low and how adoption agencies can best support this population. The data was analyzed using content analysis and interpreted through an inductive approach. The conceptual framework used to understand how the participants for the interviews responded was a Biopsychosocial Approach and the Strengths-Based Perspective. Ten interviews were conducted for this study with two different groups: five with birthparent counselors and five with birthmothers. All the participants either worked for or with a private adoption agency in the St.Paul/Minneapolis Metropolitan area. The following themes were found: 1) differences in the birthmother's adoption journey, 2) importance of a relationship between the birthmother and birthparent counselor, 3) communication patterns between the birthmother and birthparent counselor, 4) emotions and reactions birthmothers deal with post-placement, 5) common support services offered and needed, and 6) the need to change societal views on birthmothers. The findings from this research have implications for those in the adoption triad, with adoption agencies, and social workers in general.
Clinical Social Worker’s Perceptions of the Impact of the Revisions of the DSM-5

By Tara Jeno

Research Chair: Rajean Moone, Ph.D
Committee Members: Molly Kellor, MSW, LICSW; Michelle Thompson, MSW, LICSW

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual is often considered the “Bible” of mental health diagnostics and is used extensively by mental health professionals in defining mental disorders. The DSM-5 was recently released on May 19, 2013. There has been much controversy and debate surrounding the release. The most dramatic is the structural change with the elimination of the multi-axes. This research examined the impact of the changes on the assessment and treatment planning process done by clinical social workers. Interviews were conducted with licensed clinical social workers employed in outpatient mental health settings to determine the impact on the patients they serve. There were major findings from this study. Consensus among clinicians interviewed was that the DSM-5 has strong ramifications for the following: (1) functions of DSM (2) stigma, (3) subjectivity of functional rating, (4) lack of guidance towards clinical interventions and (5) reclassification. The findings indicated that the DSM was useful for the purposes of educating individuals about their condition and giving all mental health professionals a common language with which to discuss mental health diagnoses. However, participants felt the DSM is lacking in its utility for clinicians in that it does little to help determine probable causes of disorders and offers no suitable interventions to reduce or eliminate the presenting problem.
Practice What You Preach: DBT Therapists’ Skill Utilization in Burnout Prevention

By Kate Browning Jergensen

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Beverly Long, Psy.D.; Jacqueline Stratton, LICSW, MSW

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between DBT practitioners’ skill use and consultation team on burnout and stress levels. The study was exploratory in nature and used a mixed methods convenience sample that surveyed DBT practitioners through an international list serve. Burnout and stress were measured along with skill use, perspectives on consultation team, and demographic information. The sample included 135 survey responses and participants varied in demographic information. Results found that there was a negative correlation between burnout and skill use and that in general practitioners use the skills on a frequent basis and find the skills helpful in reducing stress. On a whole, the sample of respondents had very low burnout scores with only 3.7% of those surveyed falling above the burnout threshold. Respondents had mixed views around consultation team but in general found it helpful in alleviating stress around their DBT cases. Since the study was exploratory in nature, future research should aim at duplication of the study as well as looking at mindfulness practice in mental health practitioners not involved in DBT and its influence on stress and burnout.
The Somatic Methods Survey: Investigating LICSWs’ Training in Physically Based Interventions

By James W. Johns

Research Chair: Sarah M. Ferguson, MA, MSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Emily Brott, MSW; William Anderson, BS

This clinical research project investigates how and when Licensed Independent Clinical Social Workers (LICSW) in the State of Minnesota received training in somatic methods of helping. As a Masters of Social Work (MSW) student examples of somatic methods permeate class lecture, training videos, and observations made in the field. Though ubiquitous in clinical practice, methods of engaging clients somatically are not typically part of the core social work curriculum. This paradox laid the foundation for the Somatic Methods Survey which provided insight into how and when LICSWs develop skills in somatic methods of helping.

The Somatic Methods Survey was completed by N=28 LICSWs licensed in the state of Minnesota. Of N=28 respondents, N=25 (89%) of respondents indicated they use somatic methods with their clients. Respondents who use somatic methods identified a wide range of physically based methods used with clients, and indicated an average of N=2 somatic methods may be used in their clinical practice. This dedication to the use of somatic methods by clinical social workers is notable, and has implications for the future of social work education.
Deployment Issues for Women Veterans and their Children

By Alea J. Johnson

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, PhD., LICSW
Committee Members: Larisa Breid, MSW, LICSW; Keri Pinna PhD

Deployment creates unique experiences and issues for women veterans and their children. Although each family has their own understanding of deployment, examining common issues throughout families may inform future practice with military families. For this research the deployment issues that are present for women veterans and their children were examined. A secondary data analysis analyzed eight participants (n=8) and their children who had discussions regarding non-deployment and deployment issues in addition to completing problem solving tasks. This study found that deployment issues for these families were sadness about the deployed parent being gone, talking about deployment, communicating during deployment, missing birthdays during deployment, the concern of a parent being injured or killed during deployment and the parent needing space upon returning from deployment. A theme found was the presence of emotions surrounding deployment despite the unique issues that were encountered for each family. This information can allow social workers to provide better informed treatment for military families and promote increased development of mental health services for veterans and their children.
Native American Spirituality in a Euro-American World

By Carol Johnson

Research Chair: Felicia Sy, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Carol Hand, PHD., MSSW; Harlan Johnson

This study focuses on Native American spirituality and healing in a Euro-American world. Six interviews were conducted, two each at three different rural tribes in northern Minnesota. In this qualitative study the people interviewed were leaders or teachers in local tribes and also elders who are respected in the communities. The interviews were audio taped, transcribed, and put into themes by the researcher. Some of the common themes that emerged were (a) a change in the communities, viewed as overtaken by drugs and alcohol and feeling unsafe; (b) changes in traditional spirituality; (c) changes in language; (d) honoring true American war heroes; (e) changes in values and views of the ways of living; and (f) the prevalence of humor in the Indian community, which is significant for understanding worldviews and perspectives. An overwhelming response was that all the participants had unquestioning love for their immediate family, extended family, and the whole community. The words and passion spoken clearly by all the elders were about wanting their community to be a better place for future generations, for their grandchildren and great-grandchildren.
My Culture, My Voice: The Impact of Youth Hip-Hop and Spoken Word on Adolescent Participants in Positive Youth Development Settings

By Emily M. Johnson

Research Chair: David J. Roseborough Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Sandy J. Parnell, MSW, LICSW; Marjaan Sirdar, Community Organizer

Mastering the tasks of adolescence is difficult for all youth, and the journey of African American adolescents and other youth of color is a unique one. This study explored the following research questions: "What is the impact of participation in positive youth development programs that incorporate hip-hop and/or spoken word on youth participants?" and "What components of these programs are important?" Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with youth workers and current or former program participants. This study found that involvement in this type of programming was highly beneficial for youth, particularly youth of color. Participants saw benefits in a wide variety of categories, including their empowerment, community engagement, relationships with adults, academic and technical skills, non-cognitive skills, self-expression and youth voice. The art forms were culturally important for youth in understanding their own strengths and struggles in the context of their community of origin. This study challenges traditional notions of what it means to be a young person and particularly what it means to be a young person of color. There may be elements embedded within these programs and the concept of hip-hop and spoken word as developmental mediums that could help effectively address issues of risk and inequality. Continued research is needed to further understand and substantiate the value of youth development programs that incorporate the creation and performance of hip-hop and spoken word.
Bullying Prevention: How to Foster Positive Interactions Among School Aged Youth

By Sara Johnson

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D., LICSW, ACT
Committee Members: Steven Oie, MSW; Nicole Johnston, LSW

Bullying has been identified as one of the most widespread forms of violence encountered in U.S. schools, with 30% of children reporting being the victims of bullying sometime during their lives. This research sought to identify common threads that seem important for individuals working with children in school settings to be aware of in order to effectively prevent and respond to bullying based on current prevention efforts and curriculum a sample of Minnesota schools are currently utilizing. A qualitative research design was used to obtain data from a sample of seven school social workers, and data reduction was used to interpret the findings. The findings indicated the importance of social skill development among students, the use of formal and informal curriculum and programming, community building and active supervision, and the bystander effect. The findings speak to the importance of school staff to create a positive school climate, utilize curriculum and other individualized interventions, develop positive relationships with students, increase the level of adult supervision within the schools, and ensure consistent expectations and common language throughout the school in order to effectively prevent and intervene when children are involved in bullying.
Licensed Social Workers’ Perception of the Role of the Supervisor and Its Impact on Stress in Social Work

By Quinn Johnson

Research Chair: Karen Carlson, MSSW, LICSW, PhD
Committee Members: Sharyn DeZelar, MSW, LICSW; Lisa Richardson, MSS, LICSW

This study explores how the role of the supervisor impacts social workers’ perceptions of stress in social work practice and how social workers measure the experience of supervision. The study sample consisted of 54 licensed social workers with different levels of licensure selected from the Minnesota Board of Social Work. A mixed method design, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, was used to collect data for this cross-sectional research study. An email with the link to the survey in Qualtrics was sent to 160 licensed social workers. The data was assessed using descriptive statistics, chi-square analyses, and grounded theory methodology and coded based on constant comparison analysis.

Findings from this study support previous research that identified that supervisors can both alleviate and create stress for supervisees. Findings also show that respondents consider the supportive role of the supervisor to be most beneficial to their practice, social workers perceive any social work job as stressful, and respondents are satisfied with the level of supportive supervision they receive from their supervisor. Furthermore, respondents perceive supportive supervision to be helpful and it generally has a positive impact on social workers’ work with clients. Supervisors will be able to understand and apply the findings to their practice to positively contribute to the supervisor-supervisee relationship. This will also positively impact the supervisee’s work with clients. In addition, social workers who are supervisors will be able to employ strategies based on the findings to decrease stress in social work practice as well as be more prepared to provide quality supervision and help staff members develop the skills needed for carrying out their work.
**Parent Involvement in Schools: Views from School Social Workers**

By Nancy Joseph-Goldfarb

Research Chair: Dr. Lance Peterson
Committee Members: Jane Hurley-Johncox, MSW, LICSW; Meryll Page, MA

The purpose of this study was to examine school social workers’ beliefs related to parent involvement in schools as well as their perceptions of the part social workers play in facilitating engagement and mediating conflicts between parents, schools, communities, and education related policies. Given the potential for school social workers to develop and strengthen family-school connections, it is critical to understand how they view their role in this process. Three questions guided this research: 1) How do school social workers assess the importance of parent involvement in school? 2) Do school social workers believe they have a role to play in parent involvement? 3) Do school social workers believe they have a role in mediating tensions that arise from conflicts between systems and stakeholders (school staff, parents, the broader community and macro-level policy)?

The research design was qualitative and exploratory, incorporating elements of ethnographic data collection and grounded theory analysis. Participants responded to a series of open-ended questions intended to elicit their views on the role of parents in their children's formal education, barriers to parent involvement, and on how school social workers participate in parent engagement efforts. Analysis of the data revealed several salient themes. These themes included definitions of parent involvement, barriers to parent involvement and the role of school social worker in overcoming those barriers. This study adds to the research on the role of social workers in facilitating parent engagement in schools.
A Qualitative Investigation of Therapists’ Practices for Addressing the Parent Adolescent Relationship

By Michelle R. Justen

Research Chair: Lance Peterson Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Sara Stamschror, M.A., LMFT; Teresa George, MSW, LICSW

The parent-adolescent relationship appears to have a significant impact on the mental health of adolescents. Previous literature has identified poor attachments to be associated with adolescent mental health concerns as well as delinquent behaviors. In order to address these concerns, practitioners have utilized practices of providing safety within the therapeutic relationship as well as enhancing communication and encouraging attunement within the parent-adolescent relationship. The purpose of the study is to identify theories and approaches that practitioners find most effective when working with adolescents and their families. This was a qualitative study in which data was collected through interviews with eight family and mental health practitioners. Six major themes emerged from the data analysis: systems approach, safety and trust, respect, cultural awareness and responsiveness, emotional bond, and positive interactions. These findings highlight some of the vital approaches utilized by therapists when working with parents and adolescents. This study supports previous literature, which indicates the importance of therapists joining with the family to create safety as well as modeling healthy interactions. Implications for future research and social work practice are explored to offer therapists continued insight into practices for strengthening the parent-adolescent relationship, so as to reduce mental health concerns in adolescents.
Factors That Assist Low-Income Students of Color in Pursuing Higher Education

By Samantha J. Kaffенberger

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph. D., MSW
Committee Members: Kayci Rush, MSW; Molly Roark, LICSW

Currently, there is an achievement gap in education between students of color and their white counterparts. While the larger picture of inequality is readily available, it does not explain why students of color graduate at lower rates. This purpose of the qualitative research study sought to understand the experiences and perceptions of low-income youth who are of color, on their transition into college. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with four youth of color who were currently enrolled in college and identified coming from a low-income background. The five major themes that emerged from the interviews were: 1) the youth’s motivation to pursue higher education, 2) preparation for continuing, 3) support the youth received, 4) demographics of the youths’ high school, and 5) the youth’s perceptions of why other students did not pursue higher education. Implications for the field of social work, such as changing legislation of NCLB to better serve youth of color from low-income backgrounds, are discussed. Future recommendations of including social aspects into college access programs are also discussed.
“I haven’t been able to do it on my own:” Experiences of teen parents on the Minnesota Family Investment Program

By Aryn Rae Karstens

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Wanda Jensen, MA; Lew Linde, MSW, JD

Teen pregnancy and welfare spending have been popular topics in the media in the recent years. The purpose of this study was to expand on previous research on the experiences of teen parents on the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) and allow the teen parents a chance to share their stories. Specifically, respondents were asked about their experiences leading up their applying for MFIP, their current opinions of the program, and future plans. Professionals who work with teen parents were also interviewed and the responses were then compared and contrasted. Using a semi-structured interview format, four teen parents and two professionals were interviewed. Interviews were transcribed and coded by the researcher using an open coding technique. Several themes emerged from the research, including: lack of family support, experiences with violence, mental health concerns, drugs, positive and negative current experiences of the program, education as a goal, the desire to create a “normal” childhood, the need of the program to meet individual situations, and the desire for increased regulation for program participants. The findings report that MFIP participants and professionals have similar thoughts on how the program is currently working and what could be changed to make it more effective for teen parents. Ideas for positive change were shared by both participants and professionals.
How Social Work Practitioners Evaluate Their Practice

By Leah Kiefer

Research Chair: Michael G. Chovanec, PhD, LMFT, LICSW
Committee Member: Theresa Kelly McPartlin, LICSW

Evaluation of social work practice is a fundamental aspect of providing social care and delivering services to society members. As standards of social work practice and the increased recognition of the field of social work in the mental health profession continue to gain prominence, social work professionals are becoming more in touch with evidence-based practice. This online survey of 265 social work professionals are evaluating their practice in many ways. The survey found that participants used more direct interactions, i.e., client feedback tools, client practitioner feedback rather than more analytic methods. Most participants also found workload as a factor that hinders their ability to evaluate their practice. Implications and limitations are also articulated.
**Contributing Factors in Maintaining Gang Affiliation among Adolescent Females Exposed to Trauma**

By Bridget Kingsley

Research Chair: Jessica Tolf, Ph. D., MSW
Committee Members: Jane Hurley-Johncox, LICSW; Tara Mitchell, MSW, LICSW

Female gang affiliation has often gone overlooked, however, recent research indicates a need to examine this issue due to the increase in adolescent females becoming gang affiliated. A national survey collecting data on gang affiliation indicated that females account for nearly a third of the gang member population. Not only are females joining gangs at an increased rate but they are maintaining their affiliation despite maltreatment and abuse. The purpose of this project was to explore the factors that contribute and encourage adolescent females to maintain their gang affiliation even though it is likely that they will endure continued trauma. A review of the literature indicated victimization and abuse within the family system as a strong contributing factor for gang involvement and maintaining affiliation. Using a qualitative design, eight interviews were completed with professionals who have experience working with adolescent females affiliated with gangs. Using an inductive grounded theory method, the data was analyzed and coded, and emerging themes were recorded. Major similarities between the data and the literature were found in the areas of early childhood exposures to dysfunction within the family system, the developmental needs that are being met within the gang, gender role expectations and continued exposure to trauma within the gang. The findings, however, exposed a major issue within the communities that young females return to after treatment, placements or incarceration that make it difficult to avoid returning to their gang affiliations. These findings highlight the importance for social workers to engage the families and communities in prevention and intervention strategies when working with adolescent females who are gang affiliated.
Adolescent Help-Seeking: The promise of text counseling

By Danielle Kuka

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Christopher Bargeron, MSW, LICSW; Traci Chur, MA

This qualitative study addresses the need for additional approaches to reaching youth who are struggling with mental health issues. The paper describes common barriers to serving a youth population, especially in a time of crisis. It explores the use of text counseling as a therapeutic response to youth in crisis or distress. It discusses the use of empowerment theory when developing and implementing services for a youth population. The study concludes with a description and discussion of the common themes identified through an inductive secondary data analysis of 14 text counseling sessions. The findings from this study were consistent with previous research. First, adolescent girls between the ages of 14-17 years old were the most frequent texters in this study. Second, youth quickly and openly make intimate disclosures about their feelings and thoughts when using a text platform. Third, and perhaps most importantly, adolescents do reach out for help when they are feeling overwhelmed, distressed, self-destructive and suicidal. Ongoing research in this area has the potential to strengthen our understanding of how to best serve and respond to the mental health needs of adolescents. Ideas for future research in this area are suggested.
Health Professionals’ use of Aromatherapy with Children and Adolescents with Mental Illness

By Emily Laconic

Research Chair: Lisa Kiesel, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Sarah Kopp, MSW, LICSW; Sue Murr, MSW, LICSW

The purpose of this study was to explore how health professionals are using aromatherapy with children and adolescents who have exhibited or are diagnosed with the four most common mental illnesses. The four most common mental illnesses according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2013) are: ADHD as the highest mental health disorder; then behavioral or conduct problems; anxiety; and depression (part of mood disorders). This qualitative research study used an exploratory design by conducting in-depth semi-structured open-ended questions to four subjects. Themes were identified using content analysis. Subjects using aromatherapy with children and adolescents, use a mindfulness and empowerment approach. By encouraging clients to find what essential oil helps them regulate their symptoms and so they are be able to return to daily living. Several subjects gave examples of effective aromatherapy has been to their clients. There has been no adverse reaction from parents or guardians of the children and adolescents who are using aromatherapy as an intervention. The only identified barrier from the subjects was the cost of essential oils. There is a lack research in this area, and research that directly interviews children and adolescents. There are no current licensure requirements in the State of Minnesota to practice aromatherapy, and a minimum amount of training courses. Besides a need for regulations of practicing aromatherapy, there needs to be regulations on the quality of essential oils.
How People Experience the Hospital to Home Project

By Britani Lalone

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, PhD., LICSW
Committee Members: Susan Bollinger-Brown, LICSW; Julie Grothe MDIV, CPRP

Many individuals who experience chronic homelessness with complex medical and mental health issues use the Emergency Room often. A new program called the Hospital to Home Program (HHP) has been created for people who have at least one chronic health condition, have been to the emergency room five or more times in the previous year, and have a history of chronic homelessness. This qualitative research project sought to explore the participant’s experiences of the HHP as there has been no qualitative research done with the program currently. Seven participants were asked open-ended questions to elicit responses about their quality of life being in the program, about their housing, and what Guild Incorporated has helped with. The findings indicate that the participants were all housed, they felt their overall quality of life was better, and they reported some of the barriers they previously faced and are currently facing. It was found that participants of the HHP enjoy being in the program and feel they have benefited greatly from the services.
Systemic Barriers to Mental Health Care: A Qualitative Study

By Hannah C. Langholz

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Rachel Murr, MSW, LGSW; Britta Ryan, MSW, LGSW

This paper explores systemic barriers to accessing mental health care, using Wilber’s Integral Model as a framework. A review of the literature presents qualitative and quantitative accounts of medication access issues and consequences, availability of and timely access to providers, patients not being taken seriously, communication between providers, and suggests ways to reduce these barriers. The original methodology involved conducting qualitative face-to-face interviews with mental health professionals from free and sliding scale clinics in the Twin Cities. Results discuss changes in methodology to qualitative questions posed in an online survey format to licensed clinical social workers in Minnesota. Results identify systemic barriers to mental health care, including: how access issues frequently lead to hospital/emergency room use, a shortage of providers, long waits for appointments, and financial/insurance barriers. The results also include specific suggestions to reducing and removing these barriers. Similarities and differences between the literature review and results are discussed, as well as implications of this research to social work practice and policy. This paper recommends future research be conducted directly with in-patient mental health patients. It also recommends that the shortage of psychiatry be studied in order to discover strategies to increase the availability of and access to this service.
Social Work Perspectives of Quality in Nursing Homes Compared to Minnesota Nursing Home Report Card and Nursing Home Compare

By Nicole Leasure

Research Chair: Rajean P. Moone, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Katie Benner, LICSW; Joan Mudge, LSW

The number of older adults requiring nursing home level of care continues to rise and is expected to continue as the baby boom generation ages. The quality of nursing home care has been a significant policy issue for several years, as poor quality of care continues to be an endemic problem in many of the U.S nursing homes. The Nursing Home Reform Act passed in 1987 was designed to set quality standards to improve nursing home care quality. In 1998 the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid responded by implementing Nursing Home Compare, which is a tool to inform consumers about nursing home quality. Social workers often play a key role in advocating for resident rights and ensuring residents’ psychosocial needs are being met. Care quality can have a large impact on the overall wellbeing of a resident. The purpose of this study was to learn about nursing home social workers perspectives of what quality care is and if their perspectives are similar to quality indictors identified on the Minnesota Nursing Home Report Card and Nursing Home Compare. Eight nursing home social workers participated in individual semi-structured interviews answering fourteen questions regarding their perspectives of quality care in the nursing home setting. The participants’ responses demonstrated similar quality care indicators compared to the Minnesota Nursing Home Report Card and Nursing Home Compare. Participants’ responses evolved into themes regarding resident centered care and quality of life, quality indicators and lack of response, staffing ratios, retention and burnout, leadership and empowerment, awareness and use of report cards and informed consumers. Developing an understanding of indicators that contribute towards good quality care in the nursing home setting will allow social workers to advocate for residents to ensure they experience the highest achievable quality of life possible.
An Abode for Therapy: Rediscovering the Lost Art of the Home Visit

By Zachery A. LeCrone

Research Chair: Abel Knochel, Ph.D, MSW, LGSW
Committee Members: Robert Wilson, MSW; Blythe Nelson, MSW, LICSW

The home visit is a service which began in early social work practice where the worker would visit the client in their home to ensure best practices. The literature and dominant beliefs of social workers highlight therapy in an individual’s home environment as an avenue of practice filled with difficulties, justifying abandonment of this method of service. This study examined the experiences of in-home therapists who provide services to individuals and families in order to explore how their experiences either aligned or contradicted the current literature. Therapists were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling. Using a focus group qualitative design, four in-home therapists discussed their experiences of conducting therapy in a client’s environment and how they were able to increase the effectiveness of therapeutic intervention through utilizing the client’s surrounding atmosphere. Participants identified increased effectiveness in the home setting regarding assessment, empowerment, rapport building, and ethical services. Participants also identified strengths in this setting regarding confidentiality and boundary setting, two areas identified as difficulties in the literature. The implications created from this study articulate the enhanced ability of assessment when conducted through a home-visit and the importance of social work education to incorporate in-home therapy as a method of practice to class curriculum.
Humans share a strong bond with animals, when a pet becomes sick or dies an owner can feel extreme grief and bereavement. Research studies have shown that some veterinarians feel they are inadequately trained to handle the pet owner’s feelings of grief and loss. Social workers could have a unique fit in assisting bereaved pet owners, since many social workers help bereaved individuals successfully grieve the loss of a human loved one in a healthy way. The purpose of this study is to see what veterinarian’s attitudes are toward social work services in small animal private practice settings. Using a qualitative exploratory research design, six veterinarians were interviewed on their knowledge of social work services, comfort level in dealing with bereaved owners and the roles and challenges using a social worker in small animal private practice settings. The data revealed that veterinarians acknowledge client grief almost daily, use a variety of skills when working with bereaved owners, and have extensive knowledge of social work, social workers and social work services. Participants stated social work services could be utilized in private practice settings by helping clients make difficult decisions, offering support, facilitating communication, providing resources and training and staff support. Participants identified challenges of having social work services at a small animal private practice including fees and cost associated with the services, small clinics with low client demand and integrating social work services in a veterinary setting. These research findings strongly suggest there is a place for social workers and social work services in a veterinary setting; however maybe not in private practice settings. It is up to future social workers to forge a bond with veterinarians to offer unparalleled client centered care by offering support for pet loss and bereavement.
Harm Reduction in the Social Work Practice

By Kayla Lessard

Research Chair: Dr. Rajean Moone, PhD.
Committee Members: Kristen Reichert, MSW, LICSW; Cailje Lorsung, BSW, LSW

Harm reduction is a technique used to address a variety of behaviors that produce harm and is implemented at micro, mezzo and macro levels. The purpose of this study was to examine the social worker experience of implementing harm reduction techniques with clients that identify as using substances. This study aimed to discover the strengths, limitations, and barriers of implementing harm reduction into the social work practice. This is a qualitative study that used guided interviews to collect data. Eight licensed graduate social workers that identify as using harm reduction techniques with clients that abuse substances were interviewed. Data gathered was analyzed by coding the interview transcripts, and identifying themes that emerged from the data. Data reviewed was linked to previous literature and discussed further in application to social worker practice and policy. The findings showed that social workers view harm reduction as a strength to establishing rapport with clients. In addition the data also showed limitations with legal concerns and macro level policies. These findings coincide with previous research on how harm reduction is used not only in the therapeutic relationship but also from a policy level, and how each level relates to the other.
Effective Preventative Interventions of Substance Use

By Amanda Logan

Research Chair: Dr. Felicia Sy, MSW, PhD, LICSW
Committee Members: Cathy Kottenbrock, MSW, LICSW; Mary Onungwe, LAC

Substance use among adolescents remains a serious problem in most rural communities in part due to the well-documented failure of most prevention programs. Despite these challenges some prevention programs have been deemed both reliable and valid. Three such programs include the: Adolescent Transitions Program, Strengthening Families Program: For Parents and Youth 10-14, and Guiding Good Choices. This paper provides a systemic review of these three programs and offers suggestions to community leaders for successful program implementation.
A Case Study: Native American Traditions in Child Welfare Assessments

By Timothy Markgraf

Research Chair: Felicia Washington Sy, MSW, PhD., LICSW
Committee Members: Chris Bray, PhD., LP; Julie Krings, MSW; Brenda Swett

Little research has been conducted regarding how culture is used in assessing parenting capabilities in Indian Child Welfare (ICW). A case study was conducted within the Native American community of the Woodland People to explore this phenomenon. The data used in this qualitative research project consisted of interviews of the Indian Child Welfare workers and a content analysis of the active cases of the workers. Loss within the Woodland People, inconsistencies in practice, and the understanding of Indian Child Welfare were the three main themes that emerged from the data. The data within these themes clearly demonstrated that the Indian Child Welfare workers in the Woodland People's community understood the culture and community in which they worked. Incorporating culture into his or her assessment of parental capabilities was as varied as each worker. The data pointed to opportunities to explore further research, practice changes, and educational systems change. The story presented by the ICW workers in this case study provided this author a greater understanding into the Woodland People's community.
The Family's Voice: Caregiving for an Older Adult

By Deborah J. Mason

Research Chair: Abel Knochel, Ph.D., M.S.W., LGSW
Committee Members: Emily Samsel, M.B.A., M.S.W., LGSW; Mary Morrison, M.S.W., LGSW

The purpose of this research was to explore the family as a unit, in particular the effects on the multigenerational family when at least one person is giving care to an adult over the age of 65. While, most prior research focused on the caregiver; this study looked at family as a whole single unit. The respondents were asked to describe how the caregiving affected them personally as well as how it affected the family.

The sample for this study included 16 adult family members of caregivers for a person over age 65. Data was collected utilizing an online survey. Respondents were recruited with the assistance of local senior assisted living and apartment communities and by some postings in local social work groups.

Respondents voiced that life was now stressful and frustrating. Although some revealed there were benefits, many stated the caregiving affected the family in an adverse way. This study confirmed the idea that having a family member caring for an older adult member does affect the dynamics of the whole family.
Processing Client Death for Individuals in Social Service Roles

By Susan Matzke

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Crystal Hughes, MSW, LGSW, Erin Pash, M.A., MFT

Dealing with client death in the social service profession impacts the workers that provide client services. This experience can be stressful and may lead to secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout among social service workers. These effects may also lead to higher rates of staff turnover in agency settings. The purpose of this study was to provide insight into how those working in social services process the death of a client, how this experience affects them, what supports are available and utilized, and how they view these supports. In this mixed method study there were a total of 40 participants, who mostly worked in the area of mental health, and shared both statistical data and personal experiences with client loss. The most present type of client death was due to unexplained medical causes, which supports the use of a holistic model when providing services to those with mental health diagnoses. Self-care was identified as one of the most helpful coping strategies used by professionals when dealing with this type of client loss as well as an underrepresentation of employees in this field that have had training in this area. Respondents also identified that agency support was beneficial when they experienced it and mostly view this support positively when impacted by the death of a client.
The Use of Yoga in Eating Disorder Treatment: Practitioners’ Perspectives

By Jennifer E. McMahon

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Rebecca Neeck, MSW, LICSW; Lindsey Mackereth, MA, LPC

Eating Disorders are a growing mental health concern with serious consequences for those who struggle. The individual and complex nature of eating disorders presents a need for new, innovative treatment modalities. One such treatment that is gaining interest in the eating disorder field is the holistic modality of yoga. The benefits of yoga on mental health have been addressed in previous research. While previous research focuses on quantitative studies and outcomes of clients, this paper administers a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews done with licensed therapists and yoga instructors who practice yoga with the eating disorder population. The study focuses on why yoga is being used with the eating disorder population and how practitioners are implementing yoga interventions effectively. The themes that emerged from the data were: 1) a mindful experience of the body; 2) the power of yoga philosophy; 3) partnered with therapy; 4) a careful and thoughtful use of yoga; 5) a personal yoga practice; 6) safety comes first; 7) benefits for clients who are willing. The theme safety comes first included three subthemes: yoga preparation, assessing for trauma, and modifications. Implications for the use of yoga in clinical social work and recommendations for future research are discussed.
Hospital Staff and Bereavement Services: Examining Compassion Fatigue in Nurses

By Kelly McManimon

Research Chair: Lance Peterson, Ph, D., MSW
Committee Members: Bridget Chastain, RN and Theresa Huntley, MSW, LICSW

Disenfranchised grief, often experienced by nurses, can then lead to compassion fatigue if left unattended. The prevalence of this concern is rising and the literature shows that this issue clearly needs to become more centralized in the hospitals in which these nurses work. Social workers hold an important role in recognizing the needs of hospital staff and helping to address the issues of grief and loss with those who care for patients. In order to address these concerns a quantitative survey was conducted in one area pediatric hospital to address the effects of this phenomenon. The sample consisted of . . . The correlation between years of experience and the level of compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary trauma showed no statistical significance; however, the rate of burnout in nurses who have the most years of experience showed that the statistical significance is approaching relevance, and with a larger sample size may demonstrate a correlation. Following the survey a qualitative face-to-face interview took place with a random selection of volunteer participants, the results of which were analyzed and coded for themes. The findings suggested that grief supports and managing the grief symptoms helped to eliminate some of the immediate symptoms of grief. The nurses’ concerns over what services were offered and what services were useful were also major themes in the research. What was found suggested that many of the nurses have alternate ideas of which bereavement services would be more beneficial to their disenfranchised grief to help eliminate the risk of compassion fatigue. Further research is needed to determine the best ways to alleviate the bereavement that nurses feel following the death of a patient, while still following policy and agency protocol in a hospital setting.
The purpose of this study was to explore what social workers are doing to help youth age out of the foster care system. This research project gathered data in a qualitative study from social workers and how they help youth gain the needed skills to achieve self-sufficiency before they age out at age twenty-one. The researcher was able to obtain ten interviews from interviewees across the state of Minnesota. From the interviews, six themes had been established and categorized as the following: resources, the model or framework used in the work, supports, relationships youth have, approaches centered on youth strengths and empowerment, struggles youth face and permanency. Further research is needed to look at how youth are fairing in the foster care system since the Fostering Connections and Adoptions Act of 2008. It is important to continue looking at research pertaining to foster care that helps the youth attain self-sufficiency.
Case Management: Using Harm Reduction with Chemically Addicted Clients

By Angela M. Musich

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Chris Larson, MSW; Michele Boyer

The research surrounding the outcomes of harm reduction is gaining momentum, and the awareness of the harm reduction philosophy is becoming more widespread among social workers. Providers who utilize harm reduction are often the people that work directly with the most disenfranchised people in our nation. These providers most often deal with clients who are chemically addicted. Current research indicates that harm reduction can be beneficial for the clients who use chemicals. This research project sought to collect information about the experiences of case managers who implement harm reduction. The case managers expressed that the utilization of harm reduction could be difficult at times because there is a need for more provider trainings on the model; and harm reduction could be hard to implement when working with professionals from cross-disciplinary fields and chemical health professionals from the abstinence-based community. However, case managers felt that implementing harm reduction supported their ability to create a meaningful relationship with their clients, and it also lowered their general stress level. The results of this research will be used to inform social service providers about the struggles and successes that some case managers who implement harm reduction experience when working with chemically addicted clients.
Helping Mothers and Children Bond: Sharing Children’s Literature After Domestic Violence

By Debbie Stone Nelson

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Ericka Arnold-McEwan, MSW, LICSW; Ann Peters, MLME

This qualitative study explores how mothers attempt to bond with their children after the trauma of family domestic violence. This study was based on the use of two psychoeducational focus groups with women who are mothers and victims of domestic violence. Focus groups based on a semi-structured interview guide were held before and after a shared book experience with the group participants. Women from two Minnesota domestic violence agencies (Group A=five and Group B=eight) comprised the study sample. Findings indicated that mothers are working to create bonds with their children but have a number of roadblocks. Participants were empowered to try the practice of reading with their children to repair the damaged mother/child dyad through the process of spending time reading with their children.
Factors that Impact Couples’ Discussions of Advanced Directive Contents

By Margaret. I. Nerison

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, Ph.D., MSW, MPP, LISW
Committee Members: Molly Matteson, MSW, LICSW; Doretta Stark, MA, LICSW, emertius

An advanced directive is a document used to communicate end-of-life treatment desires when a patient is incapacitated or determined to be incapable of making their own decisions. This study was conducted using secondary data analysis of data collected from a 2010 survey by the National Center for Family and Marriage Research. The sample utilized in this study included married and cohabitating couples between 45 and 64 years of age. This research analyzed the accuracy of couples’ perceptions of their partner’s end-of-life treatment wishes. Characteristics among those who have advanced directives in place were distinguished. Individuals are better able to predict their spouse’s end-of-life treatment wishes when they themselves were in poor health. Factors that contributed to a slightly higher percentage rate of participant’s ability to distinguish their spouse’s end-of-life treatment wishes included having a spouse appointed as durable power of attorney for health care and having discussed end-of-life treatment wishes with a spouse. Participants who reported dissatisfaction with their spouses’ listening were found to have slightly lower percentage rates of ability to predict their spouses’ end-of-life treatment wishes. These findings reveal that many Americans do not actually know the level of care their spouses would like to receive at the end of their lives. The findings suggest a need for social workers to assess if there is a disconnect between couples when it comes to understanding one another’s advanced directive contents. A disconnect in this vital communication may leave individuals receiving care they do not want, or not receiving care they would prefer.
The Culture Change Movement among Nursing Homes: Social Workers/ Health Care Professionals Perspective

By Emily Nesbitt

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, PhD., LICSW
Committee Members: Sarah Beckius, LSW; Shari Hornseth, LISW

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience of social workers and other health care professionals that are working in facilities that are or have implemented the Culture Change Movement (CCM) and to determine its impact on older adults and those working with them. This qualitative research study examines social workers and other healthcare professionals’ perspectives on the implementation of the CCM in nursing home settings. Six licensed social workers and two registered nurses were interviewed for this study from various surrounding nursing homes that are or have implemented the CCM. A semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant to learn more about the CCM and its effects on the nursing home environment. The interviews were conducted in private spaces to ensure confidentiality for each participant. The interview was recorded, transcribed, read and coded to determine themes throughout the interview. Upon completion of the interview and transcription, a reliability check was completed with another academic colleague. The emerging themes from the interviews were as follows: transitioning from an institutionalized setting to a more home-like environment, giving residents more choices, and positive feedback from residents, families and staff. These findings support the research. Future research in this area will only continue to provide direction to nursing facilities that are implementing the CCM and will help inform them of the impacts of the CCM.
The Use of Physical Restraints: Examining Past Staff Perception, Attitudes, and Beliefs

By Robert Nguyen

Research Chair: Pa Der Vang Ph. D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Gina Misiewicz, Linda Azure

The use of physical restraints in special educational school settings has long been a topic of conversation and concern of parents, students, and the staff members. The intent of this research is to examine the thoughts of having to use restraints as a form of intervention from the viewpoint of individuals who once worked in a special educational school with students with emotional behavioral disorders. This research was conducted through qualitative surveys. Grounded Theory methodology was used in data analysis. Respondents provided feedback to eleven open ended questions that included their thoughts on the positive and negative aspects of using restraint, training, safety concerns and thoughts on changing current use of restraints. Findings identified four areas of concern: insufficient training and education from the amount of hours required to the content of material provided, the importance of team cohesion, the negative aspects of using restraints including the physical, emotional and mental effects it has on both staff and student, and that using physical restraints are a necessity. The themes that surfaced were consistent with previous research. To provide students and staff with safer school environments, there should be continued exploration on the use of physical restraints in special educational school settings.
Secondary Trauma: Agency Support as a Protective Factor

By Natalie Oleson

Research Chair: Dr. Pa Der Vang, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Ginger Pederson, MSW, LICSW; Shari Dezelar, MSW, LICSW

Secondary trauma is something that any clinician could experience if they work with clients who have a trauma history. This is where the clinician exhibits symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder by hearing about the details of a client’s trauma. There has been much research done on possible protective and predictive factors for secondary trauma. One of these protective factors is receiving supervision. Supervision is time spent with a clinician’s supervisor to debrief about clients, talk about work in general, receive feedback from documentation and client interactions, and receive psychoeducation from the supervisor about relevant client issues. It is the debriefing about clients that can be especially helpful for secondary trauma. A quantitative survey was sent to clinicians who work with clients who have experienced trauma. This survey asked questions about supervision, self-care, outside hobbies, etc. This survey also included the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale, which measured symptoms of secondary trauma in three categories: intrusion, avoidance, and arousal. There was a significant negative correlation between receiving supervision and arousal symptoms. No other analysis comparing secondary trauma to supervision was significant. There was a significant relationship between spending quality time with friends and lower rates of secondary trauma, however.
End-of-Life Quality Measures and How They are Viewed by Medical and Non-Medical Hospice and Palliative Care Staff

By Sheila M. Oliver

Research Chair: Dr. Felicia Sy, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Amanda Thooft, MSW, LICSW; David Farley, MSW, LGSW

This paper explores end-of-life quality measures and their relationship to medical versus non-medical hospice and palliative staff. More specifically, “There is a difference between hospice and palliative care medical versus non-medical staff views in relation to end-of-life quality measures.” This study included 121 hospice and palliative care medical and non-medical staff. The staff was from one hospice program in a metropolitan area. The participants were contacted through an anonymous, online survey package called Qualtrics. The survey did not find any statistical significance to the research question but did find some interesting implications about views of end-of-life quality measures. One conclusion is that medical and non-medical hospice and palliative care staff seems to view the quality measures very similarly and value these measures with high regard. Further research is needed, however, to help solidify the value of quality measures and the involvement of the patient and family in end of life care. More research in end-of-life quality measures would also assist in proving that there is a greater need for these services and that an increase could actually help save health care dollars.
Suicide Risk and Protective Factors in the Military

By Nicole Gauer Patnode Fisher

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Nicole Siegler, MPAS, PA-C and Megan Braith, MS

Suicide rates in the military are on the decline, yet on the rise in the National Guard and Reserve components. Training programs to educate and raise awareness about suicide have been implemented in all branches of the military. There is a lot of research about suicide risk and protective factors in the general population and Active Duty military population, but there is not research that identifies service members’ perceptions on what those risk and protective factors may be. Nor is there research that explores the perceptions of stigma in the military regarding suicide. Knowing how service members perceive suicide risk and protective factors and stigma in the military may give some insight into how well the training programs are working. This study compared the perception of suicide risk and protective factors of new members to the service and veterans. The research showed that the two groups have similar perceptions regarding risk and protective factors, yet have fairly differing perceptions about stigma in the military. The veteran sample believes that service members are uncomfortable reporting mental health concerns to the military; the veterans also believe that the military discriminates against service members with mental health issues. The new service member sample believes that it is safe to ask for help regarding suicide in the military; they also believe that the military wants to help those with mental health issues. The research also shows that unit cohesion and family support are strong protective factors for suicide. Based on the findings I recommend improving family involvement in the military. I also recommend creating more unity within Guard and Reserve units. The research also shows there is a lack of resources for Guard and Reserve members; I recommend further research studies identify where the greatest needs for resources are.
Women Working with Criminal Men: The Raised Eyebrow

By Emily A. Patrick

Research Chair: Abel Knochel, Ph.D, MSW, LGSW
Committee Members: David Holewinski, MSW, LICSW, CBIS; Llewellyn H. Linde, MSW, J.D.

The purpose of this research was to learn more about the past experiences of women correctional workers in Minnesota who have worked with male offenders and male co-workers between 1960 and 1989 and whether or not they experienced harassment and discrimination. It was predicted that women who were entering the male dominated field of corrections experienced a great deal of harassment at the hand of male colleagues. The experiences of early women correctional workers may be of interest to women who are considering those fields for their chosen professions. In order to better understand the current experiences of discrimination against women and the harassment they endure, it is important to understand how women experienced this in the past. This study applied the concept of sex role spillover in order to explore the experiences of discrimination and harassment of women correctional workers from male colleagues. Data was collected through research of primary documents from historical archives and analyzed using internal criticism and content analysis. Several themes were identified: workplace minority, refusal to hire, lack of advancement opportunities, unequal standards, exclusion from equal benefits, exclusion from same work, sense of belonging, direct abuse, and reprisal. The findings were consistent with information found within the literature in that common themes were found: no refusal to hire and direct abuse.
**Foster Parents’ Key Barriers to Agency Training and Support Groups**

By Ruth Patton

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Debra Langer, MS, LISW; Erin Wall, MSW, APSW, LGSW

In 2012, more than 185,000 American children lived in nonrelative foster homes. While some states do not require foster parents to receive ongoing training or agency support, these services have been shown to decrease foster parent attrition and improve the experience for both parents and children. Despite the benefits, foster parents do not regularly take advantage of agency training and support options. Previous research has revealed that common barriers to support and training group attendance are both structural (e.g., timing and inconvenience) and perceptual (e.g., relevance of training). This study showed that foster parents experience similar barriers, despite believing that the groups improve their parenting. Implications for foster agency staff are discussed.
Discrimination Experienced by Adults with Hidden Disabilities Who Pursue a Higher Education

By Elizabeth Ann Peltzer

Research Chair: Karen Carlson, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Dennis M. Chlebeck, LICSW, Patricia L. Wallway, MAEd

The perpetual and on-going nature of all types of disabilities on the human condition can have multiple effects and long-lasting consequences on a person’s life and their perception of personal and professional successes. This is especially true of adult students with hidden disabilities pursuing a higher education enrolled in colleges and universities around the world. Living with a disability or disabilities can present additional challenges and adds limitations to a person’s life. The complication of issues and realities of discrimination that continue to exist today create the belief that disabled people need to learn to adapt to society, instead of society adapting to the disabled.
School Choice and Self-Efficacy

By Jessie Mayo Phillips

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D. MSW
Committee Members: Ramon I. Reina, MSW, LICSW; Joseph Musich

This study explores school choice policy and its relationship to student feelings of self-efficacy. Bandura’s (1999) Social Cognitive Theory is used to conceptualize the research question. School choice is the predominant model in which many families find themselves embedded as their student approaches schooling. Given this context, families/students that make a conscious choice about where to attend school tend to have positive academic outcomes. A sample of 36 students from a small, private university in St. Paul, Minnesota was surveyed about whether or not they chose their high school, how they felt about the school they attended, and then assessed their feelings of self-efficacy using the New General Self-Efficacy Scale (Chen, Gully & Eden, 2001). The survey also explored demographic factors that tend to be related to high feelings of self-efficacy and/or better academic outcomes. Results of a t-test on the self-efficacy scale revealed no significant difference between the mean self-efficacy scores of school choosers versus non-choosers. A significant difference was found between school choosers and non-choosers on their perceptions about the quality of the school they attended. Further research is recommended to explore how school perception may affect individual feelings of self-efficacy with a larger, more diverse sample. The social justice of school choice policy is questioned, as it relates to providing equal access to the perception of a good education. Recommendations are made for school and community social workers to empower students by boosting their self-efficacy through mastery experiences, and social modeling reflective of their own communities. Further, suggestions are made to challenge negative school perception on the micro, mezzo and macro level.
Emotional Care in the Nursing Home Setting

By Trista Pohlman

Research Chair: Felicia Sy, PhD., MSW, LICSW

Committee Members: Mary Maddern, LSW; Linda DeRemee, LGSW, RN

This research project examines emotional care provided to nursing home residents, prior to them being hospice qualified. Hospice offers a continuum of care that has documented success. In review of the literature, it appears that the nursing home setting provides a set of standards for how needs are responded to that inhibit the type of care hospice is able to provide. By conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews of six employees working in the role of case management in a nursing home setting, an analysis by phenomenological method was done and several themes were found. The following themes were found: multiple roles of case managers with the subthemes; intake process and acclimation of new residents; ongoing care with the subthemes; social health, emotional health, medical health and spiritual health; residents with complex issues with the subtheme insurance frustrations. Following the findings, there is a discussion and implications for further study.
Methadone Maintenance Treatment and its Psychosocial Effects on Individuals

By Fatai A. Popoola

Research Chair: Rajean P. Moone, Ph. D., LHNA
Committee Members: Rashad Hameed, MA, LADC, Neerja Singh, Ph.D., LICSW

Methadone Maintenance Treatment (MMT) was introduced into the United States in the 1960s to counter the surge of heroin addiction. Since then, MMT's effectiveness in combating heroin addiction and weaning people off methadone itself continues to be questioned. This study examined the psychosocial impact of methadone as a harm reduction approach on individuals that have embraced the program. In this study, the structure and operations of methadone clinics, the differences between methadone and other pharmacological treatments for opioid dependence, as well as the stigma associated with the program were examined. Qualitative semi-structured interviews with Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselors, an addiction medicine physician, and social workers with extensive experience in the area of MMT were conducted for data analysis and interpretation of facts. Findings from this research reveal that despite the stigma and controversies surrounding methadone maintenance treatment, it is still considered the most effective treatment for opioid addiction. Therefore, these findings will provide useful information about methadone to the general public; and equip clinical social workers the basic knowledge needed in working with clients on the MMT program.
Therapists’ Perspective on Use of Somatic Interventions in Childhood Trauma

By Coral Popowitz

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Chris Dooley-Harrington, MSW, LICSW; Korie DeBruin, MSW, LGSW

Childhood trauma’s prevalence is apparent to therapists in the field, validated by statistics from national trauma studies, out-of-home placements and the longitudinal Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study. The purpose of this project is to look at the therapists’ perspective in using somatic interventions in childhood trauma treatment. Using a qualitative design, five therapists were interviewed regarding what somatic interventions they used with traumatized children and how they found the interventions to be useful. Transcribed interviews were coded for theme analysis; the emerging themes correlated with current related literature. The findings showed the themes of safety, engagement and embodiment to be key factors in empowering children and resolving trauma. Specific interventions that encapsulated those themes were noted. Additionally participation in the somatic interventions (i.e. yoga, mind-body work, expressive arts) by the therapist while treating the child was found to be a benefit of using somatic interventions and a possible deterrent from vicarious trauma.
Animal-Assisted Therapy and its Effects on Children in Schools

By Jordan Putz

Research Chair: Andrea A. Nesmith, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Victoria Wilt, LISW; Kelly Reed, OTR/L

Animal-assisted therapy could be used in schools as a supportive intervention provided by school social workers. The purpose of this project was to explore how animal-assisted therapy in schools, specifically using dogs, could be a complimentary and supportive form of intervention provided by social workers in a school setting. Using a qualitative design, five school social workers and three therapy dog handlers were interviewed regarding their perceptions on using therapy dogs in schools and how the therapy dogs may impact students. The data was analyzed using the content analysis method in which themes were developed from participant responses, integrating the perceptions of the school social workers and the therapy dog handlers, and then were linked to previous literature. The findings indicated that using therapy dogs in schools could benefit students by serving as an intervention and helping students learn skills that result in better connection and relationships, and skills that can assist with self-regulation and self-control. In addition, objections to using therapy dogs in schools were addressed and countered in participants’ responses. These findings emphasize the potential benefit of using therapy dogs in school social work practice as a supportive intervention.
The Effect of Playback Theatre on Managing Elderly Bullying in Senior Communities

By Jennifer E. Rooney

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Mary Pederson, MSW; Chris Rosenthal, MSW, LISW

This qualitative research project explores the long established social problem of bullying among the expanding population of adults over 65. One of the main goals is to identify effective interventions in addressing the problem, specifically Playback Theatre. Grounded theory was implemented in data analysis. The social work theory of Person in Environment (PIE) and Systems Theory were used as the theoretical framework for formulating questions and interpreting answers. Seven professionals working in assisted living and senior public housing were questioned regarding their observations and experiences of elderly bullying within their facilities. Data analysis occurred within a three-month period. The main theme that emerged is the lack of evidence-based interventions. Other prominent themes include: (a) what bullying looks like in the studied population, (b) where bullying most often occurs, (c) reasons for bullying among older adults, (d) what interventions are currently being used, (e) Playback Theatre, (f) use and attitudes towards art-based interventions, (g) what type of training professionals have in dealing with bullying, and (h) messages communities can use to address bullying.
Caregiver Support within the Dementia Context: Best Practices in Responding to Ambiguous Loss

By Michel Rousseau

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Rochelle Rottenberg, LISW; Greg Owen, Ph.D.

The purpose of this study was to use the concept of ambiguous loss as a lens to explore common challenges that family caregivers experience when caring for a loved one with dementia. This study attempted to collect qualitative data from licensed social workers who have experience working with family members and their diagnosed loved ones. Key findings made in this study include the different forms in which ambiguous loss may cause distress on behalf of caregivers: A physical presence yet psychological absence (an example of boundary ambiguity) on behalf of the diagnosed individual, the loss of future potential on behalf of spousal-caregivers, and role changes within the family system. Other findings include the tendency for caregivers to isolate themselves from outside support due to the private nature of caregiving and a possible stigma against support group attendance. Research recommendations as well as recommendations to social workers within the dementia context are also discussed. Given the relative infancy of the current research base regarding ambiguous loss within the dementia context, it is important that future studies continue to examine the nuanced form of grief that individuals face when caring for a loved one with a neurodegenerative disease.
The Self-Reported Needs and Reflections of Caregivers of Brain Injury Survivors

By Katelyn M. Ryan

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Christina Kollman, LSW; Jennifer Kahn, LICSW

This study seeks to examine the experience of family members of brain injury survivors in regard to the accessibility, helpfulness, and the effects of the information, resources, and support that they received from professionals during the recovery period, post injury. This research was qualitative and was completed through the use of a semi-structured interview schedule. Participants were asked questions which facilitated the exploration of six different topic areas in order to gain an understanding of the participants’ and their families’ experience throughout the recovery process following the occurrence of a brain injury of a family member. The six areas that were explored were: knowledge and awareness of brain injury; family/caregiver, long term effects of brain injury; the family’s way of coping and adaptation; advice for others who have a family member that has recently suffered a brain injury, as well as additional necessary resources, supports and educational needs. The research found that nine themes emerged. These themes include: lack of general brain injury awareness; misdiagnosis; stress and change in family roles; lack of family effects information and resources provided; prevalence emotional and mental health effects; lack of information provided on long term effects; family support and developed strengths. Results indicate a need to increase the amount of and availability of brain injury educational information, resources and support for brain injury survivors and their families.
Creating and Maintaining the Therapeutic Relationship with LGBT Elders: An Exploratory Study

By Natasha K. Satre

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Christopher Bargeron, MSW, LICSW; Mary Beth Gustafson, MSW, LICSW

As the aging population rapidly rises in the United States, so does the need for social workers who are competent to practice with older adults. Social workers must also be prepared to serve subpopulations within their generational context that may have unique needs and histories of inequality and oppression. The LGBT elder community has historically been overlooked in generalist and clinical practice with older adults. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore how mental health practitioners create and maintain the therapeutic relationship with LGBT elders. Individual interviews were conducted with nine mental health practitioners holding LICSW, LISW, and LGSW degrees. The major themes that emerged from the data were: 1) definition of the therapeutic relationship, 2) the importance of avoiding assumptions, 3) the importance of cultural competency, 4) the validation and recognition of life experience, 5) the development of trust, 6) the importance of safety and acceptance, and 7) challenges in developing the therapeutic relationship. Implications for social work, future research, and policy are discussed.
**Provider Satisfaction with an Integrative Adolescent Depression Program in a Pediatric Setting**

By Aynsley Scheffert

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D., LICSW, ACT
Committee Members: Hannah Mulholland, LICSW and Mark Williams, M.D.

Adolescent depression affects approximately 11% of adolescents by the age of eighteen. Depression in adolescents can lead to low school performance, strained interpersonal relationships, low self-esteem and may increase the likelihood of adolescents engaging in risky health behaviors and suicide. Primary care is the first stop for many adolescents seeking treatment for depression. However, primary care providers have expressed discomfort in diagnosing and treating adolescent depression. The EMERALD program is an integrative adolescent depression program within a pediatric primary care setting that provides specialty support to primary care providers in diagnosing and treating adolescent depression. This study sought to determine providers’ opinions regarding the program through the use of four longitudinal quantitative and qualitative surveys conducted from July 2011 to January 2014 including an expanded current survey and in-person interviews. Results indicate a steady increase in respondents’ reports of their comfort levels both diagnosing and treating adolescent depression over four years. Participants also expressed the value of the increased access to specialty support for both themselves and their patients. Furthermore, participants indicate the integrative model, especially as it relates to the value of the role of care coordinator, was very beneficial to their practices in diagnosing and treating adolescent depression.
Mental Health Case Management: The Perspective of Nursing Home Social Service Personnel

By Mary K. Schmitz

Research Chair: Dr. Pa Der Vang, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW, LCSW
Committee Members: Sharon Johnson, LICSW, Deborah Goulet, LICSW

Many clients who suffer from serious and persistent mental illness (SPMI) are admitted to long-term residential facilities, like nursing homes, and often end up staying for years. Many studies have shown that case management helps them to achieve and maintain their highest level of independence however, clients often become ineligible to receive these services when they reside in nursing homes. This mixed methods study was able to get the perspective of nursing home social service personnel, who are often put in the primary role of assisting client’s discharge to more independent settings when case management is not available. The goal of the study was to find out if continued case management helps client’s discharge to more independent settings. The quantitative data showed a statistically significant relationship between case management greater than 90 days, and clients who had discharged, however it was a weak correlation showing that case management does not appear to have a strong impact on client discharge. The qualitative data showed how important case managers are to clients and social workers. The study showed that case managers who work in collaboration with nursing home social workers offer clients the best chance to successfully return to more independent settings.
The Role of Resilience in Adolescents with Complex Trauma: A Look at Therapists' Perspectives

By Abby O. Schwebke

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge
Committee Members: Tiffany Johnson, MSW, LGSW; Britta Svhiel, MA, LADC

The purpose of this research study was to look at what resilience factors therapists view to be important in their work with adolescents who have experienced complex trauma. This study used a qualitative research design, in the form of semi-structured interviews to collect data. The main findings of this study showed that 100% of the participants perceive healthy attachment to be a leading resilience factor in complex trauma. Additionally, according to the participants in this study, unhealthy coping skills (promiscuity, chemical use, self-harm and dissociation) were discussed as survival techniques. Finally, the use of resilience in therapy was addressed with incongruent findings. Participants differed in their view of client readiness to process their complex trauma. The findings of this study can be used to help therapists gain a better understanding of what resilience factors are common in clients who have experienced complex trauma, which will assist them in their work together.
Adults with a severe and persistent mental illness who are also experiencing homelessness face a difficult challenge in both finding and maintaining independent housing. This level of difficulty is increased when dealing with added issues of substance abuse and a lack of social support. Affordable housing options have also not risen at a substantial rate to meet the needs of this population. The purpose of this project was to explore what factors and resources are important in helping adults from this population overcome barriers to access and maintain independent housing. Using a qualitative design eight professional staff who work closely with homeless and mentally ill adults were interviewed using a series of ten questions. Data were analyzed using a deductive approach and three distinct themes were identified including barriers to housing, success factors, and intervention strategies. The most common barriers to housing access cited by these professionals were a lack of available and affordable housing, a criminal record, and/or a poor rental history. Aspects that foster success in maintaining housing included developing a relationship with landlords, having housing that promotes socialization, access to public transportation, and access to drop-in centers. Finally, intervention strategies that assist in the process of maintaining housing cited by professionals in this survey involved engagement with clients, consumer choice in housing options, and meeting the client where they were at in terms of treatment and recovery. These findings stress the importance of acquiring and maintaining housing as critical pieces to achieving mental health stability.
Clinical Social Workers’ Competency in Practice with Same-Sex Couples

By Emily Smuder

Research Chair: Lisa R. Kiesel, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Teresa George, MSW, LICSW; Josh Cook, MSW, LICSW

This study was conducted to seek out Licensed Independent Clinical Social Workers and their competency in working with couples of the same-sex. With in the last year the State of Minnesota passed law, providing the freedom for all to marry, which prompted the idea for this research. The study asked what LICSW’s overall competency is with working with couples, and whether years in practice, types of training, whether training has been received in this area affects competency. The research further looked at whether those who had and had not received training and whether their years in practice affects their thoughts on needing to change their practice since the passage of the marriage law. The findings found no significance in years in practice on overall competency, but did find significance amongst different types of training received and overall competency scores. The research suggests that trainings about work with same-sex couples need to be continually offered in different forms for social workers. This population of same-sex couples will continue to grow and being competent in practice with this population has great purpose in the work of all social workers.
Older adults and the long-term care crisis: Increasing capacity for community independence through social workers and supportive caregivers

By Emily Kay Snyder

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Kaylee Smith, MSW, LGSW; Lauren Park, MS, CNP

The present study explores how social workers can collaborate with older adults and their family caregivers in transitional care facilities to increase older adults’ ability to live independently in the community versus receive institutionalized care. The data was gathered through five interview sessions with Licensed Social Workers in transitional care units serving geriatric populations. Findings suggest that involved family caregivers who demonstrate knowledge of an older adult’s medical condition play an integral role in the older adult’s treatment plan and continued success in the community by facilitating communication with the treatment team and providing necessary supportive cares in the community. Findings conversely suggest that family caregivers who lack adequate knowledge of the older adults’ medical conditions or struggle with acceptance of their decline in functioning often resist the treatment team’s recommendations and impede the older adult’s care plan in the facility. Study implications include the need for increased education and support from social workers and health care providers in transitional care that include programming on building knowledge and skills to help family caregivers cope with their challenging role both in the facility and in the community. Additional implications for social work practice include education provision related to financial planning and benefit programs available to older adults, as many have a minimal understanding of Medicare coverage and other community programs or resources that are available.
The Experiences of Families with a Child Diagnosed with Autism

By Lauren Snyder

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Kathleen Caron, MSW, LICSW; Leanne Mairs, MSW, LICSW

This qualitative research study explored the experiences of families who have a child diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Surveys were sent out to families at a local agency, and seven parents responded. The survey investigated the impact of the child’s diagnosis on the parental relationship, stress levels, feelings of social support, and self-care techniques. The objective of this study was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of these families with an autistic child, and to gain insight into where they need more support from professionals in the field. The content of the surveys was transcribed, coded, and themes were drawn out to draw conclusions about common experiences. The findings revealed five common themes: (a) positive impacts on the parent’s relationship, (b) negative impacts on the parent’s relationship, (c) increased overall stressors, (d) lack of social support, (e) and the importance of self-care.

While previous research addresses effective intervention strategies for children and parents with autism, this project provides a framework for social workers to utilize in their therapeutic work with families who have a child with autism. These findings also uncover implications for future research. There is a need for more detailed research investigating what the experiences of having a child with autism are like for families. This includes gathering more information around the impact on parental relationships, stressors, self-care techniques, and need for more support.
What Are Effective Employment Strategies for Non-Custodial Parents?

By John W. Spieker

Research Chair: Felicia Washington Sy, MSW, Ph. D., LICSW
Committee Members: Cheryl Byers, MSW, Ph. D., LISW, William Haubrich

The role of the Non Custodial Parent (NCP) in the life of a child has been and continues to be a challenging social dilemma. For over a century, the United States government has struggled with how to insure the welfare of children when one of the parents is absent from that child's life. A continually evolving social policy, Child Support Enforcement (CSE) was strengthened in 1996 to enforce the absent parents financial responsibility for the child, offsetting the expense of public assistance. This project explored the employment strategies that would promote the capacity of absent fathers to support their children. A qualitative thematic synthesis was conducted using four national demonstration projects that explored strategies to promote employment, improved relationship with the child and an increased participation in Child Support Enforcement services. Final reports of each of the projects was reviewed, coded for service tasks and then analyzed to develop themes from which to draw conclusions on best practice strategies to support NCP’s. Findings indicated that case management services and peer support through content focused education groups provided value to the struggles of NCP’s. Participants reported becoming better parents, CSE offices showed improved participation and employment/ personal income increased for the most challenged NCP’s. This research can be used as a guide to improve local child support work to promote the better welfare of children.
Bridging the Silos: The Effects of Including Social Workers in Integrated Healthcare Teams in the Treatment of Chronic Pain

By Anne Spiro

Research Chair: Pa Der Vang, Ph. D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: George Baboila, MSW, LICSW; K. Robin Newcombe Nelson, MSW, LICSW, LADC

An exploratory study of how the inclusion of social workers on integrated treatment teams affects the satisfaction of chronic pain patients. This study utilizes a mixed methods approach: interviews with social workers currently working in integrated healthcare teams as well as anonymous survey data collected from people who identified as having experienced chronic pain in order to provide as much initial data as possible. A content analysis reveals qualitative themes including patient advocacy, the power of integrated healthcare, and the importance of the mind/body connection in integrated healthcare. Qualitative and quantitative both find evidence of a lack of social worker visibility in medical settings which impedes the availability of data regarding social worker effect on chronic pain patient satisfaction. Implications for social work practice and future research are discussed.
Boundaries, Hospice and Rural Communities: Social Workers’ Perspectives

By Haylee Erin Spronk

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Dawn Eckhoff, MSW, CSW-PIP; Pam Neet, BSW, LSW

In the past years, the utilization of hospice has increased greatly from previous years and is expected to only increase. This increase is not only found in urban communities but in rural communities as well. Previous research exemplifies that professional boundaries can be different in rural communities than in urban communities. This research set out to explore how rural hospice social workers maintain professional boundaries through eight (n=8) semi-structured interviews. The findings, developed through an open-coding process, included the following themes: the rural community and the grocery store experience, maintaining professional boundaries, and methods to helping professional boundaries. These themes aligned with previous research but participants added depth and understanding to the limited research. More research needs to be performed in the area of rural hospice social work as professionals are left with very little guidelines.
A Qualitative Investigation of Mindfulness Practice with Clients Suffering from Anxiety

By Amy G. Steiner

Research Chair: Lance T. Peterson, LICSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Joan Hlas, MSW; Janet L. Dahlem, MA

Mindfulness has been proposed as a potentially important new approach for the treatment of anxiety and has been increasingly used in clinical practice with those with anxiety. However, to date no studies have researched the approaches that actual clinicians use in practice with anxiety. The goal of this study was to qualitatively investigate these approaches for anxiety using interviews with therapists on the ways they use the approach with clients with anxiety. Six therapists outside of the formal approaches of mindfulness were interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured, and asked questions about their use of mindfulness in practice with anxiety. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed using grounded theory. The themes that were found in the data were: teaching awareness of self and anxiety, teaching openness and acceptance of anxiety, use of mindfulness exercises, taking mindfulness into everyday life, use of mindfulness in practice as an art, and introduction to mindfulness. These techniques could use further investigation into their usefulness.
Social Workers' Perceptions of Professional Boundaries within Residential Mental Health Treatment Settings

By Carmen E. Tomaš

Research Chair: Lance T. Peterson, LICSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Beverly Caruso, LICSW and Susan Conlin, LICSW

The beliefs about how to ethically treat those with mental illness have fluctuated considerably throughout the centuries in the United States. As a part of the community mental health movement, some mental health treatment is now provided in residential settings. The purpose of this study is to gain further understanding of social workers’ practice of professional boundaries within this specific mental health treatment modality. Using a qualitative design, six Licensed Independent Clinical Social Workers (LICSWs) employed within Minnesota Intensive Residential Treatment Services (IRTS) facilities were interviewed. Data were analyzed using inductive grounded theory and open coding which revealed the findings and suggested implications for future research and social work practice. The findings indicate that individuals’ understanding of the professional boundary concept is largely socially-constructed. Social workers in residential mental health treatment settings practice professional boundaries in three main ways: 1) informing clients of their professional versus personal role, 2) using limited self-disclosure, and 3) role modeling/teaching generalizable skills. In addition, the social workers described how their practice was influenced by the unique aspects of the treatment modality – providing 24-hour care for clients in a home-like setting. Finally, the data show that social workers believe a consensus in professional boundary practice among the IRTS facility staff is best practice, but this does not always occur due to staff’s differing professional roles and levels of experience. These findings indicate both the need for continued research as well as practical implications for social work practice – namely the importance of having frequent discussions about professional boundary practice within mental health treatment teams.
The Experience of MSW Students: Self-Stigma and Mental Illness

By Ashley E. Trudell

Research Chair: Lisa Kiesel, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Judy Hoy, MSW, LICSW; Jillian Early, MSW

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the ways in which current MSW students experience different forms of the stigma of mental illness. The broader research question for this study is: Do current MSW students experience self-stigma of mental illness? Self-stigma is the internalization of negative attitudes and stereotypes created by general stigma (Corrigan et al., 2008). An additional research question for this study is: If social work students hold lower amounts of general stigma, will they also hold lower amounts of self-stigma? In other words, if social work students are non-judgmental towards others in the general public with mental illness, are they similarly less judgmental towards themselves or each other? The sample population for this study included 48 current MSW students enrolled at two separate MSW programs in the Twin Cities and these students consented to participate in a quantitative study by completing an online questionnaire. Findings highlight the prevalence of self-stigma of mental illness within the two MSW programs, demonstrating some discrepancies in the literature about the relationship between levels of general stigma and self-stigma. The goal of this research will be to enhance general knowledge about MSW students in regards to mental illness in order to identify gaps in current research related to levels of general and self-stigma experienced within current MSW programs. Generalized knowledge about MSW students will benefit the professional field of social work by focusing on important subject areas in need of more social work research.
Social Work and Chaplain Perspectives in Offering Long Term Care Bereavement Support

By Laura Tvedt

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Heather Kittok, BA, LSW; Amanda Thoof, MSW, LICSW

Currently, more than 1.4 million people are considered long term care residents in the United States and one in five deaths happen in long term care facilities (Nursing Home Statistics, 2013). The purpose of this study will be to understand the types of grief and loss experienced by family members, as well as gain awareness of bereavement support systems in long term care facilities, what the support systems entail and what, if any, the barriers are to providing support. The research design was qualitative research with interviews. This design was chosen due to the exploratory nature of the research question. The researcher interviewed eight subjects; five social workers and three chaplains. The interview was a semi-structured format, guided by a set of questions. The researcher used a grounded theory-based approach to analyze the transcripts of the discussions. The qualitative interviews reflect the lack of bereavement services provided to families whose loved one has passed away in a long term care facility. Respondents feel there is a greater need for these services. They also feel there isn’t sufficient time to invest in the support services and that they lack funding. There are many common needs during bereavement. While some experience different types of grief, they all need some form of support to cope with their loss. Long term care facilities should have a relationship with bereaved individuals when their loved one dies. Data suggests there is a need for bereavement services that offer different types of supports in long term care settings but there are barriers that influence program development and accessibility.
Interagency Collaboration and the Homeless Population: Barriers, Supports, and Willingness to Change

By Dana Irene Tweit

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, LISW, PhD.
Committee Members: David Holewinski, LICSW; Ashley Pratt, LGSW

Homelessness is a growing clinical concern in social work and in any helping profession. As the number of homeless population grows, counties in Minnesota attempt to collaborate and problem solve possible solutions. Interagency collaborations is not unique to social work or to this population, yet many agencies collaborate with others on a large scale to formulate solutions to this epidemic. This study identifies 8 participants who were currently in an interagency collaboration for the homeless population. The focus was on the willingness of agencies to change and collaborate to benefit the homeless. This report addresses barriers that arise, and supports or successes about collaborating that appear to be unique to Minnesota as no other research is available to indicate otherwise. The outcome concluded that these individuals believe that everyone they know is willing to change. They agree that there are barriers that make serving this population a challenge. They identified that change is a good thing and most cautiously promoted the change. Finally, participants identified that it can be a challenge to measure what the collaboration is doing and if it is successful or not. These findings indicate there is a need for more research and standardization in some of the collaborations nationwide.
Friendgrief: Perspectives on the Loss of a Friend

By Katie Ueland

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Ted Bowman; Lindsay Anderson, MSW, LGSW

This purpose of this study was to determine the connection between friendship and grief through interviews with professionals in the grief and loss field. The literature review explored friendship and grief within the framework of adult attachment theory. The two independent topics then merged in a discussion about the concept of Friendgrief, the grief experienced due to the death of a friend. The present qualitative study interviewed five grief and loss professionals working in various settings to discover their perspectives on Friendgrief and its implications on social work practice. The content analysis of the data was accomplished through transcription and coding of the interviews. Four major themes emerged from the data analysis: attachment, friendship, grief, and integration of the loss. The interviewees all emphasized the importance of the depth of attachment and connection within a friendship and put less emphasis on the title of the relationship. The respondents also discussed that grief is an individual experience unique to each person that goes through the process. The last major theme found in this study was the importance of the integration of the loss into one’s life. Surprisingly disenfranchised grief, which was very prominent in the literature review, was only mentioned sparingly throughout the interviews and was not determined to be an overarching theme in this study.
Challenges and Advantages of Mental Health Services to Adolescents in Rural Areas

By Shannon Uhl

Research Chair: David Roseborough, PhD
Committee Members: Carrie Menk, MSW, LICSW; Jennifer Schnarr, MSW, LICSW

While the rates of adolescent mental health problems in rural areas are similar to those seen in urban areas, serving adolescents in rural settings poses some particular challenges. This research focused on the challenges and advantages in the delivery of mental health services to adolescents in rural areas, surveying a total of 98 respondents were surveyed with 28 responding, over four rural counties in western Wisconsin. Respondents consisted of mainly school-based providers. The survey utilized both quantitative and qualitative questions developed by this researcher and questions grounded in existing literature. Respondents noted the importance of social support, including family members and the community, knowing the adolescents well, and partnering with others in the community when delivering mental health services. Respondents spoke to the particular role of school settings in service delivery. Findings suggest a need for continued education and training in the area of the needs of adolescents who experience mental health problems in rural areas.
A Systematic Review of Wilderness Therapy: Theory, Practice and Outcomes

By Lindsey J. Van Hoven

Research Chair: Lance Peterson, Ph. D., LICSW
Committee Members: Mari Ann Graham, Ph.D.; Danyelle Fisher

The purpose of this study was to examine current literature on wilderness therapy in order to identify any consistent themes. Ten studies were located and key data was identified on theoretical foundations, therapy components, populations being served, as well as outcomes. Results identified six theoretical foundations of wilderness therapy: Systems Theory/Family Systems, Eclectic Framework, Attachment Theory and Family Systems Theory, Group Therapy Theory, Motivation to Change Theory and Psychodynamic Theory. Numerous consistent themes were identified within wilderness therapy components, in addition to several independent components. Wilderness therapy was identified as a treatment modality for a wide range of populations and identified client problems, but most often the client was identified as at risk youth. Six studies included data on program outcomes, which identified positive benefits of wilderness therapy including positive client change, better family and client functioning and a sustained decrease in problematic behavior. Since this study was exploratory in nature, future research should aim at duplication of this study as well as utilizing additional case studies to gain a better understanding of the use of theoretical foundations and components of wilderness therapy.
This study explores how members of the LGBT community experience support systemically during family formation and parenting. Six Caucasian women, who identified as lesbians, were interviewed in relation to their perceptions of support during family formation and parenting. The researcher asked 12 semi-structured questions to capture the level of support LGBT members receive by family, friends, general public and professionals (i.e., social workers). The majority of the respondents felt supported systemically in part because of the intentional environment they chose to live in and the family of choice chosen as a support system. Although the participants felt supported by the environment they interact in, all shared a level of uncertainty and fear in relation to their children receiving support, specifically in school and away from the intentional environment chosen for them. Similarly, this fear came from the heteronormative lens in which society views family in that there is one mother and one father. Currently, families that do not consist of having one mother and one father are considered “untraditional.” Most literature that depicts families identifies families from this heteronormative perspective and fails to recognize families such as the LGBT population. As a result, children who come from untraditional families are often targeted. In response, this paper provides implications and suggestions for future research and advocacy.
Play Therapy: Practitioners' Perspectives on Implementation and Effectiveness

By Jade E. Wageman

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Colleen Mens, MSW, LICSW; Melissa Williams, MSW, LICSW

The purpose of the present research was to explore practitioners' perspectives on play therapy as an intervention when working with a child who has experienced trauma, has present PTSD symptoms and has a co-morbid mental health diagnosis. Play therapy has been accepted as an effective intervention to utilize with children who have been exposed to trauma (Schaefer, 1994). However, there is currently limited research evaluating play therapy as an intervention with children who have been traumatized and have developed PTSD or other mental health symptoms/disorders. The current study aimed to supplement the gap in existing research. Two agencies that serve early childhood mental health clients agreed to participate in the present study by completing an online survey. Data was gathered from 22 practitioner respondents. The results indicate that practitioners believe that play therapy is an effective intervention when treating children with trauma histories, PTSD symptoms, and mental health disorders. The results of the present research support findings from previous literature regarding play therapy when used as an intervention for treating trauma and/or mental health disorders. Furthermore, the present research confirms the notion that creating a safe space for their clients using play therapy is an important part of the intervention process. Given the gap in research surrounding play therapy as an intervention when PTSD and a co-morbid mental health disorders occur concurrently, further research would be beneficial to the field of social work and would positively inform the practitioners who work in early intervention settings.
Clinician’s Perspectives on Physical Holds: The Impact on Adolescents with Abuse History

By Keeli N. Wagner

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchs, PhD, MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Kathy Caron, MSW, LICSW; Michelle O’Connell, MSW, LGSW

More recently, the use of physical holds or physical restraints on adolescents in residential and psychiatric treatment facilities has become a rising controversy among the professionals working in these settings. The literature discusses the debate more in detail, touching on the potential psychological risks associated with these holds and whether or not this outweighs the need to perform these holds to ensure safety for these adolescents. This research was designed to study this controversy in more detail, specifically examining the effects of physical holds on adolescents with a history of abuse through the experiences and perceptions of the clinicians who have witnessed or performed these holds. This study used qualitative research, which included data collection and analysis using content analysis to establish themes within the data. This data was collected from 8 clinicians who currently work in a residential treatment setting and have witnessed or performed physical holds on those with an abuse history. The following themes were identified from the data: a) Ensuring Safety, b) Importance of Training, c) Trauma Response, d) Importance of Processing Physical Holds, e) Loss of Power and Control, f) Secondary Trauma and g) Trauma or Abuse history. The findings of this study have many implications that will be relevant to various professionals working with children or adolescents. Possibly the most important indication is the potential to significantly reduce the adverse effects of physical holds and transition towards utilizing holds as a therapeutic tool to further help clients experience change.
Livable Wage Legislation: Minnesota Social Workers’ Knowledge of and Involvement in the Movement

By Maggie Wangen

Research Chair: Karen Carlson Ph.D., MSSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Mary Ann Brenden, MSW; Sharyn DeZelar, MSW, LICSW

Minnesota’s minimum wage provides insufficient income for full-time adult employees to meet their needs and the needs of their dependent children. The social work profession, and individual social workers, should be aware of and involved in the current social justice issue of raising the minimum wage to a more realistic (livable) wage. This research paper examines the potential impacts of raising the minimum wage, current opinions of American society regarding livable wages, and the extent to which Minnesota social workers have knowledge of and are involved in the livable wage movement. Results of a survey taken by Minnesota’s licensed social workers reveal a significant portion of social workers have never heard or read about the livable wage movement, and a remarkably low percentage of social workers are not involved in the movement; however, the social workers were generally interested in the issue and most social workers believed it was a very important issue. The data indicates that additional research is needed to investigate the reasons behind the lack of awareness and effort by social workers to remedy this social injustice. The study demonstrates the need for individual social workers to engage themselves in more mezzo and macro practice; organizations that exist to uphold the mission of social work (such as the Minnesota Association of Social Work and the National Association of Social Workers) must implement practices and policies that will enable the profession of social work to fulfill its mission for social justice.
Adjustment Differences in Teenage Children: Foster Care versus Group Homes

By Torrie Katya Ward

Research Chair: Karen T. Carlson, MSSW, LICSW, PhD
Committee Member: Terri Powell, MSW, LICSW; Karne Nelson-Zilka, MSW, LISW

The number of adolescents who are in the social welfare system is growing yearly due to a variety of family circumstances such as inadequate care for the adolescents, physical or mental abuse, and drug use or charges of some type. The purpose of this study was to explore the adjustment differences with adolescents who have been placed in foster care versus group homes. Using the qualitative design, six social work volunteers were interviewed regarding their general knowledge about the struggles of teenagers in foster care or group homes. Data were analyzed using both inductive and deductive approaches in which categories were first developed from the interview responses and then were linked to literature review. The findings indicate that out of foster care and group homes, therapeutic foster care is the most cost effective placement for teens. Group homes were found to have stricter rules and more expensive than foster care placement. In the foster care and group home settings, adolescence had a harder time adjusting to structure/rules. They also had a harder time accepting support by pushing away from the caregivers. With set rules/guidelines, support from foster from foster families or group homes therapist along with staff, made it easier for the adolescence to adjust knowing the rules and boundaries. If these teens did not revive any emotional support from their settings or have hope for a better future, they can end up in multiple placements.
Experiences of LGSWs in Working with Sex Workers

By Megan A. Week

Research Chair: Andrea Nesmith, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Heather Conley, MSW, LGSW; Laurel Edinburgh, BSN

There are various factors that influence the lives of sex workers, especially as they are trying to exit sex work. Frequently these factors lead these women to interact with social workers. The purpose of this project was to examine the experiences and preparedness/comfort level of LGSWs in working with sex workers. It also examined the perceived barriers to exiting sex work. Using a mixed methods survey, 61 LGSWs in Minnesota were surveyed about their preparedness to work with this population and their beliefs about the barriers to exiting. Data were analyzed using both descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings indicated that a small percentage of participants felt that they had been prepared by either their graduate education or their employers to work with this population. They also indicate that approximately one third of participants have previously worked with sex workers. Participants’ responses regarding the barriers to exiting sex work were largely reflective of the barriers indicated in the previous research. These findings illustrate the lack of preparedness to work with this population and point out a need for continued research in this area and changes in policy regarding social work education.
Lessons from the Field: Clinicians’ Perceptions of Treating Complex Trauma in Siblings

By Elisabeth Wells

Research Chair: Mike Chovanec, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Mireille Bardy, LICSW; Joel Hansen, LICSW

This research set out to explore how clinicians are currently addressing treatment of siblings. The purpose of this paper is to explore clinicians’ perceptions of how to treat siblings who have suffered complex trauma. The research shows that there is a growing need to look at this issue, as in 2011 there were 3.4 million reports to Child Protective Services (CPS) in regards to 6.2 million children. Of those 6.2 million, 2.0 million received a CPS response (United Department of Human and Health Services, 2011). “Complex trauma” is a term defined, for the sake of this paper, as the exposure to multiple traumatic events, often of an intrusive, interpersonal nature. Complex trauma frequently does not affect just one child, but often several victims within a family. Children are part of a larger system existing of their family, school, community, and are impacted by their environment. More than one sibling in a family often has symptoms of complex trauma, but treatment is typically focused on the child who has the more obvious behaviors. The research will rely on the Developmental Repair Model as a conceptual framework that guided interview questions and informed the researcher of one particular treatment modality to use with siblings. Salient findings revolved around themes such as sibling as a co-regulator, joining, sense of self, and sibling dynamics. The study concluded with a recommendation for further research to explore the outcomes of placing the Developmental Repair model within an agency or school and measuring its success. The research also has implications for social workers in teaching educators to focus more on what is behind the behaviors the schools are seeing, and joining with a child to establish safety and trust.
The Refugee Experience: Involving Pre-migration, In Transit, and Post Migration Issues in Social Services

By Whitney Keltner Wessels

Research Chair: Lance Peterson, Ph.D., (Chair)
Research Committee: Theresa McPardin, LICSW; Diane Balfany, MSW, LGSW

In this systematic review, I investigate interventions used to address pre-migration, in transit, and post migration stressors amongst the three settings of the refugee relocation process: pre-migration, in transit, and post migration. After a comprehensive search of the literature, nine articles met the inclusion criteria determined for this study. The nine studies were then coded with predefined categories based on intervention setting and the types of issues that were address by the interventions. I found that of the nine studies, eight involved interventions in post migration settings. I also found that eight of the nine studies address pre-migration issues, one of the nine articles included in transit issues, and three of the nine articles included aspects of post migration issues in their interventions. Based on the research included in this study, it is evident that the social services are neglecting to capture the totality of the refugee relocation experience by focusing primarily on pre-migration issues, trauma and torture, in post migration settings.
Stress among Social Work Professionals in Mental Health Care Settings

By Emily Willems

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, Ph.D, LISW
Committee Members: Joan Stauffer, MSW, LGSW; Stacy Rutt, MSW, LICSW

The purpose of this research project was to compare stress among professionals in a mental health care setting. This research question sought to answer the following question: Do mental health care social workers experience higher levels of stress in comparison to other mental health care professionals? Empirical research suggests that mental health social workers experience higher levels of stress, than comparable occupational groups. Therefore, this research project explored stress among mental health care social workers in comparison to other mental health care professionals (Lolyd, King, Chenoweth, 2002). In order to compare stress levels among professionals a stress survey was distributed to professionals in a mental health care setting which included; Social Workers, Nurses, Physicians, Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Doctor, Chaplin, Speech Therapist, Occupational Therapist, and Physical Therapist. In order to measure and compare stress among professionals a Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was distributed (Cohen, Devert, 2012). The results of this survey reported that there is a significant difference between the stress levels of individuals who responded to the survey. According to the results of this survey mental health care social workers experience less stress in comparison to other mental health care professionals, therefore this study rejected this researcher’s hypothesis. While the findings did reject the suggested hypothesis, research does indicate that social workers do still experience high levels of stress, which makes this research project important to the field of clinical social work. This research is important to the field of clinical social work because of the implications for future education. In order to deviate from stress in the social work field, self-care is a technique that should be taught in social work programs. In addition, social work programs should integrate mindfulness practice into curriculums because this practice proves to be an effective technique that alleviates stress.
Families with Severe Medical Conditions in Children: Effects and Interventions

By Morgan B. Wilson

Research Chair: Catherine L. Marrs Fuchsel, Ph.D, LICSW
Committee Members: Laura Senst, LICSW; Harriet Kohen, LICSW

Parents and primary caregivers are the most important providers of support and care for their children. Families with children with chronic or life-threatening medical conditions face many challenges that the average family does not. The purpose of this research project was to discover what the effects of having a child with a chronic or severe illness are on the family system. This was done by finding out what has been the most helpful to the family and each of its members during the time since the child has been diagnosed and by finding out what has been challenging to the family throughout their experience. The purpose was also to find out how professionals, specifically social workers, can be of more service to these families. This study used a qualitative research design to gather data from 5 caregivers of 5 children with different chronic or life threatening medical conditions, using in depth interviews. Many common themes were found across diagnoses. As compared to the current literature, many similarities and some differences were found pertaining to the parents, to the ill child, and to the child’s siblings. As an example, the most common negative impacts or challenges on the parents that were reported in this study were handling the initial diagnosis, seeing the child suffer, having fear of harming the child more, juggling work and treatment, lack of understanding and social support from relatives and friends, a negative impact on marriage, handling insurance and finances, and having to repeat their stories over and over. Other notable findings included negative impacts on other family members, helpful coping strategies for family members, and themes for social workers, such as encouraging families to use the resources. These findings, along with others, have many implications for clinical social work within and outside of the medical field.
Homelike Variables and Rates of Depression among Assisted Living Facility Residents

By Courtney J. Wright

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Carol A. Ashwood, MSW, LGSW; Diane E. Bauer, MSW, LICSW

There is an undeniable increase in the number of aging adults who are utilizing assisted living facilities to delay transitioning into nursing homes in order to receive care in their older years. There has also been in recent years a growing interest in the importance of recognizing and preventing depression and depressive-like symptoms in the aging population. A transition from a home environment where one has potentially spent the majority of their life brings about its own set of emotions and stressors. This may undoubtedly create a variety of concerns to become apparent by current and future facility residents and the communities to which they belong. This qualitative research study sought to delve into current facility residents perceptions of facility living and whether the inclusion, or lack thereof, of homelike qualities was in any way related to their emotional wellbeing. Individual interviews were conducted face-to-face with eight persons residing in an assisted living facility. These interviews focused on several themes that were suggested through literature review: (1) the importance of feeling protected within the facility; (2) the perception of the size and scale of the facility and the impact that has on emotional wellbeing; and (3) the importance that a person places on the facility having a natural (homelike) feeling versus an institutional setting. Implications for social work and recommendations for future research are discussed in relation to these findings.
Life Experience as a Catalyst for Therapeutic Change

By Emily K. Wrobel

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, Ph.D., MSW, MPP, LISW
Committee Members: Cara Carlson, Ph.D., LICSW, Anne Boone, MA, LMFT

The therapist's lived experiences of personal transformation can be reflected to clients in a variety of ways in a therapeutic relationship. This was an exploratory study with a qualitative research design aimed to examine the impact of transformative experiences of the therapist on the therapeutic relationship, as well as how use of self is defined and operationalized by the therapist in clinical practice. Participants were recruited through a nonprobability snowball sample. Data was gathered through six in-depth qualitative interviews of female participants from both urban and suburban settings, with an age range of 29 to 65 years old. Participants were employed in a variety of settings ranging from private practice to hospital social work. The data was analyzed and coded using thematic analysis. Findings suggest a much more complex subjective process of use of self, an introspective practice, with significant overlaps in ways the self is reflected in the world; based on the unique qualities of the participants and their willingness to engage in deep self-reflection as a practice in itself. This was seen as the primary component for participants when trying to engage effectively with a client in a meaningful way. Introspection provided clarity by helping participants sort out their feelings, reduce stress, and find meaning in their experiences. Not all personal transformations created a significant shift in what the participants did in their practice in terms of technique. The personal experiences of the participants created more self-awareness, purpose, meaning, and clarity of life, which was reflected in a deeper intention in their work with clients. Implications suggest more education and research is needed related to inter-subjective experience & transpersonal perspectives in social work practice.
Agency Support for Self-care and Burnout among Licensed Social Workers

By Catherine Wyman

Research Chair: Lance Peterson, Ph.D., LICSW
Research Committee: Allison Jordan, MSW. Richard Huynh

Social workers often work in stressful environments and experience secondary trauma through their clients. An examination of the available literature has found that social workers experience symptoms of burnout. Previous research also indicated that self-care is beneficial to decreasing stress levels in social workers. In this study, a quantitative and qualitative survey was distributed to licensed social workers in the state of Minnesota examining burnout and self-care within the context of the social work agency. Quantitative data was evaluated using descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data was analyzed and coded using grounded theory methodology. There were no significant quantitative findings. Qualitative findings were congruent with current research on contributing factors to self-care and burnout; themes of support and flexibility to support social workers in maintaining self-care and combating burnout were prevalent in qualitative findings. Future more extensive research can be done to better operationalize the components of a work environment that is supportive of self-care.