CLINICAL RESEARCH PROJECT ABSTRACTS

2015

St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas
School of Social Work
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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.
Views on Seeking Mental Health Services in the Somali Community

By Hamdi H. Adan

Research Chair: Karen Carlson, Ph.D.
Committee Members: David Schuchman, MSW; Faizo Mohamed, BSW

There is a need for culturally sensitive and suitable health care in the United States since there is a rising population of immigrants and refugees that reside in this country. The purpose of this research is to examine the views of mental illness among Somali individuals that live in the United States. A quantitative design was used for the collection of the data by using survey. Thirty six participants completed the written survey. Data was analyzed using a descriptive and inferential statistics to investigate the relationship between the participant’s level of education, the participants’ length of stay in the United States, and their views on mental illness. The results showed that there was some significant relationship between the variables for those who participated in the research.
What is the Importance of Education Women on Postpartum Depression?

By Ashley Akwa

Research Chair: Andrea Nesmith, PHD.
Committee Members: Linda Ericson, LICSW; Miriam Itzkowitz, LICSW

Postpartum depression is a mental health issue that affects one in seven women after giving birth to a baby. When a woman is undiagnosed and suffering from postpartum depression not only is she affected but her family members and the baby can be negatively affected as well. With the pressure for women to be able to do it all, postpartum depression symptoms are often ignored by mothers. Educating women on postpartum depression, especially prior to discharge at the hospital, is important so women (and spouses) are aware of what symptoms to look for when it is time to look for help. A systematic review was conducted to see what research says is the importance of educating women on postpartum depression. Twenty-one out of one hundred and twenty articles fit the inclusion criteria, concluding in four themes: Importance of Support, Need for Education, EPDS being an Efficient Scale, and Interpersonal Psychotherapy being Treatment of Choice.
Behind the Steel Curtain: Examining News Coverage of a Rape Allegation Case

By Claire C. Anderson

Research Chair: Lisa Kiesel, MSW, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Miriam Itzkowitz, MSW, LICSW; Margret McCue-Enser, Ph.D.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2011), one in five women will be the victim of rape in her lifetime. Previous research has also found that the media has the power to influence public opinion on social issues, such as sexual violence. The purpose of this project was to examine the television news coverage of a rape allegation case involving a perpetrator who is a professional football player. Six news clips from Fox News and six news clips from ABC News were analyzed using a critical discourse analysis framework. Textual data from the interview transcripts were analyzed using a coding scheme based on themes found in the existing literature and concepts related to critical discourse and feminist theories. The study also included a visual analysis of the imagery used in the news clips. The findings indicated, overall, the media portrayed the alleged perpetrator as innocent by shifting blame to the victim. In addition, there was a pattern of discrepancy between visual imagery and spoken language in the news clips. These findings underscore the fact that the media’s portrayal of rape often blames victims for their attack, which alleviates perpetrator responsibility. In order to address the problem of sexual violence on a macro level, social workers must be aware of the way the television news media depicts this social issue.
Animal-Assisted Interactions: Impacts for At-Risk Youth

By Emily Marie Axen

Research Chair: Andrea Nesmith, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Tanya Bailey, MSW, LICSW; Jane Hurley Johncox, MSW, LICSW, LCSW

Animal-assisted interactions (AAI) have shown increasing promise in reaching at-risk youth. Overview: This systematic review explores the biopsychosocial-spiritual impacts of AAI for at-risk youth through analyzing the existing body of empirical research in the field. Qualitative analysis of findings indicated three main themes identified as (1) “the human animal connection,” exploring the unique impacts of equine and canine partnership in treatment, (2) “a new sense of self,” describing internal benefits of AAI, and (3) "social impacts” or increased prosocial behavior in participants. Quality assessment ratings indicated need for additional research in the field; however, results indicate promising outcomes for at-risk clients.
A Systematic Review of Cognitive Processing Therapy and Prolonged Exposure with Veterans

By Lauren Bares

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Paula Childers, MSW, LICSW; Patrick Pischke, MSW, LICSW

The purpose of this systematic review was to identify the effectiveness of Cognitive Processing Therapy and Prolonged Exposure in reducing PTSD symptomology in United States military veterans. The present research study attempted to identify individual factors that may lead to a more effective treatment outcome with one of the two therapies that are frequently utilized in the Veterans Affairs Health Care System. Thirteen studies met inclusion criteria for the present study. The findings demonstrated both Cognitive Processing Therapy and Prolonged Exposure are effective in reducing PTSD symptomology in veterans. Only one study directly compared the two therapies, and Prolonged Exposure was found to be more effective. Several studies indicated factors that may impact outcomes with Cognitive Processing Therapy and Prolonged Exposure including a veteran’s period of service, age, gender, application for an increase in service connection, race and ethnicity, education, alcohol use, and use of psychotropic medication. More research is needed to directly compare the effectiveness of Cognitive Processing Therapy and Prolonged Exposure, so veterans can make more informed decisions when considering the therapies.
Food Insecurity: Providers’ Perspectives Regarding Improving Food Access for Low Income Americans

By S. Barrett

Research Chair: Kari L. Fletcher, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Mindy Johnson, MSW, MPH; Margaret Kinney, MSW

Food is often seen as the common denominator that brings people together yet food-related issues often plague our society in negative ways. Food insecurity, defined as having limited access to food resources often, impacts individuals and households. The prevalence of food insecurity within a household can increase the risk of developing chronic health conditions and obesity. Food insecurity can also be a hard statistic to track because it is self-defined and self-reported. This qualitative research study was designed to investigate the impact of food insecurity from the perspective of providers that work within food resources programs. In total five participants were interviewed, four participants from community based food shelves and one participant from a community based free meal program. Participants of the study were asked to evaluate their perspectives on identifying the hardships and barriers that affect client populations facing food insecurity. In addition to identifying where gaps in receiving food services exist. Participants were also asked to explore ways that service providers could address service gaps and in order to impact food accessibility for their clients.

Results of the research show that four major themes impacted food security rates. These themes were transportation barriers, the impact of household income, the under-representation of seniors, disabled individuals and some ethnic groups in accessing food programs and the increased need to improve food diversity. Implications for social work practice and policy implications are also discussed to emphasize, the importance of addressing food insecurity so that the larger society can understand the full impact of the issue.
Psycho-social Barriers to Military Reintegration

By Krista Baysinger

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Member: Jane Hurley-Johncox, MSW, LICSW

This project was a systematic review of the research studies that have focused on the barriers of reintegration by military service members to civilian life. This paper examined what psycho-social variables these research articles have found that have had the greatest impact on those reintegrating into civilian life. Because reintegration is a process that affects the service member, his or her spouse, and potentially children, it is an important area to research. This paper is a systematic review of the research already published regarding barriers to military reintegration for OEF and OIF veterans. Mental health was the most dominant theme as a barrier to reintegration followed by anger and aggression. It is hoped that analyzing the available data on this topic can better assist clinicians in their efforts to provide effective treatments and programs for returning service members; however, more research can always be done and the clinician should stay up-to-date with the most current findings on this topic.
I’m Proud I’m Actually Writing: Analyzing the Poetry of Urban Youth with EBD for Risk and Protective Factors

By Clara N. Bergene

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D, LICSW
Committee Members: Theresa Pease, LICSW, Andrea Robertson, LICSW

Urban youth experience any number of risk factors in their daily lives, but they also have protective factors that serve to support and shield them. This study was designed to examine how urban youth who have been given the label of Emotional or Behavioral Disorders (EBD) experience and perceive the various risk and protective factors that are present in their lives. This was done by examining 486 poems written by these youths. Data were analyzed using the framework of Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets, as well as deductively coding for themes of risk. The following themes were used to code for developmental assets: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. The eight themes developed through analysis were: lack of safety, loss, law and police, drugs, lack of relational support, poverty, race, and feeling lost. When taken together, these sixteen themes represent both the strengths and challenges these adolescents face. Possible explanations for and implications of these themes were explored, as were suggestions for future research.
A Social Workers Perspective on Father Involvement and How it Impacts Infant Mental Health

By Deb Bjorgaard

Research Chair: Rajean Moone, PhD., LNHA
Committee Members: Cheri Brady, LICSW, Liz Otos, LICSW

This research project shows the perspective of six respondents on fathers and its impact on infant mental health. This research describes how in the Early Childhood setting and Infant Mental Health field how father involvement plays out. Infant Mental Health was defined by the respondents as an interdisciplinary field, involving many different disciplines, such as medical, education and mental health. Despite many of the respondents limited involvement with fathers in their programs and Infant Mental Health work, the research found that roles of fathers are changing and they are becoming more involved in their young children’s lives. Father involvement was shown to be a component of good mental health through this study. Finally, there are some interventions that the respondents have used that are father-friendly and that current research showed were good ways to target fathers and have father-friendly environments.
Use of Supervision for Catholic Social Workers

By Geoffrey Bornhoft

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, PhD, MSW, MPP, LISW
Committee Members: Father Kevin McDonough, Ericka Johnson, MSW

The importance of supervision for social workers is demonstrated in research and the importance of strong Catholic formation is crucial to the Church and her mission. This study aims to investigate Catholic social workers’ perceptions on the use of Catholic supervision and social work supervision to work through ethical dilemmas. Five social workers and one marriage and family therapist were interviewed for this study. They were interviewed in regards to what Catholic supervision looks like, what social work supervision look like, and how they work through an ethical dilemma using both perspectives. The major themes from the study demonstrates that Catholic social workers approach the use of supervision in a variety of ways, and meeting informally with peers was the most meaningful avenue for the respondents. Respondents were more likely to first go to a member of the Catholic Church before going to their workplace supervisors. The findings of the study highlight the importance of both Catholic and social work supervision, whether formal or informal, to work through ethical dilemmas in the workplace.
A Systematic Review of the Effects of Family Conflict: Focusing on Divorce, Infidelity, and Attachment Style

By Jacob B. Borst

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D., LICSW, ACT
Committee Members: Kurt Gehlert, Ph.D; Brianna Loop, MSW, LICSW

In this systematic review, I explored the topic of family conflict, focusing on the conflicts of infidelity and divorce, and how these conflicts affect attachment style. The literature review provided information showing that family conflicts may increase the likelihood of children committing at-risk behaviors, have negative impacts on attachment style, and may even influence the success of future relationships. Positive outcomes can also occur from family conflict such as leaving an abusive environment or gaining secure attachment figures such as a stable stepparent.

A focused literature search found 25 articles and two books that provided information regarding the effects of family conflict in this area. This research showed that trust and stable friendships during conflict impact attachment style and mitigate against the potentially negative effects of family conflict. Another theme found throughout the research was that there are generational patterns of conflict and that children often learn their behaviors from the generations before. The research supported the theme that attachment style can change over time and that when conflict arises it is important to develop effective repair techniques when communicating with others such as romantic partners or children involved in the family conflict. Lastly, children and adults can be highly adaptive and resilient when experiencing family conflicts and that strength may decrease negative implications such as higher likelihood of relational struggles and patterns of negative conflict.
Social Support of Clients with SMI: Professional Perspectives

By Madeline A. Busch

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, Ph.D., LICSW, LMFT
Committee Members: Michelle Gricus, MSW, LICSW; Nils Dybvig, LICSW

The purpose of this project was to explore the impact of social support in the lives of individuals with serious mental illness (SMI). Using a qualitative design, eight mental health practitioners with experience working with individuals afflicted by SMI reflected on the ways social support impacts individuals with SMI. The findings of this study appear to correlate with the literature review. This study identified that social support can be enhanced for individuals with SMI through: providing psychoeducation to families, offering programs that provide peer support, involvement with professionals in an ongoing and consistent relationship, implicit learning of new skills that foster independency, and by implicit learning from professionals modeling healthy communication skills. These findings underscore the different ways social support provides individuals a sense of connection with his or her community, decreases isolation and severity of symptoms, and fosters hope and possibility for individuals afflicted with SMI.
How do you start a nonprofit with programming designed to meet the needs of a targeted population?

By Jolene Castillo

Research Chair: Lisa Kiesel, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Richards Coleman, MSW; Amy Ihlan, Ph.D., J.D.

The purpose of this study is to explore the process of establishing a new nonprofit organization designed for a specific purpose of an intended population and the development of programming to meet the needs of that population. This study seeks to explore how do you start a nonprofit with programming designed to meet the needs of a targeted population? This study inquires into the motivational factors used in the development of the nonprofit organizations and what process was used in developing an organization. This study looks at leadership styles and qualities required to found and run an organization and addressing the needs of the intended population. An inquiry into what barriers exist and how individuals were able to overcome such barriers in the process of starting a new nonprofit organization. This study looks at how individuals were able to obtain funding to start an organization and what their viewpoints of collaboration and credibility are in relation to founding and running a nonprofit organization.
Social Factors Related to Domestic Violence among Hmong Adults

By Ace Chang

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

The purpose of this study was to explore social factors related to domestic violence among Hmong adults. The formal hypothesis for this research was: Social factors are related to domestic violence among Hmong adults. A total of 43 Hmong male and female adults were drawn from the community of St. Paul and Minneapolis, MN. The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 60 years old. Recruitment was accomplished through snowball sampling.

The instrument used for this study was developed and designed by the researcher. A thirty-two survey questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section was divided into five categories of social issues: educational, acculturation, relationship, and individual issues. The second section consisted of demographic opinion-type questions regarding social factors that were found to be related to domestic violence, using a Likert Scale ranking. Data was analyzed and frequency counts and percentages were calculated for the total group of respondents. The relationships between variables were calculated using cross-tabulation. The results of the statistical analysis indicated that those individuals who were married early experienced more depression than those who married later. Also, couples who had more problems in their marriage reported more depression, and victims’ partners who are aware of domestic violence were the ones who controlled the relationship. The results did not show a statistically significant difference between family members who abused the victim or controlled their lives and other variables. Further research is needed to examine violence related to in-laws in the family.
Social Workers’ Perceptions on Quality Hospital Care for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

By Mallory Clark

Research Chair: Catherine L. Marrs Fuchsel, PhD., LICSW, LCSW
Committee Members: Sue Walker, BSW; Laura Senst, LICSW

People with intellectual disabilities (ID) are not experiencing the quality care they deserve from healthcare professionals when hospitalized. A qualitative exploratory study was conducted using questionnaires and Grounded Theory to examine the perceptions social workers have in regards to the quality care people with ID receive in the hospital. From the data analysis, five themes emerged: (a) a lack of understanding, (b) a need for medical professionals to have specific education for treating people with ID, (c) person-centered care, (d) advocating for people with ID, and (e) barriers to quality care. Social workers can apply these findings toward a better understanding of how to help educated healthcare professionals to be culturally sensitive when working with patients’ with ID.
Deep Breathing & Downward Dog: Supporting Youth with an EBD through Yoga

By Rachel Coates

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D, MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Heather Alden, MSW, LICSW, Katie Kenefick, RYT

The purpose of this research project was to explore how school social workers are utilizing yoga as an intervention for youth who have an emotional/behavioral disorder (EBD). This research project was qualitative in design and seven school social workers from Minnesota were interviewed. Participants interviewed were school social workers from Minnesota that discussed how yoga was being used in schools to increase mind-body awareness and self-regulation among youth who have an emotional/behavioral disorder. Six themes emerged from the data including: normalizing yoga, benefits, yoga curriculum, feedback, barriers, and suggestions. Previous research has indicated that yoga is beneficial not only for the physical body, but for the mind as well, which was indicated in the findings. The findings suggest the need for further research to be conducted relating to altering the use of yoga as an intervention in a more systematic way, in addition to the need to adapt the yoga interventions to meet the needs of the group.
Systematic Review: Coping and Supports of Family Caregivers for Adults with Serious Mental Illness

By Sheryl A. Cotton

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph. D., MSW
Committee Members: Eva Solomonson, MSW, LICSW, Amy Robinson, MS, LPCC, BCBA

Caring for a loved one with serious mental illness is a challenging role to be in. The purpose of this systematic literature review is to integrate the current literature which values the viewpoint of the caregiver regarding their own strength perspective of discovering what coping skills and support systems they have found to be beneficial. The studies included in the review were peer reviewed empirical, qualitative and quantitative studies, representing several countries and age groups. Inclusionary terms for this study included: “chronic mental illness” or “mental illness”, some version of the word caregiver, family, related, adapt, cope and long-term. Exclusionary terms included race and dementia. Common themes of strength found in the research included: educating the caregiver about the illness, the behaviors and prognosis, creating partnerships with the loved one and treatment team, finding acceptance of the illness and life situation, living situation effects, the importance of the caregiver caring for and finding support for themselves, finding a new life purpose and planning for the future. Future research would benefit from further evaluating disseminating educational materials, guidelines for development of support groups, training for peer mentoring and future planning into areas of the world that are more rural or limited in availability of services.
The Needs of Families Post-International Adoption

By Courtney M. Coulter

Research Chair: Catherine L. Marrs Fuchsel, PhD., LICSW
Committee Members: Sarah Park Dahlen, PhD.; Misty Coonce, MSW, LICSW

Adoption is becoming a more normal way of life in the United States, totaling more than 7,000 children in 2013; as a result, more attention is being drawn to the services and experiences of those who have adoption as part of their lives (Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2014). The needs of families adopting internationally are areas that require further research, specifically focusing on the pre- and post-adoption services provided and what additional services are needed. The goal of this study was to examine the needs of families post-international adoption. Qualitative interviews were conducted with eight women who had adopted from either China or Russia. Interviews focused on participants’ experience adopting with an emphasis primarily on their post-adoption challenges and needs. Several themes were identified: (a) support, (b) educational needs, (c) community services, and (d) material needs. This study suggests that families post-international adoption have needs that can be fulfilled through services provided by relationships, the adoption agency, or other community services. While this research study is exploratory in nature, it holds implications for social work practice and identifies areas for future post-adoption research.
Latino Professionals’ Views on Employment Discrimination Towards the Latino Immigrant Community

By Anali Crispin Ballesteros

Research Chair: Karen T. Carlson, M.S.E., MSSW, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Susan Schmidt, MSSW, LGSW; Arlette Cuevas Renteria

The purpose of this research study was to identify the causes and negative effects of employment discrimination towards Latino immigrants. Using a qualitative design the researcher interviewed nine Latino professionals on their views of employment discrimination towards Latino immigrants. Additionally, the participants have worked with the Latino immigrant community, have experienced employment discrimination themselves or know Latino immigrants who have experienced employment discrimination. The researcher analyzed data by looking for themes. Themes have been noted and compared to the literature review that has been collected on this topic. Transcripts were analyzed and reviewed to ensure validity and credibility. The findings indicated that eight out of nine participants believed that employment discrimination towards Latino immigrants still exists today. Participants discussed how employment discrimination is a form of injustice that prevents Latino immigrants from getting access to equal employment opportunities. The findings of the study also demonstrated a need for future research. The researcher encourages future researchers to conduct a study on the positive outcomes that may result from educating Latino immigrants about U.S. labor laws.
A Young African-American Woman’s Story: Risk and Protective Factors in Developing Identity

By Jennifer A. Davis

Research Chair: Felicia Washington Sy, MSW, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Buffy Smith, Ph.D.; Gail Pederson, MSW, LICSW

The purpose of this research study is to explore the life experiences of an African American young woman specifically focusing on risk and protective factors and their impact on identity formation. The research asks the questions, “What are the risk and protective life experiences of an African American young woman? How do these possible life experiences impact the way the young woman participant views herself and her world?” The methodology chosen for this research is a qualitative case study allowing for an in-depth and holistic look at an individual’s life. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with a young African American woman and her uncle, who the young woman identified as a “special adult” within her life. Interview questions called upon participants to reflect upon the life of the young woman. The young woman was instructed to take photographs of the places and things that are most important to her allowing an active role within data collection. A visual analysis of photographs taken provides a meaningful interpretation of the young woman’s life including her dreams, values, ambition, and sense of safety. Furthermore, findings suggest risks within the forming identity of a young African American woman are relationships and social perception. Protective factors consist of a vision for her future, a sense of purpose, and resilience. These findings propose a need for future research, funding, and social work practice that is informed of risk and protective factor’s impact on identity development within the lives of young African American women. An informed practice has the potential to create a more inclusive world.
Maslow’s Hierarchy and Early-Onset Alzheimer’s Disease: Systematic Review of Stages and Interventions

By M. Bethany Doerr

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Carol Ashwood, MSW; Diane Bauer, MSW

Early-onset Alzheimer’s disease occurs at a fairly young age and causes a life altering shift after being diagnosed. Helping persons diagnosed live to their fullest potential at all stages of the disease is a relevant and meaningful goal for social work. The purpose of this systematic literature review was to synthesize the current research on how interventions, therapies, and practices address the different levels of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs for individuals living with younger/early-onset Alzheimer’s disease. A systematic literature review design was used and the level of publication was limited to peer-reviewed English language academic articles within the time frame of 1990-2013. The electronic databases searched included Social Work Abstracts, SocIndex, and PsychINFO. Gray literature was also searched for the most up-to-date information. The inclusion terms used for this research were “early onset” or “younger-onset,” Alzheimer’s disease, senile dementia, dementia, patient, and quality of life. The exclusion terms were also applied. The systematic literature review was organized around the conceptual framework of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs which include the five levels of: physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization. The findings indicated that there is a lack of specific research regarding the needs of persons with younger/early-onset Alzheimer’s disease. The hierarchy of needs that received the most attention in the literature was biological and physiological and love and belongingness need. The areas that received the least amount of attention were esteem needs, self-actualization need, and safety needs. Findings shown that when using Maslow’s Hierarchy it is best to adjust it in order to fit the each individual’s needs. For instance when using it for an individual with early-onset Alzheimer’s disease it would fit their disease process better to address the needs in reverse order starting with the self-actualization need. Future research suggests there needs to be more research, services, and resources on person-centered care for those with early-onset Alzheimer’s disease and given more recognition in order to better help this group of individuals.
Millennial Men: A Correlational Study between Masculinity, Emotional Expression, and Mental Health

By Kathryn L. Driscoll

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Erin Hansen, MSW, LICSW; Robert Hensley, Ph.D.

This study aimed to explore the question: do American, millennial men that try to achieve masculine ideals have less ability to express themselves emotionally and do they have less positive mental health and well-being? The population sample gathered consisted of 44 American, male participants between the ages of 35 and 21. The data was measured via a survey that consisted of two questionnaires, the Gender Role Conflict Scale and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale as well as several demographic questions consisting of a total of 55 questions for the survey. The survey was administered online via Qualtrics Survey Software. The design of the study was a quantitative, correlational design. The results did not find a significant, positive relationship between gender role conflict and mental health and well-being or between emotional expression and mental health and well-being. Participants in this study had an average of moderate levels of gender role conflict (not severe levels of gender role conflict) and average mental well-being scores suggesting that men may be experiencing less gender role conflict pressures than men from previous studies. Gaining understanding and perspective on how this could affect men may be beneficial towards understanding what new generations of men are struggling with and how they may differ from previous generations.
The Early Identification of Autism Spectrum Disorder in Preschool Settings

By Samantha J. Drusch

Chair: Sarah Ferguson, Ph.D., LISW
Committee: Leanne Mairs, MSW, LGSW; Meghan Sutter, MA, MHP II

Preschool teachers have high levels of exposure to the developing child and so are in an ideal position to identify children who may have autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and refer them for assessments which may lead to access to early intervention services. The purpose of this research paper was to better understand whether or not preschool teachers are familiar with signs of ASD in young children, comfortable discussing concerns with parents, and knowledgeable about services to which young children with ASD may benefit. Using a quantitative design, 84 preschool teachers were surveyed about their understanding of ASD symptoms, perceptions about mainstreaming, comfort voicing concerns about developmental delays with caregivers, and their knowledge of certain services available to children with ASD. The findings indicated that preschool teachers have a moderate level of knowledge regarding ASD symptoms regardless of experience. In general teachers held positive perceptions about mainstreaming and those who have had training specific to inclusion had more positive perceptions about mainstreaming than those who did not. Teachers responded with high levels of comfort voicing their concerns about child development to parents, and teachers with greater experience reported feeling more comfortable addressing their concerns with parents. Teachers in this study reported having knowledge of services available to families with children with ASD. Moving forward, social workers should reach out to preschools and teach them about the early signs of ASD as well as how to include children with ASD in their classrooms.
Autism and the Impact of the Siblings’ Identities

By Marya Dumke

Research Chair: Catherine L. Marrs Fuchsel, PhD., LICSW, LCSW
Committee Members: Kathleen Thormodsgaard, MSW, LICSW; Andrea Lemon, MA

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can be an overwhelming experience for the caregivers and families of those diagnosed. According to estimates from Centers for Disease Control’s (CDC) Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network, about 1 in 88 children have been identified with an autism spectrum disorder. This is a small, qualitative study that explores the impact ASD has on siblings and their identity development. Previous research regarding this subject has focused primarily on the sibling’s stress and experiences when growing up with a child diagnosed with ASD. However, there is little to no literature on ASD impact on a sibling’s identity. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of siblings of individuals diagnosed with ASD and the potential impact this played on their identity development. Given the rate of ASD in children, it is a natural extension to explore how such diagnoses affect the siblings’ and their own identity development. The goal of this study was to contribute to and expand upon the literature on the experiences of individuals who have a sibling with ASD and to hopefully develop a better understanding of the impact of ASD on siblings. In this study, qualitative research was used. Qualitative research includes data collection, data analysis, and drawing conclusions. There were five themes found in the sibling’s interviews; 1) Definition of Self, 2) Family Dynamics, 3) Childhood, 4) Future Care, 5) and Reflection. This study is based on eight semi-structured interviews. The participants explored the sibling perspective and experience of having a sibling with ASD. The primary research question is the following: What is the impact on sibling’s identity of a sibling diagnosed with autism? The research produced both strengths and limitations. The implications of this research will inform current and future social workers to relate to and work with individuals who have a sibling diagnosed with an autism spectrum diagnosis.
An Integrative Healthcare Approach to Empowering Older Adults in Creating Advance Directives

By Rebekah J. Elling

Research Chair: Dr. Felicia Sy, Ph.D
Committee Members: Gretchen Scheffel, MSW, LISW, William Swanstrom

The purpose of this study is to determine the best practice strategies for creating advance directives when using an integrated team approach. Healthcare professionals are required to inform nursing home residents of their rights around advance directives. Healthcare professionals are also called to assist nursing home residents in creating an advance directive, without coercion, so that it reflects their values around death and dying. Six healthcare professionals (consisting of four social workers, one nurse, and one chaplain) were interviewed to determine their beliefs about the integrative team approach to creating advance directives. The qualitative interviews were analyzed from a grounded theory approach. The ecological perspective for healthcare social workers was used to further conceptualize the data. This study found that having early and frequent discussions with the patient and their family was essential to creating an advance directive. Finding healthcare professionals who are confident and comfortable with talking about death and dying is also beneficial in advance directive discussions. Having an agency that values holistic approaches to healthcare equated to valuing integrative team approaches when discussing advance directives. This study concludes that implementing advance directive strategies with integrative team work remains an abstract theory that lacks evidence of use between these two approaches. Based on the responses around strategies to create advance directives and how integrated teams work together it would appear that the integrative approach to creating advance directives would be successful in accurately documenting the patient’s values and wishes around death and dying.
Increasing Advocacy, Awareness and Support for Transgender Individuals

By Kacie E. Ervasti

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Teresa George, MSW, LICSW, Lisa Bauer, MSW, LICSW

The lack of understanding and knowledge regarding transgender individuals is a social justice issue social workers and social service practitioners must educate themselves on in order to serve this oppressed and vulnerable population to create change and equality. This qualitative research project conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 individuals who identify as transgender, or somewhere along the spectrum of gender non-conforming, regarding their opinions on how to increase awareness, support, and advocacy for the transgender community. Important themes that were found in the data regarding the experience of clinical practice with people who transgender individuals were: understanding transgender terminology, explaining and understanding gender identity, opinions regarding inclusion in the LBG-Q community, issues in transgender community, advocacy, and thoughts on future research. Discussion of the findings in relationship to the literature is addressed. The findings go beyond the sparse literature and shed light on several implications for the changes needed in order to create equality for all individuals. Implications include understanding gender identity, specifically regarding language and use of pronouns, addressing discrimination including the need for gender neutral public restrooms, health care, violence and creating better practice though education and research.
Does Identification with the LGBTQ Community Impact Reintegration Experiences? 
Female Service Members’ Perspectives

By Jennifer Evans

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, Ph.D., LICSW (Chair)
Committee Members: Charlotte McGrath, MSW, CSW-PIP; Sandra Laski, M.Ed., MSW, LICSW, ADCR-MN

The purpose of this research was to examine the reintegration experiences of female service members who deployed in a Post 9/11 war and identify with the LGBTQ community. The study employed a mixed methods survey to gather information from two female service members regarding their identification with the LGBTQ community before, during, and after deployment as well as their challenges and supports post deployment. Responses from the survey were analyzed and coded to develop themes. The themes that emerged included pre-coming out, coming out, and post coming out. These themes outlined how the coming out process aligned with the deployment experiences of participants. Participants consistently identified frequent challenges during reintegration in balancing multiple roles, relationships, and mental health as well as receiving support from military leadership, peers, and military and civilian organizations. Future research is needed to better understand this unique population and provide direction for policy and social work practice.
Adapting Parent Programs for Families Impacted by Incarceration: Community Providers’ Perspectives

By H. Ann Fasbender

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, Ph. D., LICSW
Committee Members: Cynthia Hernandez, MS LPC; Maureen Noterman, MSW

Parenting programs are an essential component in assisting mothers and fathers to be effective providers for their children. These programs are important within the community, as well as the parent population within the jail or prison setting. This study explored the perceptions of parent education providers that work within community-based settings, and whether or not these programs can be adapted for incarcerated individuals. Using a qualitative method, interviews were conducted and themes were developed. These themes were compared to the findings from the literature review. This study interviewed two women, ages twenty-three and forty-two, both of which work in community-based parenting programs. The data gathered from interview transcriptions was analyzed and themes were developed. The themes that arose were the importance of being aware of parent needs and getting to know your clients. Findings revealed common themes in the importance of adjusting to your audience, and in the importance of understanding how a parent’s childhood can often influence their current parenting habits. Further resource would be helpful on the effectiveness of parenting programs, as this is an area of limited study.
Effective Ways Social Workers Respond to Secondary Trauma

By Amy Fogel

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, MSW, LICSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Eva Solomonson, MSW, LICSW; Heidi Ombisa-Skallet, MSW, LISW

Due to the traumatic material of their clients, social workers are often faced with symptoms of secondary trauma. Symptoms of secondary trauma can have an impact on a social worker’s ability to form therapeutic relationships with their clients as well as interfere with their personal life. This qualitative study of six social workers, examines the ways that social workers effectively respond to the effects of secondary trauma. The findings of this study found that supervision, the importance of leaving work at work, spending time with family and friends, talking with colleagues, and extra support of agencies helped social workers respond to secondary trauma.
Programming That Targets Needs of Homeless Children: A Systematic Review
By Erin Foss

Research Chair: Laurel Bidwell, MSW, Ph. D., LICSW
Committee Member: Angela Marti Jedinak, MSW, LGSW; Krystle Englund, LSW

This research set out to examine intervention programs and services targeting homeless children to identify if they were addressing the developmental needs of these children. This research used a systematic review of articles retrieved form scholarly databases. Sixteen articles were identified as meeting inclusion criteria and analyzed based on predetermined targeted intervention categories. The five categories of intervention that were focused on were basic needs, physical health, mental health, educational, and independent living skills. Additionally, this research looked at if the intervention was focused solely on the child or was a family focused intervention. This research found that many of the programs did focus on developmental needs over basic needs. However, the findings did reveal the areas of physical health and independent living skills were focused on less often than mental health and education. It was also identified that families were often part of child focused interventions. Future research on programming for children experiencing homelessness should focus on the effectiveness and long term outcomes of participation in these programs.
School Social Workers’ Role in Supporting Parents of a Child with Autism

By Mo Foster

Research Chair: Kendra Garret, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: JoAnn Gonzalez, LGSW & Judy Elks, LISW

This quantitative research study explored the role of the school social worker in supporting parents of a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Surveys were emailed to members of the Minnesota School Social Workers Association. Participants were asked to complete the survey if they worked as a school social worker and supported students with ASD. The survey investigated the impact of an ASD diagnosis on the parental stress and what role school social workers had in supporting parents’ needs. The objective of this study was to gain a better understanding of the school social workers’ role and identify what supports are being utilized and which are not. The three most common supports were connecting parents to community resources, acting as a liaison between school and home and emotional support. Respondents reported parents most frequently report stress relating to behavior, educational needs and lack of resources. Some respondents reported certain areas of stress in which they did not feel it was their place to provide supports such as parent support groups.
Access to Fresh Produce: A Corner Store Owner Perspective

By Kelly C. Freeburg

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, Ph.D., MSW, LMFT
Committee Members: Adam Kay, Ph.D.; Taiana Hayes, MSW

There is an understood difficulty for the average American to meet the daily nutritional recommendations; but to numerous of neighborhoods across the United States, access to healthy food items is scarce (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Weill, Cooper, Hartline-Grafton, & Burke, 2011). In low-income environments, it is common to find “corner stores.” Corner stores do not often carry as many items as compared to a grocery store, especially “healthy” items. Because of a biology professor’s experience with soil, crops, and an abundance of produce, the department and local health department staff started a delivery system to corner store sites which offers attractive, fresh produce to neighborhoods in North Minneapolis. The purpose of this study was to explore the value of a business relationship with a local fresh produce distribution business, BrightSide Produce Distribution, from a corner store owner perspective. Qualitative interviews were conducted with eight corner store owners in Northern neighborhoods of Minneapolis. The interviews explored the owners’ experiences; and 10 themes were developed. The findings of this study suggest that the realities in low-income environments make offering fresh produce quite difficult. The findings also indicate a fresh produce distribution system is highly appreciated, with cost being the number one contender. While this study is exploratory in nature, it holds implications for social work practice, policy, and future research.
Acceptance Experience of Parents of Children with Mental Illness

By Brieanne Gallaway

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Emily Anderson, LICSW; Sarah Carlson, LSW

This study seeks to identify the grief and acceptance experiences of parents of children who have been diagnosed with a mental illness. In particular, the study compares the experiences of parents whose children have been diagnosed with a ‘socially acceptable’ diagnosis to parents whose children have been diagnosed with a ‘non-socially acceptable’ diagnosis. The study involved 29 parents who were recruited through the method of snowball sampling. A qualitative survey was distributed to parents, with descriptive statistics analyzed through frequency distributions. Qualitative questions were analyzed through content analysis, with responses transcribed and coded by the researcher. The research found that there were not many distinctions among experiences of parents of children with ‘socially acceptable’ and ‘non-socially acceptable’ diagnoses. Experiences appeared to be quite varied and individual for all parents. Both parent’s supports and time since a child’s diagnosis did emerge as factors that could impact a parent’s experience and acceptance of their child. Implications of this research suggests the benefits to social workers educating parents and professionals, as well as encouraging parents to deal with the emotions and responses they face regarding their child’s diagnosis.
Meditation and Mindfulness: Transforming Therapeutic Presence in Clinical Social Work Practice

By Leah B. Ghali

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Merra Young, LICSW, LMFT; Corey Hobbins, LICSW

This study explored how practicing meditation and mindfulness influences psychotherapy practice. Qualitative methods were used to recruit and interview mental health practitioners who have a personal practice of meditation and mindfulness. Nine participants responded to interview questions in person, via email, or over the phone. Using Grounded Theory and open coding, eight themes were identified: (a) definitions of meditation and mindfulness; (b) training obtained and/or pursued; (c) inspiration to begin practicing meditation and mindfulness; (d) frequency and method of practice; (e) integration into the clinical setting; (f) importance of neuroscience; (g) impact of meditation and mindfulness on self-care, burnout and compassion fatigue; and (h) future hopes for integration of meditation and mindfulness into mental health care. A discussion of how these themes relate back to the literature is offered. Several implications for social work practice, policy, and research are suggested, including: (a) ethical considerations for practitioners offering mindfulness-based therapies; (b) the value of meditation and mindfulness to address practitioner burnout; (c) the relevance of neuroscience to meditation and mindfulness; and (d) policy recommendations pertaining to the expansion of alternative therapies for vulnerable populations.
Adverse Childhood Experiences and Other Risk Factors in a Homeless Youth Population

By Michelle J. Goar

Research Chair: Lisa Kiesel, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Cara McGlynn, MSW, LGSW; Denise Smieja, MPNA

This quantitative research project sought to explore the relationship between ACE score, homelessness, PTSD and substance use in a homeless youth population. 161 participants, age 18-21, participated in the 29 question survey, with 40% of youth indicating they were currently homeless, and 86% indicating they were homeless in the past. Mean ACE score was 4.15, with an average duration of homelessness of 17.7 months. 48% of the population screened positively for PTSD, and 83% indicated they used substances in the last six months with 39% using marijuana daily. ACE score, rates of PTSD and substance use was found to be higher among youth who had been homeless compared to those who hadn't been homeless. ACE score was also found to be higher in youth who screened positively for PTSD and used substances. Additionally, participants that identified as LGBTQ or female had higher rates of ACEs, PTSD, and sexual abuse than participants that identified as heterosexual or male. Youth identified as “couch hoppers” were found to be more vulnerable than youth accessing shelters, and equally as vulnerable as those youth staying on the street. These findings indicate a high need for mental health services in the homeless youth field, as well as an increased need for shelter space and long term housing solutions to move youth out of homeless. Agencies working with homeless youth should be urged to adopt trauma informed philosophies, and re-evaluate how needs are assessed with regards to youth who are couch hopping or refusing shelter usage.
**Supporting Adults Living with FASD in Achieving Community Integration: A Complex Task**

By Lyndsay E. Gomos

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph. D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Sierra Asamo-Tutu, MSW, LGW, Therapist; Karen van Rooyen, B. Ed, Certified Autism Specialist

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) is an all-encompassing term that refers to specific diagnoses resulting from prenatal alcohol exposure which causes a multitude of social and adaptive deficits for children that will typically become more pronounced as they age. These probable, lifelong deficits suggest that adults are likely to need unique supports throughout their lives for successful community integration. The purpose of this study was to explore the complex aspects of community integration for adults living with FASD. Using a qualitative design, four participants, who identified as a caregiver to an adult child with FASD, were interviewed regarding what types of services and supports are utilized, what barriers have been faced, and what still may be needed by adults living with FASD to enhance community integration. Data were analyzed using both inductive and deductive approaches in which reoccurring concepts present in the data were identified. These concepts were then organized into themes and subthemes and then linked to previous literature. The findings indicate that adults living with FASD had a very active caregiver in their life to help with service coordination, organizing and planning, and to act as a safety net. All of the caregivers reported that their adult children have utilized both formal and informal supports to supplement community integration and all had also faced systemic barriers to access supports. In addition, all participants were able to identify both struggles and successes that their adult children experienced with autonomy in community integration. These findings indicate that adults living with FASD do need supports and are likely in need of unique supports and services for optimal community integration which points to the need for continued research into the complex aspects of community integration for adults living with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders.
Challenges to Escaping Homelessness Among Male Veterans

By Tiffany Groskreutz

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Necol Arens, MSW, LGSW; Kylie Otte, MSW, LGSW

Homelessness among adult male veterans continues to exist for numerous reasons including certain key factors consisting of past childhood experiences, socioeconomic status and other environmental issues. Each of these factors contributes to the difficulty in male veterans escaping homelessness. More homeless veterans than non-homeless veterans had either mental health concerns, substance abuse concerns or both. Homeless veterans, who participated in leisure and social activities, were found to be of a lessor risk of mental illness and chemical dependence relapse tendencies. This paper is a systematic review of 16 articles which were used in gathering information about the needs for homeless male veterans in escaping homelessness. These articles were scored by the quality of the study. A three point rating scale was used in scoring each article according to their sample size, sample strategy and comparison group. This systematic review substantiates the factors that contribute to homelessness among male veterans, and will provide clarifying information for the social work professionals, who directly serve this population sub-group.
A Social Worker’s Perspective on Integrating Social Work into Assisted Living Facilities

By Melissa M. Gudgell

Research Chair: Rajean Moone, Ph.D., LNHA
Committee Members: Tricia Schilling, LICSW, Michael O’ Brien, LICSW

A social workers perspective on the integration of social work into Assisted Living Facilities (ALF) is extremely limited within literature context review. The limitation of the research is most likely due to the fact that there are no national regulations or requirements for social work involvement within ALF except in specific cases such as those of Elderly Waivers Program or congregate housing where individuals are assigned case management services. The focus of this research was to examine the structure of ALF and the ideology of incorporating the practice of social work within ALF. With no national standard, states are allowed to adapt their own view and procedures on the services provided within ALF; this can have both positive and negative effects of the residents of ALF. The purpose of this research was to examine what services associated with social work are provided in ALF and who provides services associated with the field of social work if no social worker is present in an ALF. To accomplish this, a quantitative research survey was sent out using the system Qualtrics. Forty-two surveys were sent to ALF located in the southeast region of Minnesota, only 6 ALF responses were completed in entirety and analyzed. The purpose of this research is to further graduate social work research in the area of older adults.
Understanding Death and Dying: Perspectives of Hospice Social Workers and Cultural Diversity

By Andrea Hanson

Research Chair: Lance T. Peterson, LICSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Kristen Pearce, LGSW; Joan Olson, MA, BCC

Hospice care has become a popular care concept among medical fields and with patients and family members who are terminally ill or have entered into the final stages of their life. Cultural competency is important to the social work profession and it is especially crucial to respecting the culture of a client and his/her loved ones at the end of life. Within the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro, local hospice social workers encounter the culture and religions of various Asian, African, Middle-Eastern and Latino clients. I specifically sought to analyze data from qualitative, semi-structured interviews with six local hospice social workers with the intent of evaluating the education and trainings that local hospice social workers receive in order to best equip them to assist their clients of diverse cultures and religions in relation to death and dying. I found that most of the education and training that the six local hospice social workers that were interviewed have received has been from interpreters, the clients or the internet. The following sections will explain the study and explore the themes in which the hospice social workers were educated; themes include: what is defined as best practice in hospice; clients as teachers of cultural competence; barriers, challenges and opportunities; and recommendations for education and training on religions and cultures.
The purpose of this study was to explore what factors contribute to burnout and compassion fatigue in a residential treatment setting, what factors may help to minimize risk for the development of compassion fatigue in a residential treatment setting, and how these two issues affect client care. This study utilized a mixed-methods design by sending out an online survey to two residential treatment centers serving youth with emotional and behavioral difficulties (n = 88). Descriptive statistics were used to identify participants compassion fatigue and burnout levels as well as better understand what symptoms of these two phenomena were most affecting participants as well as what factors they most contribute to the development of burnout and compassion fatigue. An open coding process was used on qualitative questions to better understand how burnout and compassion fatigue effect client care standards and what participants felt was needed to help mitigate burnout and compassion fatigue in their agencies. Five major themes emerged: quality of work; organizational needs; worker-client relationship; self-care; and, organizational support and incentives. These findings aligned with previous research, however they were able to add new information and depth to the already limited research out there on burnout and compassion fatigue in a residential treatment setting.
Understanding College Staff’s Experiences in Responding to Student Domestic Violence Victims

By Leigh Hartenberg

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Emily Velure, LICSW; Laura Goodman

The purpose of this study was to explore campus violence from the perspective of the campus staff members who work with directly with domestic violence victims. Current research that focuses on the experiences that campus staff members have in working with student domestic violence victims is limited. A qualitative approach using exploratory and inductive research was used to analyze seven interviews from campus staff who had personal experience working with student domestic violence victims. Participants were asked to describe their thoughts about campus violence and their thoughts on ways to improve existing campus policies, procedures, and programs to continue reducing violence on campus. Participants identified key themes and ideas that could improve campus safety, such as continuing using Green Dot and having a more collaborative campus message that does not tolerate violence towards women. Participants also mentioned services such as anonymous reporting or confidential reporting was important to help increase reporting of domestic violence. These themes demonstrate an importance for understanding college staff perspectives as these staff have an intimate working knowledge of the campus and how to improve safety measures for all students.
Mindfulness as a Treatment Component for Adults Suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

By Johanna L. Hauck

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D
Committee Members: Kathleen Fargione, LICSW; Uta Wolfe, Ph.D

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder has become a widely recognized and accepted mental health concern affecting many individuals. Various treatment approaches are used to alleviate the symptomology of this mental health condition including: different therapeutic approaches, psychotropic medication, and mindfulness. The purpose of this research project was to analyze and distill existing research pertaining to the neurological implications of trauma and mindfulness, with emphasis on how the latter is an effective treatment approach for the former. Data were analyzed in three phases: one, PTSD and Mindfulness; two, Mindfulness and the Brain and; three, Mindfulness and its Impact on the Brain for adults with PTSD. Findings show how that trauma not only impacts the three regions of the brain (hindbrain, midbrain, and forebrain), but a person’s body as a whole. Findings suggest that mindfulness may positively counteract the effects of PTSD due to activating and influencing different areas of the brain, which have been deregulated after encountering trauma, with particular impact upon the structure and function of the brain.
Exploring the Use of Mindfulness with Individuals Diagnosed with Alzheimer’s Disease

By Gina L. Hemmesch

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, MSW, MPP, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Mary Kay Zobava, LISW, Marsha J. Berry, MA, CAEd

Alzheimer’s disease is one of the leading causes of death in the United States. This is a progressive disease with no cure. Are there interventions available to give individuals with Alzheimer’s disease hope? One such intervention is the use of Mindfulness practices. The purpose of this research is to explore how professionals working with individuals with Alzheimer’s disease use mindfulness in their practice and what the benefits of using mindfulness may be. Using a qualitative design, three participants were interviewed who use mindfulness with individuals with Alzheimer’s disease. The data was analyzed using inductive coding of the research. Four themes were identified. These included, benefits of the use of mindfulness with AD, lowering distress and stress in individuals with AD when using mindfulness practices, the stages of AD that would benefit from mindfulness, and the training and education needed on mindfulness when working with individuals with Alzheimer’s disease. The use of mindfulness practices offers hope to individuals with Alzheimer’s disease. The research on mindfulness practice is relatively new and more research is needed. As our country continues to get older and more individuals develop Alzheimer’s disease, more research on effective treatment options is needed.
Beyond Therapeutic Techniques: Successfully Serving Hmong Families Living with an Autism Spectrum Disorder

By D. Ariel Xiong Her

Research Chair:  Rajean P. Moone, Ph.D.
Committee Members:  Alyssa Kaying Vang, PsyD; Hannah Epstein, MSW

Autism, also known as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASDs) has not only been puzzling for parents but for professionals as well.  Although ASD affects all races, economic and social classes, and genders, many research studies have shown that ASD is not represented fairly among all races, ethnicities and socioeconomic groups.  Multiple research studies have shown the importance of early intervention for children diagnosed with ASD.  Research has also found that minority children with ASD are diagnosed at a later age.  Very little research has been done among Southeast Asian communities, especially Hmong communities.

We assume that many mental health professionals, treating children with ASD are probably using similar techniques; however, what this research paper would like to explore further is looking closer at what professionals are doing beyond the therapeutic techniques that keep Hmong families in therapy.  As a developmental disability case manager, it has been my experience that the majority of Hmong families do not seek outside resources such as therapy, for their children with ASD.  However, for the few who are using different therapeutic services, what is it that those providers are doing that is drawing Hmong families to their clinics?  What additional therapeutic techniques are mental health professionals using when working with Hmong children with ASD that motivates them to come back?
Lived Experiences of African American Male Combat Veterans and the Integration of Culture in Behavioral Health

By Nora Hewson-Stech

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, Ph.D., MPP, LICSW, MSW
Committee Members: Oliver Williams, Ph.D., MPH, LICSW; SFC Tyrone Patterson, MSW, LGSW; Nada Rajan Sethuraju, Ph.D., MA, BA

The mental health needs of African American combat veterans are not being met due to historical trauma, mistrust and a lack of cultural sensitivity. The objective of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American combat veterans and to understand how lived experiences of historical trauma and mistrust were culturally incorporated into their therapy sessions. The study consisted of a snowball sample of nine participants from three different states across the United States. Participants completed tours of duty during: Vietnam, Gulf War and Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF). Data analysis included a mixed methods qualitative design that focused on ethnography, phenomenology and grounded approaches in order to bring out the lived experiences and patterns between veterans. Major findings suggest informal support systems vs. traditional therapy, decreased trust due to a lack of empathy and historical trauma, little if any, conversation regarding culture in therapy sessions, and a need for psychoeducation to increase the participation of veterans. Findings have implications for increased cultural training and hands on experience, developing an understanding of the lived experiences through asking questions, and maintaining a positive therapeutic alliance through storytelling, psychoeducation and the continuous involvement of the veteran in the therapy and learning process.
The Experiences of Social Workers with Organizational Support for Professional Burnout and Vicarious Trauma

By Halaina Howard

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Angela Lewis-Dmello, MSW, LICSW; Kathleen Caron, MSW, LICSW

Social workers and therapists have been experiencing professional burnout and vicarious trauma for quite some time. However, the preventative measures, interventions, and responses of organizations to slow down or limit the symptoms of professional burnout and vicarious trauma seem deficient. The purpose of this research study was to explore the experiences of social workers with organizational support related to professional burnout and vicarious trauma. This qualitative study gained insight into the personal experiences of social workers. Eight social workers were interviewed, two of the participants were licensed independent clinical social workers (LICSW), one was a licensed independent social worker (LISW), and five were licensed graduate social workers (LGSW). The participants have experience working in domestic abuse agencies, residential treatment, hospitals, schools, outpatient mental health, child protection, prisons, community centers and homeless youth programs. The major findings from this study were the importance of teamwork, co-workers, and supervisors in lessening social worker’s experiences with professional burnout and vicarious trauma. It was important for social worker’s to be a part of an organization that was aware of professional burnout and vicarious trauma and offered trainings on the topic. It was also important for the participants to be a part of organizations that were structured in a way that promoted social workers having a voice. Implications for future research include the examination of the organizational responses and the impacts on professional burnout and vicarious trauma in order to differentiate where there are more positive effects.
Shame --- the Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Therapist Perspectives

By Karen L. Hulstrand

Research Chair: Lance Peterson, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Stacy Husebo, MSW, LICSW; Mary Anna Palmer, LICSW, LMFT

Shame is common and a universal part of the human condition. It is a factor in mental illness, and shame issues frequently arise in psychotherapy. There has been much theorizing about shame, but less research on how psychotherapists address this in their practice. This qualitative research study looked at how psychotherapists conceptualize shame, how shame issues present in psychotherapy, what approaches therapists find helpful in working with shame and the impact of shame in the therapy process itself. Eight psychotherapists were interviewed. Shame was found to be ubiquitous in psychotherapy. Psychotherapists mainly conceptualized shame as clients’ negative beliefs about the self. Shame presented itself in clients’ beliefs, relationship difficulties, somatic cues and defensive reactions to shame. In working with shame, therapists did not find it helpful to confront the beliefs directly. They did find that the importance of relationships in all their facets (to the therapist, family, groups, community, self, and God) was essential. Therapists described multiple approaches to managing shame in the therapy process itself. The good, bad and ugly aspects of shame were considered. Social workers are encouraged to pay attention to the dynamics of shame in their interactions. In addition, early childhood development and secure attachment need to be supported to develop an adaptive relationship with shame.
Yoga As Therapeutic Intervention with Survivors of Sexual Abuse: A Systematic Review

By Julia C. Hutchinson

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, MSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Catherine Justice, PT, DPT, E-RYT; Eva Solomonson, MSW, LICSW

Survivors of sexual abuse state that the experience is harrowing involving both their body and mind. Traumas like these stimulate the stress response and can result in disjointed memories within both the body and the mind. Working with the felt sensations in the body, in conjunction with more traditional talk based therapies, may help to create clarity from these disjointed memories. This systematic review was designed to explore the research question: what makes yoga a therapeutic intervention with survivors of sexual abuse? The review was set up using peer-reviewed articles and dissertations published after 2005 as data. The databases PsychInfo, Alt HealthWatch and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses were systematically searched using the terms; “incest” or “rape” or “sexual abuse” or “intimate partner violence” AND “yoga” or “mindfulness” or “meditation” or “mind body therapy”. Out of these searches, ten articles and dissertations satisfied criteria for inclusion and were used in the final review. Six themes emerged from the research synthesis regarding what makes yoga a therapeutic intervention with survivors of sexual abuse; 1) establishing a sense of safety, 2) providing choice and a sense of control, 3) addressing the relationship with the body and personal boundaries, 4) yoga and mindfulness as an adjunct treatment with psychotherapy, 5) the use of present mind thinking, and 6) accessibility and self-treatment. The research suggests the importance of including the body in therapeutic work with survivors of sexual abuse. Moving forward, more research is required with survivors of sexual abuse to better understand the therapeutic needs of this population. Exploring potential risks of this form of intervention as well as the relationship between yoga practitioner and mental health provider are also important areas for further research.
When children experience trauma, their ability to recognize, process, and share their emotions is unlike that of an adult, due to their lack of language skills. Typically, evidence of the trauma is then displayed through behavior, which happens to parallel similar symptoms of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). This similarity becomes a problem when children begin school, where the tendency among adults is to focus solely on behavior. This study was intended to look at the relationship between ADHD and PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) among children and how mental health professionals differentiate between the two diagnoses. Using a qualitative design, five children’s mental health professionals were interviewed. The findings from this study were consistent with current research, concluding the existence of significant symptom overlap between ADHD and PTSD among children. Misdiagnosis can result in the prescription of inappropriate medication and therapeutic interventions. Unlike current research, this study suggests that the best way to differentiate between ADHD and PTSD among children is by attaining the social history of a child. Additionally, the data from this study suggested the need for further education of parents, schools, and community agencies on trauma-informed care. This approach is important in order to prevent misdiagnosis and undiagnosed disorders among children, create more of an empathetic approach to children with potential trauma histories, and enhance society’s understanding of trauma and its impact.
Somatic Psychotherapy: Illuminating an Embodied Experience of Self-Transformation through Autoethnography

By Ellie Jones

Research Chair: Felicia Sy, Ph.D., LICSW, MSW
Committee Members: Cara Carlson, Ph.D., LICSW, MSW; Kate Daly, MA LP

Somatic Psychotherapy is a contemporary embodied, experiential therapeutic modality that is difficult to understand by reading theory alone and without the benefit of direct personal experience. In this autoethnography, I aimed to illuminate the therapeutic change process in somatic psychotherapy from my perspective as a client. In reflecting on my experience as a client, I also strove to more deeply understand my own healing process to become a more effective and ethical somatic psychotherapist. The data consisted of my direct participation in four professional workshops related to somatic psychotherapy, as well as my personal experience as a continuous client of somatic psychotherapy. I then developed evocative narratives based on my somatic psychotherapy sessions that highlight the process of how somatic psychotherapy functions between client and therapist and illuminate how I experience personal transformation. I also interwove my reflections of the related workshop experiences with salient theoretical literature to further elucidate my understanding of how somatic psychotherapy engenders self-transformation. Ultimately, I found that the intersubjective relationship between client and therapist is inherently embodied and moreover becomes the transformative healing agent in somatic psychotherapy. I additionally found that self-transformation occurs through the delicate and simultaneous moments of grace and precision that both profoundly ground the client in the present moment, and connect them to a sense of all that is available within and beyond them.
Motivational Interviewing and Co-Occurring Disorders: Minnesota Correctional Agents’ Perceptions

By Elizabeth Kalmon

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, MSW, Ph.D., MPP, LISW
Committee Members: Jane F. Hurley Johncox, MSW, LICSW; Jason M. Sole, MSCJ, Ph.D. Candidate

Recidivism is high among individuals with co-occurring disorder of a mental illness and chemical abuse or dependency. Specifically, for those who return to the community on supervised release to the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area of Minnesota from state incarceration. Minnesota’s Department of Corrections and Community Corrections have implemented the use of Motivational Interviewing by Community Correctional Agents with all Supervisees as part of a model designed to reduce recidivism. The purpose of this study is to expand on the limited literature pertaining to the use of Motivational Interviewing by correctional agents who work with supervisees with a co-occurring disorders. A nonpositivist qualitative approach was used to address the research question: What are correctional agents’ perceptions with using Motivational Interviewing with supervisees who have a co-occurring disorder. Correctional agents were recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball strategies. The sample consisted of four participants. Face-to-face semi-standardized interviews were used to collect the data. Grounded Theory was used to analyze the data and produce the finding. The findings of this study showed that the participants were client-centered in their approach to establishing a professional alliance; participants’ perceptions of their agencies’ support for implementing MI was equally split; and participants perceived mixed successes in the use of MI with supervisees with COD. The discussion addresses these finding, relates them to the importance to the field of social work, and from them makes recommendation for future research.
Factors Influencing Treatment Completion of Involuntary Groups

By Charles Kalogo

Research Chair: Michael G. Chovanec, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Anna Pederson, LICSW, Deric Jackson, LGSW, & James Reilly, MSW

This qualitative study explores factors that influence treatment completion of involuntary clients. Eight professionals who have substantial experience facilitating groups with domestic abuse, substance abuse, DWI, and general offender rehabilitation programs were recruited for participation. Through semi structured interviews, professionals reflected on the factors they believed contributed to attrition and interventions they implemented to improve retention. Thematic content analysis informed by grounded theory generated several themes associated with treatment completion. Motivation, readiness, stage of change, mental health and chemical dependency were individual factors believed to influence completion. While, housing, employment, transportation, child-care, program cost, program time, program length, closed, and open group formats were noteworthy environmental factors. Engagement and facilitator bias were discussed in terms of the impact on retention. Implications for social work practice suggest the need for pre-group orientation, knowledge of Trans theoretical stages of changes, and Motivational Interviewing skills to effectively work with treatment resistant clients.
The Experiences of Huntington’s Disease Caregivers

By Alisa Kanuit

Research Chair: Catherine Marrs Fuchsel, PhD, LICSW
Committee Members: Nina Ross, LICSW; Ted Bowman

Huntington’s Disease (HD) is a genetic, inherited, and terminal neurological disorder that affects both physical and mental capacities. The most recent estimates state that 1 in every 10,000 Americans has HD and more than 250,000 are at risk of inheriting the disease from a parent (Huntington’s Disease Society of America, 2013). Caregivers can be defined as informal or formal. Informal caregivers are typically family members such as spouses, children, or siblings. Formal caregivers are paid, professional caregivers. Family members often become caregivers for diagnosed individuals, however, the need for formal and paid care increases as the disease continues to progress. The purpose of this study is to examine the overall experiences of formal and informal HD caregivers. Qualitative interviews were conducted with seven informal and formal caregivers. The interviews explored the caregivers’ experiences and nine themes were developed: (a) Lack of Education and Awareness, (b) Resources and Support, (c) Denial, (d) Burnout, (e) Attachment, (f) Progression of the Disease, (g) Grief and Loss, (h) Complex Mental Health, and (i) Family Dynamics. The findings of this study suggest that a lack of knowledge, awareness, and resources contributes to caregiver distress. The findings also indicate that HD negatively impacts the family system. While this study is exploratory in nature, it holds implications for social work practice, policy, and future research.
Best Practice in Early Childhood Home Visiting

By Shannon Karsten

Research Chair: Rajean Moone, Ph.D., LNHA
Committee Members: Susanne Schroeder, MSW, LICSW; Kelly deBruin, Ph.D.

Home visiting has been in practice for some time but has gained an increased spotlight in recent years. The present study is a qualitative exploration of the best practices surrounding the specific realm of home visiting in reaching children in early childhood and their families. The research focused on ages three to five and was specific to school readiness. The researcher conducted nonscheduled-standardized interviews with professionals from eight home visiting programs in southern Minnesota and the metro. The transcripts were analyzed using a grounded theory approach and seven themes emerged to describe the work done in these early childhood home visiting programs. These themes included challenges in working with diverse communities, unstable funding, modification and lack of curriculum, importance of relationships, the need to focus on the parent, an emphasis on school readiness and a link to social work. The data also provided a broad look at the curriculum, staffing, assessments and partnerships used in home visiting work. The findings imply that home visiting has certain challenges specific to the work but there are significant benefits to this strategy in reaching children and their families as well. The research also pointed to a link to social work practice partly due to the significant work in home visiting to connect isolated families to their communities along with the school readiness focus.
Marital Satisfaction: The Impact of Premarital and Couples Counseling

By Amanda Kepler

Research Chair: Laurel Bidwell, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Abigail Henderson, MSW, LGSW; Meghan Williams LMFT

Marital dissatisfaction affect people of all ages, races and cultural backgrounds and often leads to divorce. Divorce can have negative implications that last for years. Social workers and other allied professionals providing premarital and marital counseling work to ameliorate marital discord and improve marital satisfaction. The purpose of this study was to examine the connection between premarital and marital counseling and marital satisfaction for couples. Using a cross-sectional design, the following three questions were asked: Is involvement in premarital counseling linked to a greater satisfaction of a marriage? Is marital or couples counseling during times of marital discord linked to greater satisfaction of a marriage and less likelihood of divorce? Is a positive experience of premarital counseling linked to a greater likelihood that couples will engage in marital or couples counseling during times of marital discord? Twenty-seven individuals responded to an anonymous Qualtrics survey about couples’ involvement with premarital and marital counseling as well as self-ratings of marital satisfaction. Data was analyzed using chi-square analyses. Findings were not significant for any of the three research questions, however a trend was detected showing that individuals who took part in premarital counseling indicated greater marital satisfaction than those who did not take part in premarital counseling. Limitations of this study include the lack of variability in individuals’ experiences. Future research is needed to explore this relation more fully and to develop a solid base of knowledge that can inform the development of effective social work intervention strategies in the area of premarital and marital counseling.
Therapists' Perspectives on the Use of Yoga in the Treatment of Trauma

By Brianna Klatt

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph. D., LICSW
Committee Member: Michael Schock, Ph.D., LICSW

This study explored therapists' experiences of incorporating the practice of yoga into their psychotherapy with clients who experience traumatic stress. Using a qualitative design, five volunteer licensed mental health professionals were interviewed regarding their experiences with integrating yoga as a therapy tool with their clients who experience traumatic stress symptoms. Data was taken from a semi-structured interview and analyzed to identify common themes. The findings support the literature which says, traumatic events affect both the mind and body, and clinicians' need to implement inventions’ addressing the whole person, to be effective helping clients’ heal from traumatic stress. Findings indicated that the overall experiences of therapists were positive, when safely incorporating yoga as a part of clients’ therapy to treating traumatic stress.
Staff Retention and Job Satisfaction in Child Protection

By Brittany Kowalewski

Research Chair: Lance T. Peterson, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Jessica Hoeper, MSW; Mariann O’Keefe, M.S.

The purpose of this study is to provide the background and theoretical framework that contribute to staff retention and job satisfaction in child protection. This project intends to understand the factors and relationships associated in maintaining successful staff in child welfare. An anonymous mixed methods study was utilized and formatted with both quantitative and qualitative questions. This survey was distributed to four Southeastern Minnesota county child protection units and asked respondents specific questions in regards to personal characteristics, work factors, and agency factors that impact their job satisfaction and levels of compassion fatigue. This study indicates that work factors such as the nature of the work, client population, severity of cases, paperwork, and workload, significantly impacts the level workers job satisfaction. Implications suggest when adequate supports are provided, there is a reduction in stress, which leads to higher levels of job satisfaction, and ultimately retention of staff.
Perceived Effectiveness of Group Therapy in Elementary School Settings with Children Experiencing Parental Divorce

By Jennifer Kronenberg

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Tasha Alexander, MSW, APSW; Luke Fedie, LPC

This research explored the perceived effectiveness of group work for children experiencing parental divorce in elementary school settings. This research collected qualitative data from eight school social workers in the state of Minnesota. The workers ranged in years of practice, licensure level and size of district. This research found that immediacy of intervention, length and time in group, closed membership and varied activities all greatly contributed to overall effectiveness. In addition, this research found noteworthy measurements of effectiveness including positive emotional and behavioral outcomes, emotional expression, increased self-esteem and identified positive supports. The findings of this research did not support the involvement of parents within the group process. Future research should explore parental and systems involvement as related to group effectiveness.
Professional Perspectives: Views of Service Needs for Individuals Diagnosed With Frontotemporal Dementia and Their Families

By Karina Krosbakken

Research Chair: Rosella Collins-Puoch, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Carol Ashwood, MSW, LGSW; Rochelle Rottenberg, MSW, LISW

The purpose of this study was to explore professional's perspectives on the service needs for people with Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD) and their families. A qualitative research design was used to obtain data from (n=4) four professionals from a variety of work settings. The results of this study supported previous literature in identifying the challenges in supporting and lack of services for people with FTD and their caregivers. The major theme which emerged in this research was that there is a need for FTD specific services. The subthemes which emerged to support this theme included: physical activities, more staffing, individualization, collaboration, financial barriers, and education. Implications include the need for social workers to provide education and advocate for service needs for people with FTD and their caregiver in multiple levels. In additional to exploring professional perspectives is imperative that future research explore the service and support needs from the perspective of those providing care for individuals diagnosed with FTD.
Impact of Traumatic Brain Injury in Veterans With PTSD

By Marcus Kuboy

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, LICSW, Ph. D.
Committee Members: Bryan Bodrog, MS, LPC; Elizabeth Rezek, LICSW

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have had a negative impact on a significant amount of veterans who have returned from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Mindfulness practice has proven to be an effective means to increase the quality of life (QoL) for many who have been impacted by TBI or PTSD. This study intended to examine the exact implications that having a TBI has on improving the QoL through mindfulness for veterans who have PTSD and TBI. This was a qualitative study of four professionals in the areas of traumatic brain injury (TBI); post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); mindfulness practice; and/or veterans who have experience with any of the above. The study highlights the challenges that professionals face when working with an invisible wound; qualities of effective mental health workers when working with TBI; and the positive impact that mindfulness practice can have on this population.
Racism and the Media: A Textual Analysis

By Kassia E. Kulaszewicz

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Eowyn Gatlin, MSW, LGSW; Brandon Jones, M.A.

The topic of media influencing racism in our society is significant in research. It targets media bias, and therefore it is wise to explore how media contributes to racism in explicit ways. During the beginning stages of film and media, Blacks struggled to represent their own stories, beliefs, opinions and identities because Whites controlled the entertainment industry and chose what images of Black people to portray. This study incorporated an understanding standing of Bandura's Learning Theory to gain understanding of how media messages impact our belief and value system. This study examined what information was available to readers and viewers of the news media and how that information impacts our beliefs, emotions, and behaviors towards others. Specifically, as it relates to racial differences, stereotypes, racial microaggressions and perceptions of Black males. Major findings include examples and information related to racial microaggressions and the impacts as it relates to media exposure. The research also identifies "identifier" word patterns, using "black" and "white", offering a conclusion that on average "black" is used three times more in news reporting than "white". The over usage of the word "black" becomes a racial micro aggression because it can condition the mind to associate the word with negative connotation. Patterns of criminalization and justification are exposed. Black men are often criminalized and represented as violent and in addition, in the event of a White officer as the shooter of a black man, the officer's actions are justified or supported regardless of the criminality of his or her own actions. In consideration with how race is presented in the media historically, it seems that this research would show a correlation that racism is likely still reinforced through news media whether conscience or not.
Retention and Mental Health: College and Single Parents

By Lindsey Landgraf

Research Chair: Dr. Pa Der Vang, Ph. D., MSW, LICSW, LCSW, MSW
Committee Members: Susan Warfield, MSW, LICSW; Holly Ingersoll, M.A.

Literature identifies the barriers single parent students face in persisting and attaining postsecondary education; however, research is still quite limited specifically on the role conflict these students face and the direct impact role conflict has on mental health and retention. The author of this study analyzed data from a quantitative, anonymous online survey with single parent students who attend the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities and receive support services from the Student Parent HELP Center at the University. The study found a trend between role conflict and retention of single parent students; however, the finding was not significant. These findings provide valuable information for University retention policy as well as support services provided by social workers. More research is needed to further examine the issue of role conflict on student’s mental health and postsecondary retention.
A Systematic Review of Bullying Prevention Programs in Schools

By Ashley R. Lanigan

Research Chair: Lance T. Petersen, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Alli Aker, MSW, LICSW; Katie Shepherd, MSW, LGSW

Bullying prevention programs have been shown to be generally effective in reducing bullying and victimization. Because it is crucial for social workers to understand the impact of bullying prevention programs, a systematic review was conducted for this project to identify which programs have been found to be successful. A total of 518 reports concerned with bullying prevention were found, and 33 were assessed for eligibility. Of these reports, fifteen were included in this review. All articles from 1993 up to 2014 were hand-searched, and were in 9 electronic databases. Through a review of fifteen articles that acknowledged bullying prevention, numerous similarities, differences, as well as future questions were identified. Populations served through these programs included individual adolescents, teachers, and parents. No two articles presented a bullying prevention program identical to another, though numerous aspects were replicated in a number of the articles. All of the research articles reviewed identified some degree of positive effects in a bullying prevention programs. Findings indicate that bullying prevention programs work, as the combined effect of the various programs and implementations are shown to decrease bullying and victimization by an average of 17-23 percent.
“The Hunger Games”: Media Representation of the National School Lunch Program

By Danielle Lee

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D., MSW, LISW
Committee Members: Stacy Swenson, MSW, LICSW; Alisha Kaul-Nelson, MSW, LICSW

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) was designed to help ease the financial burden of eligible families and provide a hot and nutritious meal for students. This program offers assistance to families who otherwise may not be able to afford consistent nutritious meals for their children. There is a lack of research in the area of media representation of public welfare programs, including the National School Lunch Program. The purpose of this research was to examine how both national (The New York Times) and local (Minneapolis Star Tribune and St. Paul Pioneer Press) newspapers portrayed NSLP in the 1960’s, 1980’s, and 2000’s. This study used the grounded theory data analysis method to facilitate a textual analysis. Findings indicated that in the 1960’s there was support as well as acknowledgement that something needed to be done about hunger in America and NSLP created a sense of social justice and responsibility for many during this time. In the 1980’s the predominant discourse centered on the costs of the NSLP program and ways to cut the budget, but there were voices in favor of expanding the program, too. Finally in the 2000s, while social responsibility started to emerge again as a theme, the discourse shifted to the nutrition of the program and how to efficiently feed those who need it. Interestingly, across all three decades, the influence of stigma for those using the NSLP was either evident in the prose of the discourse or in the experiences of children portrayed in the discourse. Future research should focus on how race plays a part in the portrayal of NSLP in the media, and the enduring influence of stigmatization of public assistance programs, even those that help children.
Exploring Diet within Treatment of Persons with Serious and Persistent Mental Illness

By Farah Lee

Research Chair: Kari Fletcher, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Heidi Telschow, MSW, Suzanne Sorensen RD, LD, CDE,

Studies suggest that persons diagnosed with serious and persistent mental illness (SPMI) die prematurely compared to the rest of the general U.S. population. Previous research implies that this is due to disproportionate rates of chronic medical conditions prevalent in the SPMI population. Contributing factors to the mortality of those with SPMI include poor diet, lifestyle, and mental illness. This research aimed to discover how providers incorporate dietary practices into their work with persons diagnosed with SPMI. To further explore this topic this researcher analyzed data from qualitative semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with licensed professionals, medical doctors, and certified practitioners (n = 8) in the mental health field. The findings of this research supported previous studies present in the literature review and ideas of best practice techniques slowly developed. This research was categorized using three major themes: 1) cause and effect; 2) prevalent medical conditions; and 3) best practice. The findings of this study provide valuable information about the impact of diet on the outcome of one’s health. This research is important in social work in that it creates awareness to the growing public health problem of human disease and preventable deaths.
Mental Health and the American Inmate: A Systematic Review of Literature

By Megan A. Lee

Research Chair: Ande Nesmith, Ph. D., LISW
Committee Members: Roxanne Sanderson, MSW, LICSW; John Edmonds

In this systematic review, I synthesized literature regarding the effectiveness of current correctional mental health and substance use programming in the United States. Using Social Work Abstracts, Criminal Justice Abstracts, SocINDEX, and PsychINFO, 17 quantitative studies meeting criteria for the review were then analyzed. Themes identified included recidivism as an indicator of program success, therapeutic community treatment, and aftercare following correctional treatment. The studies included in this review found moderate levels of effectiveness of corrections based programming for adult inmates with mental health and substance use disorders and overall lower re-incarceration rates for offenders engaged in correctional treatment, but suggests a need for additional studies on both in-custody and post-custody programming for inmates with mental health and substance use disorders.
Academic Achievement Gap: The Case of Children of Immigrants

By Dukassa W. Lemu

Research Chair: Karen T. Carlson, M.S.E., MSSW, PhD., LICSW
Committee members: David McGraw Schuchman, MSW, LICSW; Teferi Fufa, B.Sc., M.Ed.

The academic achievement gap among immigrant children is caused by multiple factors that require multiple strategies to alleviate the gap. The purpose of my study is to get the views and ideas of key interview participants to gain deep understanding of the factors that contribute to academic achievement gap among immigrant children. A qualitative research design was used in this research. The current qualitative research project employed a phenomenological approach (Lester, 1999), in interviewing participants who have personal knowledge and experiences of factors contributing to achievement gap. The four themes considered for the research were schools, neighborhoods, family and socioeconomic status (SES) factors. Eight interview participants quantified a number of contributing factors to the gap. The semi-structured interview conducted with eight interview participants highlighted the factors that hamper immigrant children’s academic achievement. The findings in this research indicated the following conditions as major factors in the achievement gap among immigrant children: 1) School environment without bi-lingual and multi-cultural teachers, standardized tests without exception, age based placement and lack of role model teachers and school staff members 2) Poor neighborhoods with poor safety conditions and poor schools with poor academic outcomes 3) Low family socioeconomic status (SES), educational level, and school involvement; 4) Difficulties and challenges of integration into American school system because of lack of English skills that contribute to low comprehension of subject matters. In addition to the achievement gap problem, the fear of failing in school is found to be exposing immigrant children to mental and behavioral health problems that compromise the well-being of the children. The research findings showed that there are multiple factors that contribute to the gap. Therefore, intervention strategies based on research is recommended to alleviate the existing academic achievement gap and plan for the future to close the gap.
Caregivers’ Perceptions of Day Treatment Programs
By Julie Lochen

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

This paper addresses the mental health concerns of millions of children across the United States; especially those with diagnosis of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders. This researcher used a qualitative research design to obtain the perceptions of caregivers who have children placed in day treatment programs. This researcher used an exploratory design with action research theory. Action research theory was used in the hopes that clinicians would empower clients, caregivers, and families. The researcher used an open-ended interview technique to collect data through a qualitative questionnaire with participants, lasting about 15 minutes. The questions that were asked pertained to the perceptions of caregivers whose children receive day treatment services. Inductive coding was used to find common themes in the caregivers’ responses. The two themes found among all three caregivers’ perspectives was support for the child, and communication. Each caregiver mentioned that day treatment programs provide support either for their child, or for the family. Communication came up as a need for improvement between clinicians and caregivers and possibly between caregiver and child. Caregivers were empowered to be involved in communication with professionals however, may require additional support in doing so.
A Systematic Literature Review of Effective Interventions For African-American and Hispanic Alzheimer’s Caregivers

By Carolyn L. Lokensgard

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, Ph.D., MSW, MPP, LISW
Committee Members: Mari Ann Graham, Ph.D., MSW, LISW; Kelly Torgersen, MSW, LGSW

In this systematic review, an investigation of research on effective social work interventions for African-American and Hispanic caregivers of loved ones with Alzheimer’s disease (AD) was conducted. Through a comprehensive literature search, twelve articles met the set inclusion criteria. Peer-reviewed journal articles on quantitative or qualitative research studies on African-American and Hispanic AD caregivers served as the data source. The review found three categories of interventions: in-home programs, Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) focused small groups, and support groups. The majority of the studies included a demonstrated effort to culturally tailor each intervention. The results of the review demonstrate an overall improvement in depression, diminished sense of burden, and other measures of healthy caregiver coping. The majority of the interventions demonstrated little difference between racial or ethnic groups, indicating that cultural tailoring is advantageous to creating effective AD caregiver interventions. Based on the findings, further research is needed to explore CBT’s efficacy for African-American caregivers and to assess interventions that address caregiver anxiety. Furthermore, this project indicates the ongoing need for social work practitioners to act with cultural sensitivity, curiosity, and responsiveness as a means for effective cross-cultural interventions.
The Experiences of Social Workers in Corporate America

By Brianna O. Lorenz

Research Chair: Catherine L. Marrs Fuchsel, Ph.D. LICSW
Committee Members: Mary Pederson, MSW; Sharon I. Radd, Ed. D.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of social workers in Corporate America, including their role in corporate social responsibility (CSR). The data collected was from four semi-structured interviews that lasted between 20 to 45 minutes each. Each participant was employed by or consulted for a large corporation and had roles in a variety of departments, including government affairs, internal consulting, talent and change management and leadership development. None of the participants had direct CSR responsibilities, however, each participant had experience with their CSR programs and valued them in their organizations. The study explored the participants' responsibilities in their organization, and how their social work practice and skills were incorporated in their work. Themes from the data indicated that social workers are most valued in their organizations for their abilities to build relationships, effectively implement change and see things in a different perspective from their co-workers. Participants reported that they used their social work skills in their daily work even within their business roles, and believed that corporations could benefit from having more individuals with the social work perspective in their organizations. The findings in this study fill a gap in the current literature and may have implications for social work in corporate settings, in social work education, and in future social work research.
Reducing the Amount of Antipsychotic Medication among Older Adults with Dementia in Skilled Nursing Facilities in the Twin Cities Area

By Stephanie D. Marshall

Research Chair: David J. Roseborough, MSW, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Laura Anfinson, LSW; Alexis Soine, RN

There are many stereotypes that older adults in nursing homes are “snowed” and not cared for properly by “burnt out” and “careless” nursing staff. The purpose of this project was to explore professionals in skilled nursing facilities attempting to meet the Minnesota Department of Health mandate to decrease the amount of antipsychotic medication usage among older adults with dementia. The research placed a focus on non-pharmacological interventions with an emphasis on music therapy. Using a qualitative design, six subjects were interviewed regarding their experiences, successes, challenges and non-pharmacological efforts that are being implemented in their facility. Data were analyzed using an inductive approach and then through the lens of the mandate and were categorized by theme and subthemes. The data were related back to the literature and the findings indicated that all participating facilities were having success in their attempts to meet this mandate or were beginning to make attempts to meet this mandate. These findings emphasize the importance of taking a non-pharmacological approach with older adults with behaviors related to dementia but further training, research and practice are needed for continued and future success in relation to antipsychotic medication reduction and non-pharmacological approaches for older adults with dementia in these settings.
The Effects of Gender on Resiliency for Children when a Parent has Huntington's Disease

By Jessica B. Marsolek

Research Chair: Dr. Pa Der Vang, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW, LCSW
Committee Members: Anne Leserman, MSW, LCSW; Melissa Lundquist, MSW, Ph.D.

The experience of children who are raised in a family where a parent has Huntington's Disease (HD) is complex. The purpose of this project was to explore the resiliency of those who were raised in a family with a parent who had HD, explore the effect the gender of the child had on their resilience, and whether or not the gender of the parent who had HD impacted resilience. Using a quantitative design, 107 adults who were raised within a family with HD responded to an anonymous online survey answering questions on gender, resilience, and experiences growing up in a family affected by HD. The findings indicated that the gender of the child and the gender of the parent were significant in terms of the likelihood of the child showing resilience. The male respondents tended to have higher resiliency results than their female counterparts, although the vast majority of the respondents were female. In this study, a correlation between the age of the respondent when their parent began showing symptoms of HD and resilience was not supported. These findings highlight the significance of gender, impact of attachment with parent caregivers, and the importance in supporting the children who are being raised with a parent affected with HD.
More Than Just Writing: Handedness and Substance Use

By Bradley Martin

Research Chair: Lisa Kiesel, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Julie Childs, MSW, LICSW, LADC; Steven Schreiber, MS, LPC, CSAS, LADC, CRC

This study explored the possible association of handedness and substance use disorders. A quantitative study was conducted by administrating a Handedness and Substance Use survey to participants assigned to dialectal behavior therapy (DBT) skills groups in a Midwestern city in the United States. From the 96 survey responses aging from 18-62 years old, 6.3% (n=6) identified as male, 90.6% (n=87) identified as female, and 3.1% (n=3) identified as transgender. 9.4% (n=9) identified as left handed, and 90.6% (n=87) identified as right handed. Significant association was found between handedness and participation in an alcohol and drug treatment program. The results show that over 27% of all respondents have attended a form of alcohol or drug treatment, 55.5% who report being left handed and 24.1% who are right handed. Significant association was also found between handedness and someone else recommending an alcohol and drug treatment program. The results show that over 36.5% of all respondents have had someone else recommend an alcohol or drug treatment, 66.7% who report being left handed and 33.3% who are right handed. The findings also found heightened responses from self-identified left-handed participants in having felt the need to cut down on their substance use and familial substance abuse concerns compared to right-handed respondents. This study concludes by addressing the possible implementations and recommendations stemming from discovering a possible new risk factor for substance use disorders.
Sustainable, Empowering Organizational Model for Intimate Partner Violence Services

By Janet A. Mason

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson PhD, LICSW  
Committee Members: Michael Raguet, LGSW; Stephanie Spandl MSW, LICSW

IPV refuges are an important resource for those wishing to free themselves from IPV violence, but only if they truly empower the IPV survivor by not replicating the control and power differentials from which they are fleeing. Early feminist grassroots activists actively fostered empowering helping relationships in the organizational model of collectives which espoused equality, participatory decision making, and interpersonal relationships. Due largely to funding pressures, collectives were gradually replaced by the hierarchal organizational model found in refuges today. Many worry that most IPV organizations today may actually pose a barrier to the empowerment of survivors. This research project explored the question “What would an organizational work model for an IPV refuge look like that could provide sustainably funded, best practice services to survivors while holding paramount the early battered women’s movement ideals of equality, inclusive decision making, and empowerment?” The conceptual framework that was used to inform this study was empowerment; operationally defined as the process of acquiring power to direct and control one's own life. The research design was a qualitative structured theoretical analysis, drawing heavily from the systematic review methodology. A search of the literature was performed after specific inclusion criteria and search strategies were defined. Findings included major and minor themes related to helper relationships, and an analysis of sustainable funding models. A theoretical model of an IPV refuge was created from the findings, and implications for social work practice and further research was discussed. A call was made for taking the next step by developing a social enterprise business plan and seeking funding to test the model.
**Playing to Find Out: Adapting Story Games for Group Therapy with Teens**

By Adam McConnaughey

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D., MSW  
Committee Members: David M. Higgins, Ph.D.; Eva Solomonson, MSW, LICSW

Millions of adolescents in the United States face childhood trauma and its sequelae, and group therapy is a common treatment. The purpose of this project was to examine the field of role-playing game design with an eye toward developing future group therapy methods for adolescents with trauma histories. Using a qualitative textual analysis research design that was a mix of grounded theory and content analysis, two contemporary role-playing game texts, *Apocalypse World* and *Monsterhearts*, were analyzed. The text was coded, and themes were generated to organize the findings. Findings indicated that RPGs and group therapy share a great deal structurally. In addition, RPGs provide a way to approach triggering material in a safe way, through a fictional avatar. Findings also suggested that these RPG texts teach users how to play the game in a clear manner that could be helpful for future writers of group therapy manuals to emulate. These findings indicate that RPGs are a potentially fruitful field in which to develop new group therapy methods, and that these games would provide excellent starting points for such therapies.
Experiences with Birth Culture, Identity, and Feeling Different: Insight from Transracial Adoptees

By Morgan McDowell

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, MSW, Ph.D, LICSW, LMFT
Committee Members: Amy Lary White, MSW, LICSW; Carolyn Brown, MSW, LGSW

Ethnic and racial socialization of transracially adopted children has been acknowledged as a vital social work practice area in the adoption community. Transracial adoptees are often torn between two cultures and attempt to navigate their identity in a racialized society. Parents play a critical role in supporting the development of their child’s ethnic and racial identity. The primary purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between parental involvement and engagement with their adopted child’s birth culture and the child’s ethnic identity development and sense of belonging and acceptance. Using an online survey design, the study recruited 62 transracial adoptees between the ages of 20 and 55. The results showed that as parents placed more value and importance on learning the values and heritage of their child’s birth country, the child identified less feelings of being different. However, over half of the respondents (56.5%) reported no emphasis was placed on learning the values and heritage of their birth country and no respondents (0%) reported too much emphasis. Twenty-four respondents (38.7%) rated the amount of emphasis as “Just the right amount.” Additionally, multiracial participants reported the highest feelings of being different compared to the other ethnic groups represented in the sample. The findings suggest that parental efforts for socializing children to their ethnic and racial culture are crucial.
Animal-Assisted Therapy as a Trauma Intervention

By Erin E. McLaughlin

Research Chair: Lisa Kiesel, MSW, LICSW, Ph.D
Committee Members: Heather Jeffrey, EAP ADV, CTC; Sarah Thilmony, MSW, LICSW

Trauma has a significant impact not just on the individuals who have experienced it, but on families, communities, and society as a whole. While significant improvements to treatment modalities have been made, there continues to be a need for further research and exploration to establish a range of efficacious and accessible treatment modalities in this area. Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) is a promising intervention with a long history, which may be uniquely suited to treating a broad range of clients with trauma histories and/or diagnoses. The purpose of this study was to gather the practice wisdom of clinicians working in this field to develop a more cohesive understanding of why and how AAT is an effective trauma intervention. Practitioners in the field of AAT were identified via purposive and snowball sampling and a total of eighteen individuals completed an online qualitative survey, via Qualtrics. Findings were consistent with existing literature and expanded upon the unique role that the human-animal bond can play in healing and growth for those who have experienced trauma. Specific themes that emerged from the data were: the non-judgmental nature of the human-animal bond; non-verbal communication; physical and emotional safety; and the experiential and individualized nature of AAT.
The Host Home Program Model for LGBTQ Youth Experiencing Homelessness: A Program Evaluation

By Megan M. McTeague

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Erik Adolphson, MSW, LICSW; Colleen O'Keefe, M.Ed

Youth homelessness in the state of Minnesota has been consistently on the rise for the past two decades. While youth in general who are experiencing homelessness are at increased risk for victimization, chemical use/abuse, and mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) youth are at much higher risk for these barriers to well-being, among others. This study evaluated one program that specifically serves LGBTQ youth who are experiencing homelessness. Using a qualitative design, individuals involved in the program were asked to fill out surveys and provide feedback about how the program meets its stated goals of providing shelter, meeting basic needs, and fostering a sense of community for LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness. Additionally, this study looked at how this program builds strength and resiliency for youth by fostering a sense of positive self-identity and increasing external supports for youth. The findings of this study indicate that this program model meets its stated goals by providing youth with “outside the system” supports in the form of volunteer host homes and providing ongoing case management and goal-planning with youth. The findings also suggest that the program’s focus on self-determination and community-based efforts from caring adults has a significantly positive impact on youth who participate in the program. These findings emphasize the importance of access to stable housing, external supports, and the development of positive self-identity for LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness who are working towards achieving stable housing.
Causes and Solutions for High Direct Care Staff Turnover

By Heather Micke

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Anna Ruschmeyer-Bowe, MSW, LICSW; Katie Jenson, BA

This quantitative research project explores the reasons and solutions for the high rates of direct care staff turnover. Emails were sent out to social service agency supervisors asking for their approval to allow their employees to participate in an online survey about direct care staff turnover. Agencies that agreed to participate were then emailed a script and a consent form with instructions to email both the script and the consent form to their employees. The ten question online survey explored the direct care staff’s opinions on topics such as compensation, support and training. Additionally, there was a qualitative question at the end of the survey asking for direct care staff’s input as to possible solutions to reduce direct care staff turnover. Twenty-six individuals participated in the survey. Answers were analyzed and entered into SPSS in order to find correlations in the data. Themes were identified amongst the responses to the qualitative question. A majority of the respondents did not feel they received adequate support from their supervisor or adequate compensation for the work that they do. Answers showed that direct care staff who participated in the survey attributed inadequate compensation as the largest contributor to the high rates of direct care staff turnover. The answers revealed no statistically significant data however, some correlations approached statistical significance. Results from this quantitative research project were consistent with pre-existing literature.
Mobile Technology Use and Developmental/Intellectual Disabilities

By Scott Muer

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, Ph. D., LICSW, LMFT
Committee Members: Jacob Bromaghim, BSW; Lew Linde, MSW, JD

The purpose of this research project was to gain insight into the impact of mobile technology use among individuals with developmental/intellectual disabilities (DD/ID). Individuals with DD/ID are engaging in their communities and society more now than ever before and are using mobile technology as a mode to make it possible. The study’s research revolved around the experiences of professionals who work closest with individuals with DD/ID, which provided valuable, first-hand insight into the impact of mobile technology. This study also helps provide information on a topic that has relatively limited available research. One of the strongest themes in this study was how the use of mobile technology among individuals with DD/ID helps increase their connectedness to the communities and societies in which they participate. Increased connectedness ultimately leads to a reduction of stigma and increases awareness about what it means to live with a DD/ID. Increased was also described as a method for individuals with DD/ID to advocate on their own behalf, and urge for better disability programs, policies, and services. Overall, information gathered through this study indicated that mobile technology appears to positively impact the quality of life of individuals with DD/ID, by increasing independence, self-determination, and community connectedness. The limitations of this research, along with recommendations for future researchers are also included in this study.
Experiencing Joy: Personal Narratives of Hospice and Palliative Care Social Workers

By Kyle Paige Murray

Research Chair: Laurel Bidwell, MSW, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Ted W. Bowman, MDiv; Mari Ann Graham, MSW, Ph.D., LISW

A vast majority of the existing research explores the negative impacts that the profession of social work has on its practitioners. Much attention has been given to topics like secondary or vicarious trauma, burnout, and compassion fatigue. There are far fewer studies that explore the positive aspects of social work practice. The concept of joy is often missing from the literature about social work. The purpose of this study was to explore the narratives of joy of social workers practicing in hospice and palliative care. Using an exploratory qualitative design, eight graduate level social workers were interviewed about their experiences of joy in their hospice or palliative care practice. Data were analyzed according to guidelines of hermeneutic phenomenology. This study looked for the essential truths of the social workers’ lived experiences of joy in their work. The findings indicated that for social workers, joy is cultivated in relationships. Participants in this study also noted that joy is a result of experiencing fulfillment and bearing witness to client fulfillment. Joy is described as energizing and motivating, and for the social workers in this study, joy provided a necessary balance in emotionally heavy work. These findings highlight the importance of congruence of self and work in social work practice. Experiencing joy in social work practice may enable social workers to better comply with and reinforce the values and principles set forth by their professional mandate.
The Caregiver Experience: How Mental Health Conditions in Children Impact the Entire Family

By Kelly Mwei

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Linda Seifried, MSW, LICSW; Paul Sterlacci, MSEd., LP

Caring for a child with a diagnosed mental health condition not only affects the child, but impacts the caregivers of these children in a variety of ways. The purpose of this project was to explore caregivers’ experiences raising a child with a diagnosed mental health condition, specifically looking at what supports and services are available to them, how these services and supports are utilized, and what challenges and barriers they encounter. Using a qualitative design, six participants (five professional and one familiar caregiver) were interviewed regarding their experience assisting in or raising a child with a mental health condition. Data were analyzed using both inductive and deductive approaches in which categories were first developed from the interview responses and were then linked to related literature. The findings indicated that in fact there are supports and services available to these caregivers; however, there are often barriers in reaching these supports and services. Caregivers spoke to both challenges and rewards identified in raising children with a mental health condition. These findings suggest ways that mental health professionals can assist and support these familial caregivers, identify barriers and reduce stigma surrounding children’s mental health conditions, and finally ways that supports and services can be made more accessible.
Public Attitudes Toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness

By Katelyn E. Nichols

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: George V. Baboila, MSW, LICSW; Kyle Mestad, MA

In an effort to measure the public's attitudes related to prostitution and the public's awareness of sex trafficking, the Attitudes toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness Survey was developed. The Attitudes toward Prostitution and Sex Trafficking Awareness Survey was administered to a convenience sample of 185 adult respondents. The results of this study indicate that the majority of respondents were in favor of legalizing prostitution even though they are aware of the dangers and sexual exploitation associated with prostitution. The findings also indicate that respondents overwhelmingly believe that there should be severe legal consequences for individuals who are convicted of paying to have sex with children. Respondents' opinions about what legal consequences there should be for men who are convicted of paying to have sex with women were varied and tended to be less severe. The findings also revealed that nearly all of the respondents have negative attitudes about pimps and sex traffickers believing that: pimps and sex traffickers sexually exploit vulnerable women and children. In addition, the majority of respondents view the women and children used in prostitution as victims of sex trafficking. Thus, the findings indicate that policy changes need to be put in place that educate and sensitize the public about the dangers of the commercial sex industry and to address the socialized concept that commercial sex services need to exist to satisfy men's biological need for sex.
How Equine-Facilitated Psychotherapy Addresses Military Sexual Trauma among Female Veterans: Systematic Review

By Claire Niessen-Derry

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Larisa Breid, MSW, LICSW; Patti Anderson

There were roughly 5,061 reports of MST since the Department of Defense’s (DOD) fiscal year of 2012. The DOD believes that MST is vastly under reported and estimates that less than 20% of sexual assaults have been reported over the past seven years. The research question for this systematic literature review was: In what ways does equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EFP) address military sexual trauma (MST) among female veterans? Levels of publication utilized in this systematic review included peer-reviewed articles, gray literature, and dissertations. Types of studies included in this systematic review include empirically supported studies and qualitative and quantitative studies. The key search terms included: military, sexual trauma, sexual assault, rape, veterans, women, equine-facilitated therapy, equine-assisted therapy, equine, horse, holistic, therapy, animal, animal assisted therapy, equine-assisted learning, equine-facilitated learning, animal-assisted interventions, MST, mind-body, trauma-informed, complementary therapy, and integrative therapy. Primary findings included: EFP decreased PTSD symptomology through mindfulness, EFP improved relational functioning, EFP led to mind-body reintegration, EFP improved the therapeutic encounter, and EFP led to recovery and empowerment. The systematic review illuminated that equine-facilitated psychotherapy is a non-traditional form of therapy that may be appealing, and relevant, to female veteran survivors of MST who may otherwise not be amenable to traditional talk therapy. Equines are arguably more effective than other animals when it comes to therapeutic interventions with female survivors of MST. Mounted work could be considered one of the most powerful, movement-based therapies for sexual trauma due to the unique circumstances of riding.
Childcare Challenges: Impact to Low-income Working Single Mothers in Minnesota, a Qualitative Study

By Proscovia N. Ojambo

Research Chair: Karen Carlson, LICSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Kathleen Fargione LICSW, Elizabeth Peltzer, MSW

This is a qualitative study of low-income working single mothers and the issues they face as they juggle to find childcare among the other responsibilities. Participants included 11 single mothers who are employed, going to school or doing both. The study used oral interviews that were carried out face to face with the participants at a convenient place. The questions asked were about work history, wages, their level of education, childcare needs, choices and satisfaction with childcare employment and hours, types of transportation they use to take the children to childcare, other significant challenges with childcare and what they would like to see change in the childcare industry. The participants revealed challenges that supported the data in the literature review. The themes that emerged from the study included experiences of stress, high cost of childcare, transportation issues, unfavorable welfare/childcare policies, irregular schedules and fluctuating hours, childcare availability and sustainability and child safety.

Recommendations for policy would be to include inclusive childcare policies and more funding for quality childcare that include evening and night time options to serve all families regardless of their economic status or the hours when they worked.
The Exploration of Human Service Workers Personal Bias in Regards Sex Offenders

By Amanda Palmer

Research Chair: Felicia Sy, Ph.D
Committee Members: Anna Pederson, MSW, LICSW; Anna Hewitt, MA, LPCC

This study examines the relationship of dehumanization, public emotion, and social distance theory in regards to human service workers personal bias on the subject of sex offenders. This study aimed to determine the following: (a). To encourage human service workers to self assess for personal bias and counter transference regarding working with sex offenders. (b). Respond and support treatment programs and government policy that are factual based. (c). Increase the fair, objective treatment of those who have sexually offended. The researcher explored current government policies and its impact on those who sexually offended and society as a whole while questioning its impact on human service workers. A thirteen question survey was employed that encouraged human service workers to examine their personal bias. Using two well known social media websites, 94 participants responded to the online survey. The survey concluded that the human service workers studied were neutral and somewhat in favor of sex offender law creation while less than half (43%) checked their registries within the past year. Bogardus Social Distance Scale was utilized and it was concluded that there was a 49% preferred social distance element between sex offenders and the human services workers studied. More research is called for to determine whether personal bias of sex offenders impacts practice.
The Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Effective Leadership: Exploring the Perspectives of Licensed Clinical Social Worker Leaders

By Shannon Perry

Research Chair: Rosella Collins-Puoch, Ph. D., LICSW
Committee Members: Rebecca Sorenson, MSW, LGSW; John Wallgren

Transformational leadership has been found to be related to emotional intelligence. There has been limited research on emotional intelligence and transformational leadership in the field of social work. This study sought to explore the impact of emotional intelligence on leadership within a social service organization. Seven individual interviews were held with LICSW social workers that were leaders of an organization for at least one year. The major themes that emerged were: mentoring is an important component to being an effective leader, personality can impact transformational leadership behavior, transformational leadership can be learned, emotional intelligence means tuning into staff, and relationships are an important factor in effective leadership and organizational commitment. Implications for social work and recommendations for future research are discussed.
Seeking Success: A Survey of Minnesota’s Education and Training Voucher’s Recipients

By Larissa C. Peyton

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, Ph.D. MSW
Committee Members: Carey Winkler, MSW, LICSW; Jill Von Holtum, ETV Coordinator

Former foster youth are at risk for poor outcomes including higher rates of homelessness, being on public assistance, teen pregnancy and low educational attainment (Berzin, 2008) Minnesota’s Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) program is a program designed to assist foster youth in paying for college. The purpose of this study was to figure out what characteristics, connections and supports were common among foster youth who participated in the ETV program, what the impact and efficacy of the ETV program was in Minnesota and what the post-secondary educational experiences were of youth receiving (or having received) the ETV. This study used an online survey to collect data on the experiences of youth in the ETV program. It was discovered that participants who were involved in the ETV program had educational stability, relational permanency, access to financial resources to assist in paying for college and were highly motivated, supported and resilient. By focusing on what these foster youth have in common, it makes it possible to replicate these characteristics in order to assist other foster youth in achieving success.
Alternatives to Zero Tolerance Policies Affecting Students of Color: A Systematic Review

By Naomi E. Pitlick

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Sara Ferber, MSW, LGSW; Christy McCoy, MSW, LICSW

Zero tolerance policies in schools have had many negative impacts on students of color, including the "school to prison pipeline" where students of color are being funneled from schools into the criminal justice system. The purpose of this systematic literature review was to conduct an exhaustive compilation of research exploring interventions and alternative options to zero tolerance disciplinary policies in schools and to identify their impact on minority students given the extent of research that is available. Empirically based quantitative and qualitative studies based on program effectiveness were included as well as both peer-reviewed and grey literature. Terms for inclusion and exclusion are presented in this review. Fourteen studies met all inclusion criteria and were sorted into four categories using the public health model of prevention: primary, secondary and tertiary levels of prevention, as well as multi-level interventions. Primary level interventions had the most studies, followed by secondary interventions. Only one tertiary intervention was included. The findings indicated that the effectiveness of the interventions presented were inconsistent at each level and pointed out a significant need for more research at all levels of prevention. While zero tolerance discipline policies disproportionately affect minority students, limited research is available on the effects of alternative policies on these students. There is a need for additional research in the development, implementation and effectiveness of alternative programs including staff training and support, long term impacts and standardization among programs and policies.
The Impact of Social and Family Support on the Psychological Well-being of Atheists

By Justin R. Potter

Research Chair: Karen Carlson, Ph.D, LICSW
Committee Members: David Holewinski, MSW, LICSW; Carey Winkler, MSW, LICSW

Extensive research has been done on various religious groups, but few studies have looked at the experiences of atheists. This study investigated how perceived support from friends and family impacts atheists on facets of psychological wellbeing. Five atheists organizations were contacted, and asked to forward the survey onto their list servers. Five hundred eighty-three self-identified atheists participated in this study. Participants were given the Ryff Psychological Wellbeing scales and were asked questions related to how much support participants received from friends and family regarding their non-beliefs. Results indicate that atheists who received more support from friends and family score statistically significantly higher on positive relations with others, autonomy, purpose in life and self-acceptance. These results suggest how friends and family members treat individuals who identify as atheist can impact their long-term development and wellbeing. Additionally, this study offers some suggestions that atheist organizations can implement to provide outreach to their members.
Which skillsets and other characteristics of a home visitor contribute to the effectiveness of a home-based child abuse and neglect prevention program?

By Kimberly Quamme

Research Chair: Rosella Collins-Puoch, Ed.D, MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Theresa Gomez LISW; Jennifer Krekelberg, BA

Keeping children safe and therefore preventing abuse and neglect has certainly always been a value of the Social Work profession. Home visitors, those charged with the duty of executing these programs, are visiting clients in their home over a period of time, offering support, resources, and nourishing the relationship between parent and child. To find the skill sets and characteristics which impact the success of these home visitors, this qualitative research study sought to identify characteristics and skill sets of home visitors which contribute to the effectiveness of a child abuse and neglect prevention program. Individual interviews were conducted with ten home visitors from the Metro Alliance of Healthy Families in the Twin Cities Metro of Saint Paul and Minneapolis Minnesota. The major themes which emerged from the data are: 1) specific characteristics home visitors identify such as empathetic and nonjudgmental; 2) past successes which stem from the formation of relationships built upon healthy boundaries; 3) the essential role a supervisor plays in the home visitor's ability to be effective. A discussion of the data as well as implications and recommendations for further research follows.
Needs of Veterans Transitioning out of Homelessness

By Christa J. Reader

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, MSW, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Beth Gillman, M.S.; Melanie Harrison, MSW, LICSW

With the current national initiative to end veteran homelessness by the end of 2015, there are growing numbers of homeless veterans moving into housing. This study sought to explore their needs and experiences during their transition into housing. Data collected for this study consisted of six semi-structured interviews with social workers and case managers working with homeless veterans in housing programs. Four dominant themes were identified as (1) the benefit of having a case manager for support and guidance; (2) housing provides a stable base to work on goals and plan for the future; (3) substance use, mental health, and visitors are barriers to maintaining housing; and (4) medical health improves after getting housing. Three subthemes that emerged from the data include: (1) the impact of pride on the ability to ask for help; (2) the impact of the culture of homelessness; and (3) mental and chemical health improvements after housing vary depending on the person, the situation, and the length of homelessness. The results from this study suggest that veterans’ needs do not end when they get into housing, but that ongoing support and services are needed in order for them to be successful in the transition and in maintaining their housing. The results support implications for social workers to build and maintain ongoing trusting relationships with veterans to facilitate the change process during their transition into housing.
Efficacy of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy in the Treatment of Trauma: A Systematic Review

By Jessica J. Regan

Research Chair: Dr. Katharine Hill, MSW, Ph.D, MPP, LISW
Committee Members: Erica Zielin Wurm, APRN, CNP, PMHNP, Leah Neff, MSW, LICSW

This systematic review examines the efficacy of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Therapy as an intervention in the treatment of trauma in adults. Upon careful review of present literature, 14 articles met criteria. Common themes were identified throughout the reviewed studies, including treatment intervention comparison, variation in EMDR model, treatment fidelity, longitudinal follow-up, and co-morbidity. While results show that EMDR is an effective treatment intervention for the treatment of trauma, the majority of studies found it to be no more effective than other treatment interventions.
Perspectives from Hmong American Women about the First-Generation College Student Experience

By Lacey J. Reierson

Research Chair: Jessica Toft, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Leon Rodrigues, Ed.D., BSW; Sandra Traudt, MSW

First-generation college students’ (FGCS) experience in college is unique. Hmong Americans are pursuing higher education in increasing numbers, and their experience in higher education is examined in this study. Previous research regarding Hmong American FGCS indicates that gender, folk theories of achievement, social and family support, mental health status, acculturation tension, institutional practices, and larger systems all contribute to FGCS’ experience in the United States education system. Limited research has been conducted regarding Hmong American women’s experience. This study explored the perspectives of female Hmong American FGCS and how gender influences the Hmong American college student experience. Six Hmong American women were interviewed regarding their perspectives and personal experiences in the United States education system. Their responses were coded using the grounded theory method. The findings show that Hmong American women have unique expectations placed on them, they experience a culture clash in college, and the view of higher education is changing for Hmong American women. Implications for social work practice and further research are discussed, including the need to explore how institutional practices affect Hmong American students and to track changing views in the Hmong American community.
Social Support: Coping and Stress Related Growth among Adults with Mental Illness

By Tara J. Reopelle

Research Chair: Felicia Washington Sy, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Stephanie Faber, MSW, LICSW; Susanna Bertelsen, MS, RN, PHN

The purpose of this research study was to understand the relationship with social support and coping along with stress related growth in adults with mental illness. The research study sample involved six adults with a serious and persistent mental illness that were part of an assisted living and intentional community program. The methodology used in this research study was qualitative and semi-structured interviews. Findings included demographic information as to the age, education, and religious and/or spiritual status of the study participants. Data content analysis of the semi-structured interviews revealed themes of social support, learning from others, coping with feelings and stress, managing conflict and assertiveness, and people reaction’s to mental illness. Research participants did perceive receiving social support and being able to cope as helpful. Stress related growth was concluded based on the responses from research participants in semi-structured interviews and the use of the general meaning making model.
Parents Perceptions of Autism Spectrum Disorder

By Katelyn Retaskie

Research Chair: Michael Chovanec, Ph.D, LICSW, LMFT
Committee Members: Whitney Wessels, MSW, LGSW; Julie Kraft, MA

This study examines the parents of children with autism spectrum disorder perspectives on the initial diagnosis. This research is of qualitative design in which four mothers of children with autism were asked a series of interview questions. The results indicate an emotional impact on not only the mothers, but the family as a whole. In addition the results indicate a need for more education around the topic of autism itself. Implications for social work indicate a need for change at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.
Wisdom from Experience: Understanding Men’s Experience of Marriage and Poverty

By Aaron Rusnak

Research Chair: Pa Der Vang, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Janet Westlund, MSW, LICSW; Troy Holliday

The current study looked to understand the relationship between marriage and poverty from a male perspective. Previous research identified a number of barriers to marriage of those in poverty, with an emphasis on a female perspective. Previous research also found that there is a desire to marry amongst women who have experienced poverty, however many do not because of the lack of quality, marriage-ready candidates. The current research sought to fill this gap through better understanding men’s experience of marriage and poverty. Data was collected through a qualitative design by interviewing 13 men who had experienced poverty and had been married. The data was analyzed through open coding and organized around grounded categories. Findings included factors that led to the decision to get married, characteristics of the positive and negative qualities of the marriage, and how poverty affected the marriage relationship. The current study examined internal processes of what led to the decision to get married and found the most identified reason was feelings of love, like, and adoration. The positive attribute mentioned by most participants was companionship and a good quality of marriage. The negative attributes mentioned by most participants was a breakdown in relational dynamics and differences between husband and wife. Participants reported both a positive impact of poverty on marriage and a negative impact of poverty on marriage. Participants discussed how poverty brought them closer together, but also how poverty caused strain on the relationship and created arguments. Strengths, limitations, and implications of the current study were also explored.
Psychotherapists' Assessment and Treatment of Executive Functioning Skill Deficits in Clients with Eating Disorders

By Sarah L. Russell

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge
Committee members: Erin VandenLangenberg, Ph.D., LP; Ka Vang, LICSW

The purpose of this project was to determine: how clinicians assess whether or not their eating disorder patients have decreased executive functioning skills, if personality type effects executive functioning, and how clinicians treat executive functioning deficits. Using a qualitative design, six licensed clinicians, in the twin cities, with between 3.5 and 20 years of experience working with eating disorder participants, were interviewed to capture their thoughts on the research questions. The researcher then analyzed the data utilizing grounded theory coding techniques by transcribing each interview, annotating the texts and grouping codes that emerged more than three times into themes. A correlation analysis was also done to assess correlation between years of experience in working with eating disorders and percentage of clients participants believed suffered from executive functioning deficits. The findings indicate eating disorder clinicians have little consensus on the number of clients they see who suffer from executive functioning deficits. There is also no correlation between years of experience and percentage of individuals believed to suffer with executive functioning deficits ($R^2 = .0088$), leading us to believe that years of experience does not give more or less awareness of clients who have deficits in their executive functioning. Eighty Three percent of participants reported they had no assessment measure for executive functioning deficits, and 100% reported relying on clinical observation to determine behaviors that let them know if an individual has executive functioning deficits. One hundred percent of participants reported that all eating disorder patients tend to be high achieving in at least one area of their lives. Finally 100% of participants indicated that the number one strategy used to help their clients regain executive functioning skills is through proper reestablishment of feeding. The findings of this study demonstrate the need for a field-friendly assessment development that can allow clinicians to measure and analyze executive functioning deficits, as well as the need for research that explores how clinicians can help foster the regaining of cognitive and executive functioning skills during the re-feeding process.
The Impact of Social Media on Emerging Adults' Grieving Experiences

By Nikole Sharpe

Research Chair: Andrea Nesmith, Ph. D.
Committee Members: Sandra Forest, LICSW; Susan Murr, LICSW

Emerging adults experience developmental challenges when faced with loss. They are responsible for meeting developmental milestones, such as, identity achievement as well as mourning a loss both at the same time. This complexity is heightened when adding social media. Social media grieving has become a new way of mourning losses. However, there is still little data on the impact of social media on emerging adults’ grieving experiences. A systematic review was utilized to gather and synthesize the most current and relevant empirical data. Twenty five quantitative studies were selected for analysis and key data was abstracted including, sample size, age and age category (college student, emerging adult, or young adult) from a dual process model framework. Results indicated that emerging adults are most at risk for complicated grief, which plays a role in identity achievement (without social media) and are at risk for unidentified depression or emotional distress (with social media). Furthermore social media plays a role in emerging adults’ psychosocial well-being, serving as a source for connecting with others and instant gratification. Social media is a newer more widely accepted form of grieving, providing the opportunity to keep a connection with the deceased and serving as another outlet for their emotions similar to traditional grieving practice. These findings highlight the growing importance of understanding the impact of social media and the ways that emerging adults grieve in a technologically advanced world. Future research should utilize qualitative studies in order to explore and understand the breadth of experiences.
Alzheimer’s Disease, Spousal Caregiving Relationships, and Attachment

By Mary G. Sherman

Research Chair: Laurel Bidwell, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Meghan Constantini, LGSW; Deborah Fefferman, LISW

Alzheimer’s disease is the most common cause of dementia in older adults. Due to increased life expectancy and the lack of a current effective treatment or prevention for this disease, a growing number of older couples will face the transition to a caregiving relationship in which one partner has dementia. Studies have shown that spousal caregivers experience a greater strain than adult children in the caregiving role, and that spousal caregivers who are providing care for Alzheimer’s related dementia experience the greatest strain of any other caregiving group due to the nature of the Alzheimer’s disease process. Studies also suggest that there is significant individual variation in the level of emotional support and distress experienced by the dementia spousal caregiver that can impact the health and well-being of each partner. The aim of this qualitative, exploratory study was to explore if and to what extent Master of Social Work professionals use an attachment framework to guide and inform their practice when working with dementia caregiving spouses. Three primary findings resulted from this study. First, MSW professionals noted specific caregiving characteristics that enhanced responsive caregiving. Second, these professionals stated that they did not directly use Attachment Theory, but that components of this were built into their assessment process, thus, indirectly guiding their interventions. Third, MSW professionals felt that applying a more direct attachment lens could add additional dimensionality to inform and guide their practice at least in some situations. Implications for the broader practice of Social Work are discussed, as an attachment lens has the potential to help social workers proactively tailor their counseling or support recommendations for caregivers. Targeted support for caregivers has the potential to decrease caregiving burden and increase well-being. This in turn has the potential to decrease early institutionalization of the partner with dementia which places further burdens on the health care system.
Social Media, Young Adults, and Relationships

By Emma Shields-Nordness

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Jennifer Gervais MSW, LICSW; Joe Noble MA, LMFT

The purpose of this project was to explore how young adults are experiencing relationships when using social media. Using a qualitative design young adults between the ages of 18-24 were asked questions about their experience with social media. The participants reflected on their experiences and reported back. The researcher analyzed the data by looking for themes within the participant’s answers. The findings indicated that young adults between the ages of 18-24 prefer to use texting or social media as their main means of communication. The participants also eluded to the feeling of isolation that can happen when depending on these forms of communication. The findings of this study demonstrate the need for future research within the area of technology and young adults.
Do Cultural Misconceptions About Mental Illness Coupled With Other Social Barriers Prevent Somalis In Minnesota From Seeking Mental Health Treatment?

By Ali Shireh

Research Chair: Rosella Collins-Puoch, Ed. D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Kadar Hadis, MA, LGSW; Jason Griswold, MSW, LGSW

Culture plays an important role in how people view mental health and that affects their treatment seeking behavior. The purpose of this project was to explore whether cultural misconceptions coupled with other social barriers prevents Somalis in Minnesota from seeking mental health treatment. Using a qualitative design, eight mental health professionals were interviewed regarding their perceptions about whether cultural misconceptions coupled with other social barriers prevents Somalis in Minnesota from seeking treatment for mental health. Data were analyzed using both inductive and deductive approaches in which categories were first developed from the interview responses and then were linked to previously related literature. The findings indicated that most of the professionals thought that cultural views and other barriers do prevent Somalis in Minnesota from seeking mental health treatment. In addition, they identified the need for community mental health education and increasing Somali mental health professionals as a way to overcome the barriers. These findings are congruent with the literature and point to the need for educating individuals, families, community and mental health professionals.
The Impact of Birth Doulas on Post Partum Depressive Symptoms: Mothers’ Perceptions

By Devon E. Siegel

Research Chair: Pa Der Vang, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Lana Anderson-Kuchynski, M.A.; Brittany Westlund, BSW, LSW

The perceptions of mothers of the impact of birth doulas on their post partum depressive symptoms was examined through the lens of role theory and the multi-dimensional framework. With permission, an anonymous, online survey was distributed via email to 67 doulas, all of whom were members of a large organization of doulas in the Twin Cities, MN area. The email included a survey link and a request for the doulas to forward the survey link to their clients who had given birth within the last five years. The 17-question survey asked demographic data and questions regarding role conflict, interactions with their doulas prenatally and postnatally, and experiences with post partum depressive symptoms. Only 14 responses were received, preventing valid statistical analysis. No relationship was found between doula interactions and postpartum depressive symptoms. The study concludes with an in-depth discussion of the reasons for the low response rate with suggestions for improved study design on this topic.
The Integration of Peer Support Specialists: A Qualitative Study

By Maja Smedberg

Research Chair: Katharine Hill, Ph.D.,
Committee Members: Melissa Hensley, Ph.D., LISW; Andrea Lee, BS

The integration of Peer Support Specialists (PSS’s) into the mental health workplace presents both a challenge and an opportunity. For this qualitative study seven Peer Support Specialists were interviewed regarding their experiences in the workplace with coworkers and supervisors, as well as the strategies they utilized to integrate into their workplace. The transcripts of these interviews were analyzed for common themes. Some participants described successes of being utilized as a resource by colleagues and treated with respect. Many participants also described incidents of stigma and prejudice in their work environment coming from coworkers and supervisors, as well as other unique challenges related to being a Peer Support Professional. The themes identified mostly related to stigma in some form and were analyzed and discussed under the conceptual framework derived from Corrigan’s (2005) work on the stigma of mental illness. The implications of this social justice issue for the social work field was explored and discussed, and the qualitative information garnered from this study may be utilized to facilitate the integration of Peer Support Professionals by providing better supervision and encouraging mental health professionals to challenge and speak out against the stigma and prejudice that exists within the mental health field.
The purpose of this study was to examine workers and homeless adults’ perceptions of barriers that impact homeless adults’ utilization of shelters. The theory underlying this study was that shelter safety and capacity issues served as barriers to utilizing shelters. One focus group of workers and six interviews with homeless adults were conducted to learn about perceptions on shelter usage and barriers to shelter usage, shelter alternatives used by homeless adults, risks of not utilizing shelters, and barriers to exiting homelessness. This study found that homeless adults use shelters out of necessity and that safety and capacity are not barriers to use. A variety of factors were found to contribute to homeless adults’ decisions on whether to use shelters, including safety, shelter location and environment, shelter rules, and autonomy and dignity. Implications for practice and policy include a need for service providers to understand the tradeoff they are asking homeless adults to make in order to use shelters, the role dignity and autonomy play in service utilization, the need for increased advocacy efforts on behalf of the homeless population, examination of shelter policies and rules, more affordable housing, and increased access to affordable housing.
Differences in Hospice Care Between Veterans and Non-Veterans

By Tonia Smith

Research Chair: Andrea Nesmith, Ph. D., LISW
Committee Members: Maria Attema, MSW, LICSW; Ted Bowman, MDiv

The differences in hospice care needs between United States veterans and non-veterans was explored using a systematic review research methodology that consisted of 18 articles. After a review of previous research studies, it was found that veterans tended to want their healthcare providers to be more open and to the point about their diagnosis than non-veterans did. Both non-veterans and veterans wanted to be in control of their end of life cares. Non-veterans were more likely to want their family and friends around compared to veterans who were less likely to want people around. Veterans who had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) received a lower quality of care compared to hospice patients who did not have PTSD. Patients who received a palliative care consult reported having less discomfort compared to those who did not receive a palliative care consult. Patients who received extra services such as Reiki or music therapy or caregiver support had an increase in peacefulness and a decrease in pain. With the additional caregiver support, patients were able to stay at home longer or until their death. This study shows that there is not a lot of research done around hospice care with veterans, but it is a unique group that needs to be focused on more in order to increase the quality of care they receive.
Autism Spectrum Disorder Students in Mainstream Schools and Classrooms: Effectiveness and Empowerment

By Kathleen S. Soltau

Research Chair: Laura N. Bidwell, MSW, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Teresa M. George, MSW, LICSW; Casie Hammel, BSW, LSW

This study examines teachers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of mainstream educational practice in empowering students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. This study provides a focus on Minnesota and a mainstream educational program in southern Minnesota. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to better understand this topic. Interviews were transcribed and coded using grounded theory methods. Findings revealed an overwhelming amount of support for students with autism spectrum disorder in mainstream schools and classrooms. This support was shown through multiple themes identified by interviewees. Implications for social work practice and advocacy within mainstream schools serving students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder are also discussed.
The Neurology of Music for Post-Traumatic-Stress Disorder Treatment: A Theoretical Approach for Social Work Implications

By Maria G. Sorensen

Research Chair: Lance Peterson, Ph.D., MSW
Committee Members: Kerby Plante, MSW; Loretta T. Steckelberg, MSW, LICSW

The purpose of this theoretical paper is to provide information on how trauma and music neurologically impact the brain, and how music can be used as a tool to neurologically aid in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder. Post-traumatic stress disorder impacts the hippocampus, the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal axis, amygdala, and prefrontal cortex. Music stimulates the hippocampus, amygdala, nucleus accumbens, the mesolimbic dopamine system, and impacts the HPA axis. Evidence also shows that music can stimulate neurogenesis and neuroplasticity. Music can be used as a tool to stimulate these areas to activate neurogenesis and/or neuroplasticity, thereby reconditioning the brain back to healthy functioning. Several implications for social work practice can be drawn from this theoretical work. Specifically, music can be utilized to build rapport, for grounding in reprocessing therapies (EMDR), for positive distraction for clients in crisis who have a hard time self-regulating, for provoking deliberate moods, for identifying and naming moods, for increasing socialization and group cohesion, for decreasing avoidant symptoms, for expressing one’s narrative nonverbally, for expressing rage through drumming, to reduce cortisol levels, to release dopamine, and to potentially quicken or ease the process of therapy.
Trauma Innovations: MDMA as a Treatment Intervention for PTSD

By Anthony Christian, Andrea E. Grey, and Terra Sorg

Research Chair: Lisa Kiesel, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Sharon Berndt, LICSW, MSW; Jim Johns, LGSW, MSW

The ongoing impact of PTSD pervading society warrants research for additional interventions. The purpose of this project was to explore the history of MDMA-AP research and how its research has been impacted by political and popular opinions; it also investigated the opinions of current clinical licensed social workers in the further research of MDMA-AP. Using a mixed method design, the quantitative design surveyed 201 LICSW's from Minnesota regarding their perceptions about the psychedelic drug intervention-MDMA-AP. Using a qualitative design, four databases were searched [1980-Present] for MDMA & PTSD and/or Mithoefer, et al. 2010 specific scientific literature providing forty-two randomly selected articles; and YouTube was searched specifically targeting the same criteria to provide forty-two randomly selected videos. The findings produced three common themes emerged: (1) attitudes specifically geared toward MDMA-AP; (2) effusive or willful language; and (3) gaps in the research. Our conclusions showed the scientific literature displaying a somewhat supportive role in furthering the study of MDMA-AP; the primary source videos were generally supportive of additional study; and 71% of the clinicians were in support of further study.
Bride Wealth and its Implications for Hmong Women

By Elizabeth K. Soun

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

This qualitative study explores the experiences of Hmong women and their perceptions of bride wealth practices within the Hmong community. A review of the literature reveals that there is little to no previous research done on Hmong bride wealth practices. In this study, eight Hmong women were interviewed regarding their experiences with the Hmong bride wealth practice and how it relates to their overall satisfaction in marriage and mental health. A content analysis of the qualitative data using a deductive approach and open coding found themes of the participants’ responses that include the following: understanding bride wealth to be a monetary exchange between the bride and groom's families, respect for the tradition, financial stress, not defining their worth as a woman, and negative connotations for their younger selves. Although mental health distress was not a significant finding, implications for social work practice and future research are discussed.
Housing Homeless Who are Diagnosed with Mental Illness: Social Service Professionals’ Perspectives

By Kayla Sprenger

Research Chair: Karen Carlson, MSSW, LICSW, Ph. D.
Committee Members: Emma Sutton, LICSW; Stephanie Monroe, BA

Housing the homeless who are diagnosed with a mental illness has been a problem for decades, not only for the individual, but society as a whole. This study obtained data for the purposes of understanding the social service professionals’ perspective of how housing the homeless with a mental illness is beneficial. In this study, eight social service professionals in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area who work with homeless individuals diagnosed with a mental illness were interviewed. A qualitative approach, incorporating a semi-standardized survey was used. Content analysis was used to analyze the data. The survey included questions regarding changes in mental and physical health symptoms, crimes committed, use of services, goals, safety and what is needed to maintain housing. The findings indicated that housing with supports for those diagnosed with a mental illness reduces costs, improves mental and physical health, and reduces crime rates. By providing the basic need of shelter, individuals are able to focus on other areas such as their health, building relationships, and obtaining a job or schooling, while reducing the likelihood of committing a crime to obtain that basic need. There are many barriers for those who are diagnosed with a mental illness to obtain and maintain their housing. It is imperative for social workers to meet the individual where they are at in their recovery process and to advocate for and assist with identifying and reducing barriers. Emphasis should be placed on the housing first approach and social workers should advocate for more affordable housing.
Effectiveness of MBSR and MBCT in Reducing Clinical Symptoms in Adolescents

By Amber Statz

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Jacqueline Hutchinson, MSW, MA, LGSW; Sheila Sweeney, MSW, LICSW

Like adults, many adolescents live with mental health diagnoses. Like adults these adolescent sometimes struggle to manage the symptoms of their mental health diagnosis. If adolescents do not find effective strategies to manage those symptoms, those symptoms may have a profound effect on their quality of life. While mindfulness has been practiced around the globe for thousands of years, it is an emerging method of practice in the mental health field. Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) was developed as a treatment for adults. Mindfulness base cogitative therapy (MBCT) is an intervention adapted from MBSR. The purpose of this systemic review is to explore the effectiveness of MBSR and MBCT in reducing clinical symptoms in adolescents. The results of this review suggest that MBSR and MBCT may be effective in reducing some clinical symptoms in adolescents. MBSR and MBCT are skill-based interventions that if effective, teach participants skills to manage their symptoms. This is imperative for work with adolescents as it empowers their independence; compared to medication-based treatments that may lead adolescents to believe they require medication to successfully manage their symptoms. This review found that MBSR and MBCT might also be effective when paired with treatment as usual (TAU). Further research that includes both a control and a treatment groups is recommended.
The Elementary School Climate and Teacher Self-Esteem: A Study of Potential Relationship

By Kelsey Stewart

Research Chair: Felicia Sy, Ph.D, MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Dan Porter, MSW, LICSW; Colleen Bowman

The factors of self-esteem and of the school climate have been independently studied for over a century and found as universal factors of importance. This study investigates the potential relationship between teacher self-esteem and the school climate. Fifty-nine elementary school teachers at public schools in the Midwest participated in a survey consisting of demographic information, self-esteem assessment, and a school climate inventory. The findings showed a moderate relationship between teacher self-esteem and the school climate. Additional sub-categories of relationships and teaching learning indicated moderate relationships with teacher self-esteem. These findings lead to suggestions for improving factors in the school climate including incorporating a positive-based intervention and support program. Suggestions for implementing inclusive and person-centered policies and procedures at school level, local, state, and federal levels and development of growth-based evaluations and supports for new teachers are explored. Other suggestions include additional research and testing on the newly designed school climate inventory which Cronbach's alpha of .863 indicated high reliability and further research on the multi-factored relationship between teacher self-esteem and the school climate.
Incorporating E-Therapy into Practice, Social Worker Perspectives

By Kristine Strobl-Reichel

Research Chair: Rajean Moone, Ph.D., LNHA
Committee Members: R. Stephen Boswell, MSW, LICSW; Robin Hubbell, Ph.D, MSW, LICSW

Access to mental health services locally, nationally, and globally is a challenge. E-therapy is an appealing avenue to offer services to underserved and stigmatized clients. While an interesting new therapy modality, numerous questions and concerns are raised in the literature regarding online therapy services.

This study sought to answer the research question, what factors influenced a provider’s decision to provide online therapy? This qualitative study recruited clinical social workers providing E-therapy. Questions were designed to shed light on the development of a therapeutic connection, insurance coverage and reimbursement, technology glitches, and client inappropriateness for E-therapy treatment.

Findings for this study highlighted E-therapy offering increased flexibility of services for clients and providers alike. Providers cited lowered costs by using free video services and no brick and mortar overhead. Insurance coverage is extremely limited and typically self-pay. Security was raised as an issue of concern and consent regarding the acknowledgement of current security deficiencies. A therapeutic connection can be established in this format, however providers did agree that severe and persistent mental illness diagnoses are not appropriate for an E-therapy treatment environment. Concerns regarding licensing for E-therapy services to limit service delivery to within a licensed state were raised. The inability to have a high-speed Internet connection is an issue keeping many underserved clients from this therapy format. Implications for practice include provider boundaries, E-therapy training, and technological expertise by providers. Policy considerations include state and national initiatives to increase high-speed Internet access.
The Effectiveness of Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy on Children and Adolescents Who Suffer From Complex Trauma and Exhibit Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder/Symptoms: A Systematic Review

By Rachel M. Takazawa

Research Chair: Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, PhD, LISW
Committee Members: Jennifer Dynes, Psy.D., L.P.; Sarah Wilson, MSW

The purpose of this study was to examine current literature on Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in order to identify the effectiveness of this treatment on children and adolescents who suffer from complex trauma and exhibit Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms (PTSS). An inclusion criterion was created to capture studies that used TF-CBT or similar CBT techniques with this population. A systematic review research design was utilized resulting in 11 studies meeting criteria and these articles were then analyzed. The findings of the included studies were extracted and then divided into five distinct categories based on the PTSD/PTSS instrument used. The results measured statistically significant reductions in PTSD/PTSS following the use of TF-CBT and other CBT methods when compared to wait-list control groups. Additionally, TF-CBT or/and other CBT methods were found to be as effective or more effective at reducing PTSD or PTSS when compared to other treatment methods including; supportive group for parents, standard community care, child-centered therapy, non-directive supportive therapy, and EMDR. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that TF-CBT or comparable CBT methods are effective and can be utilized with children and adolescents suffering from PTSD/PTSS who have experienced complex trauma.
Experiences of Personhood in Dementia Within Long-Term Care Facilities: A Meta-Ethnography

By Rebekah E. Taylor

Research Chair: Mike Chovanec, Ph.D
Committee Members: Mari Ann Graham, Ph.D; Georgia Lane, MSW

To date, few studies have explored the subjective experience of personhood in individuals with dementia, particularly among those living in long-term care (LTC) facilities. As the population in the United States continues to age and dementia becomes more prevalent, the need to understand the experiences of persons with dementia (PWD) will only increase. This paper used Noblit and Hare’s (1988) meta-ethnography to synthesize existing qualitative research on the experience of personhood in dementia in LTC. Seven studies representing a variety of professional disciplines, qualitative methodologies, and geographic locales were included. A first level of synthesis identified four major themes relating to personhood in dementia: personhood in their world, personhood and maintaining human connection, expressing the distinctiveness of personhood, and personhood and the role required in this place. A second level of synthesis linked these four themes within an integrative framework. This framework describes the experience of personhood in dementia as one of adjustment, characterized by both reconciliation and disconnect between past and present selves. The findings of this study suggest that the narrative of loss of personhood in dementia be challenged, that person-centered care interventions in LTC continue to advance, and that both the past and present identities of PWD be honored and embraced.
The Personal Is Political: Integrating Clinical Social Work Practice through Narrative Therapy

By Taryn M. Tessneer

Research Chair: Lance Peterson, MSW, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: John Stillman, MSW, LICSW; Michele Braley, MSW, LICSW

Social justice has been identified as the core organizing principle of the social work profession. As social workers increasingly move into clinical practice, there is a more pronounced need to develop concrete practice methods consistent with this professed value. Literature suggests that narrative therapy theoretically contributes to social justice by deconstructing dominant discourses and by empowering people to author their own life stories and connect with one another to address social problems. This study seeks to understand the extent to which narrative therapy is aligned with a feminist social justice framework as it is currently practiced. The study offers qualitative data organized into themes and subthemes from six Licensed Clinical Social Workers who participated in semi-structured interviews on their practice of narrative therapy in clinical social work. The research indicated both strengths and challenges of using narrative practices to integrate social justice into clinical work. Findings suggest clinical social workers must value and engage in systems change efforts in order to incorporate social justice into practice. Social workers can utilize narrative therapy to further integrate the social work profession, but more developments in the field of narrative practice are needed to affect social transformation in the course of clinical work.
The Experiences of Latino Parents as they Navigate Care for a Child with Autism

By Emily Tibbetts

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Anne Fleming, MSW LICSW; George Baloila, MSW LICSW

This qualitative study explored the experiences of Latino caregivers as they navigate care for a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Six caregivers participated in a semi-standardized interview containing 14 questions. The data obtained was analyzed using a phenomenological approach to find common themes in the participants' experiences. Findings were organized into two broad themes and sub-themes of positive experiences with service access and delivery and negative experiences with service access and delivery. The sub-themes of positive experiences were as follows: communication, support systems, collaboration, education, and luck. The sub-themes of negative experiences were language access and interpretation, lack of information, limited support and validation from professionals, waitlists and logistics. The findings in this study provide several implications for practice, policy, research and education. Increased access to consistent quality interpretation, increased training for professionals and further evaluation of policies that impact Latino clients are all recommended.
The Support Group Experience of Older Male Caregivers in Providing Care for a Relative with Dementia

By Olivia T. Tise

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

It is estimated that 40% of caregivers of individuals living with dementia are men (Alzheimer’s Association, 2013). As the number of people diagnosed with dementia rises, older male caregivers will increasingly meet the demand for care. Men over the age of 65 may be an especially vulnerable group of caregivers. Support groups are one of the most widely used and popular interventions with family caregivers (Hornillos & Crespo, 2012). However, few studies have examined the support group experience of older male caregivers in providing care for a relative with dementia. This qualitative study explored the caregiving experiences of older male caregivers and their use of a memory loss caregiver support group. Five male caregivers between the ages of 58 and 82 participated in this study. Consistent with past literature, the findings of the present study indicate that overall, older male caregivers find the use of a caregiver support group to be beneficial in providing the practical skills and knowledge needed to provide care for a relative with dementia and also find group to be a safe place for emotional support. The men interviewed for this study share the belief that they face unique challenges as male caregivers and noted that these challenges have led to increased feelings of stress and the need for group support to ease the challenges associated with caregiving.
A Qualitative Investigation of Mindfulness-Based Practice with K-12th Grade Teachers

By Jenna Trumbower

Research Chair: Laurel Bidwell, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Teresa George, MSW, LICSW; Elizabeth Hirschman, M. Ed.

In the United States, there is an increased awareness and concern regarding K-12th grade teachers' personal and professional well-being. With current teacher turnover rates currently at about 20% compared to 9% in 2009 (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014), researchers have turned their attention to stress-reduction interventions and programs for teachers. The following study examines the experiences that seven K-12th grade teachers have had with mindfulness-based practices. This study further explores the impact that mindfulness-based practice has on K-12th grade teachers' personal well-being and professional practice. A qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was used to gather information to answer the following research question: What is the impact of mindfulness-based practice on K-12th grade teachers' personal well-being and professional practice? Data were analyzed by using grounded theory principles to uncover themes across the interviews. Indicated by the findings, teachers are overloaded with demands from their profession and stressors in their personal lives. The findings show that teachers are compromising their own personal well-being in order to take on the demands of the teaching profession. Different mindfulness-based practices that teachers utilize in their personal lives were highlighted in the findings. The themes from the data suggest that mindfulness-based practices provide teachers with internal and external resources to combat the day to day stressors inherent in their work. The relation between mindfulness-based practices, teacher well-being and quality of teacher-student relationships are explored, along with implications for school social workers in supporting teachers in their practice.
Supporting Families of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

By Marnie Tuenge

Research Chair: Mike Chovanec, Ph.D, LICSW, LMFT
Committee Members: Janet Anderson, MSW, LICSW & Jacki Harth, M.S., BCBA, LP

This qualitative research study examines the challenges that families of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) face when implementing their child's treatment objectives. Likewise, this study investigates which strategies families utilize to actively participate in family skill objectives to implement their child's treatment plan. Three caregivers (two women and one man) were recruited from around the state of Minnesota to participate in this study. A series of open-ended and scaled questions were asked of participants and the interviews were audio-taped for transcribing purposes. A literature review was written to highlight some of the expressed challenges and strategies families utilized and faced when implementing treatment objectives and these themes were compared and contrasted to the actual research. Research findings indicated that families were challenged by the availability of their schedules to participate in skill development, by challenges in caregiving for other children who resided in the house, and by their own physical and mental health concerns. The research indicated that some of the effective strategies that families utilized included involving other family members in the participation of family skills, working with therapists to generalize their child's behavior to other contexts and people, and prioritizing time to work with a therapist on skill implementation and development. Being familiar with the challenges families face as well as the strategies they employ to address these challenges are imperative for social workers and other professionals who serve families of children with ASD. It is crucial as professionals to create and reinforce effective family skill development and the successful acquisition and generalization of children's skills.
Barriers that Impact Hmong Students in Post-Secondary Education

By Francois Vang

Research Chair: Pa Der Vang, Ph.D., MSW, LICSW
Committee Members: Bridget Bordelon, M.Ed., EL Teacher & Darcy Nelson, MSW, LICSW

This qualitative study examines the personal history and risk factors that affect Hmong students in post-secondary education from the students’ perspectives. Ten Hmong students (five male students and five female students) from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities were recruited to participate in this study. A series of open-ended questions was given to the participants. The researcher used content analysis to analyze the data. Categories were first developed from the interview responses and then were linked to previous related literature. Findings indicated that family expectations, gender roles, cultural identity, racial prejudice, learning environment, language, financial struggles, academic perception, and separation or divorce in the family were the main barriers that impact Hmong students in higher education. After 40 years of living in the United States, the Hmong are still encountering many challenges in post-secondary education primarily due to internal (cultural barriers) and external (academic setting) conflicts. Acculturation is a continuous process in which individuals and families adopt different strategies at different times, and must deal with different life issues; thus, it is imperative that social workers and other professionals be knowledgeable about the current literature on how to effectively serve this population.
The Effects of Parental Response on Their Children’s Trauma Experience

By Carly S. Vaplon

Research Chair: Karen Carlson, LICSW, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Bonnie Kassen, MSW, LICSW; Mark Olson, MSW, LICSW

The American Psychological Association defines trauma as the emotional response to a terrible event. An event becomes traumatic when its adverse effects produce feelings of helplessness and lack of control, and thoughts that one’s survival may possibly be in danger. The purpose of this study was to collect data from licensed professionals who have experience working with children who have experienced trauma and their parents to determine the effects parental response to their child’s trauma have on their child’s trauma experience. Eight professionals were interviewed in this qualitative study to determine the effects of supportive and unsupportive parental responses. This study, like other studies on this topic determined a correlation between a child’s response to trauma mimicking that of the parent as well as supportive responses correlating to more efficient recovery for the children involved. Unsupportive responses were correlated with negative behaviors, self-image, emotional disturbance, depression, anxiety, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms. The licensed professionals identified the Social Work Implication of needing preventative measures and education to parents about appropriate, healthy, and supportive responses to potentially traumatic events.
Empowering Caregivers of Persons With Alzheimer’s Disease Through Psychoeducation of Community Services

By Lindsay S. Walker

Research Chair: Kendra Garrett, Ph.D.
Committee Members: Beth Bouman, MSW; Chris Rosenthal, LISW

This qualitative study examined the ways social workers empower caregivers of persons with Alzheimer’s disease (AD), through psychoeducational interventions of community services. Social workers in the field of aging may be the only informant of available support services for persons facing AD, so caregivers should not be overlooked while providing resources. Data was collected through nine semi-structured interviews to analyze the personal experience of social workers currently working with caregivers of persons with AD. This study interpreted the findings through deductive analysis of common themes from the interviews. The four themes from this study were: causes of caregiver burden, the need for psychoeducation, caregiver strengths to provide care, and social work support to caregivers. Three subthemes emerged including caregiver role identity, resiliency, and empowering caregivers. The results from this study provide strong indication for the role of social workers to provide support for caregivers in order to continue providing quality care. Implications suggest need for a caregiver assessment tool to allow social workers to further explore and discuss caregiver service expectations, awareness, and knowledge of various community-based services to encourage the caregiver to be involved in the plan of care for persons with AD.
Perceptions of Depression in Older Adults

By Kasey Weber

Research Chair: Andrea Nesmith, Ph.D., LISW
Committee Members: Lisa Kielty, LICSW; Amanda Thoof, MSW, LICSW

According to the US Department of Commerce estimates, the older adult population will more than double by 2050, to 80 million (US Department of Commerce, 1995). Depression is very common among the older generation with 6.5 million diagnosed cases out of 35 million individuals aged 65 and above (NAMI, n.d). Many of these older adults with depression suffer from stigmas, both internal and external. The objective of this systematic literature review was to synthesize the information available on stigma related to older adults with depression. The databases SocINDEX, Social Work Abstracts, Pubmed, and were systematically searched (2010 to date). The search terms included older adult, depression, stigma, perception, medications, counseling, social support and therapy. Studies were screened according to pre-defined inclusion criteria. Criteria included articles on older adults with depression and related perceptions. Researcher chose to use studies that were both qualitative and quantitative, and both cross-sectional and longitudinal. Research was focused on the population sample of both men and women who were identified as older adults. This research found stigma (both public and private) to affect older adults with depression. Further findings were an under-diagnosis of depression, a low reporting of symptoms and a belief that depression is a normal part of aging. Future research is needed into stigmas and what causes them as well as into stigmas that plague older adults living in facilities. Also, more education is needed for those who work with older adults. The results of this study form the basis for a better understanding of the effect stigma has on older adults with depression.
School Engagement and Academic Success of Students with an EBD Educational Label: Perspectives among helping professionals in schools

By Kristin Weezer

Research Chair: David Roseborough, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Eve Herzog, LICSW; Tess Pease, LICSW

With less than half of students educationally labeled as having an Emotional or Behavioral Disorder (EBD) graduating from high school, this student demographic faces both lower graduation rates and higher dropout rates when compared to their peers. Previous research findings provide several theories for these students’ lack of academic success, including: their likely exposure to risk factors such as mental health concerns and living in poverty, challenges in building and maintaining positive social relationships with peers and school staff resulting in a higher likelihood for school disengagement and lack of belonging, and the tendency for these students to be taught in a more restrictive and sometimes punitive special education classroom, isolated and alienated from their peers. Conversely, previous research also offers evidence-based suggestions for promoting school engagement and fostering academic success in EBD students, including: highlighting the importance of positive relationships with school staff, the importance of providing a nurturing and supportive classroom environment, and the importance of providing adequate mental health services in schools. The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine how a sample of school social workers view and foster success with EBD students in the classroom, defined both in terms of school engagement and academic success, leading to high school graduation. Eight school social workers were interviewed on the topics of school engagement, academic success, classroom environment, and characteristics of an ideal EBD program. The findings of this study attribute school engagement, positive relationships with school staff, positive social contexts, adequate mental health services, a supportive and nurturing classroom environment, and school staff unity to the social and academic successes of EBD students. Additionally, the findings support the need for increased funding and resources for urban school districts, as they were found to have the greatest need and least amount of resources to foster social and academic success for EBD students.
School Social Work and Expressive Art Therapies: A Systematic Review

By Margaret M. Whipple

Research Chair: Kari L. Fletcher, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Lizzi Kampf, LICSW; Holly Smart, MA, LP, ATR-BC

This systematic review focused on the use of expressive art therapies in school settings. Data was collected, synthesized and analyzed utilizing two databases. The search criteria involved the inclusion of expressive art therapies being utilized in a school setting, which resulted in 10 relevant articles and studies. A secondary analysis was conducted of the 10 articles to categorize the grey literature or informal studies from the empirical pieces found. Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory was used as the conceptual framework of this study, examining the environments that influence students’ access to services and programs. Kindergarten through high school age groups were the main populations examined as well as various expressive art therapy modalities and techniques applied in schools. The findings of this study provide a view into what programs exist and function in regards to expressive art therapies in school environments, as well as implications for future research.
The Impact Poverty Has on Adolescents’ Experiences at School According to School Social Workers

By Kelly Williams

Research Chair: Colin Hollidge, Ph.D
Committee Members: McKena Martin, MSW, LGSW; Sue Zapf, MST

Poverty is prevalent throughout the United States and can impact an individual’s childhood following them into adolescence. The purpose of this project is to look at the impact poverty has on adolescents’ experiences at school according to school social workers. Using a qualitative design, seven school social workers were interviewed regarding poverty in relation to their adolescent student’s experiences at school. The interviews were transcribed and coded into themes and sub-themes. The emerging themes correlated with the literature. The findings showed themes of adolescents’ living in poverty, academic, social and emotional experiences, to be key experiences school social workers see with poverty-stricken adolescents.
Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LICSW) provide services to vulnerable populations. As the number of sexually exploited women in Minnesota and the United States grows, so does the number of women needing services from social workers. It is important that LICSWs understand the population of women who have engaged in prostitution that were victims of sexual exploitation as children. If LICSWs are knowledgeable about the commonalities and shared experiences of the women they serve, they may be able to identify common risk factors and provide appropriate services. This research study sought to identify the commonalities and shared experiences of female prostitutes that were sexually exploited as children. The major themes that emerged from this data were: 1) females who engage in prostitution are often victims of child sexual exploitation; 2) common risk factors exist; 3) family dysfunction leads to survival sex; 4) poor self-esteem; 5) barriers to receiving service exist; 6) technology has increased the invisibility of victims; 7) the definition of sexual exploitation is too broad and hard to understand; 8) mentors are important, and 9) group therapy can be effective in helping victims to heal. Implications for social worker practice and future research are discussed.
Social Workers Advocating on a Macro Level After Graduate School

By William L. Wilson

Research chair: Laurel N. Bidwell, MSW, Ph.D., LICSW
Committee Members: Karen Carlson, M.S.E., MSSW, Ph.D, LICSW & Luke Morcomb, MSW

This paper reports on a survey of MSW social workers regarding their participation of macro advocacy post-graduation. It measures their level of engagement pre-graduate, current engagement and future engagement in macro advocacy and explores barriers to lack of engagement. Data indicates that MSW social workers are engaging in macro practice, however, a growing trend that MSW's are choosing to practice on more of micro level (individual casework) due to lack of time and organization commitments have emerged. Implications for research and education are discussed, including the need to further research the financial burdens that social work students face leaving school.
Hospice Social Workers’ Perspectives on Place of Death Congruence: A Qualitative Study

by Florence I. Wright

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This qualitative research study was designed to explore place of death congruence among hospice patients from the subjective experiences and perspectives of hospice social workers. A semi-structured interview with nine hospice social workers served as the primary means of data collection within the present study. Using content analysis with descriptive phenomenology, dominant and underlying themes were identified, refined, and subsequently confirmed through a reliability check. From the establishment and verification of themes and sub-themes, the research questions were answered. The results of this study indicate that patients generally prefer to die in a place they call “home,” including: private residences, skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, and/or residential hospice homes. This research strongly indicates that caregivers are the most critical factor in achieving a home death. Not only must caregivers be willing, available, informed, and competent, they also must have the ability to flex their roles within the family system in order to achieve a home death. Several additional factors were shown to be important determinants in actual place of death including: culture, type of terminal illness and associated symptoms, safety, and finances. Hospice social workers often act as caregiver coaches in enabling home death by maximizing caregiver strengths and by building networks of support. Hospice social workers aim to enhance place of death congruence by completing effective assessments, providing a variety of supports, educating, and providing and exploring realistic options for patients and families. The findings of the current study support previous research as well as add depth and dimension to the existing understanding of place of death congruence. The findings of the present study presented numerous implications for continued hospice social work practice. The current study offered direction for the further study of end-of-life choices in order to better provide and facilitate exceptional care for the terminally ill.
Assessment Process of EBD Students: Professional Perspectives

By Mallory Xurvein

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There are an increasing number of students labeled as “Emotionally or Behaviorally Disordered” (EBD) each year (Seidman, 2005). Less than one half of students labeled as EBD graduate (Lehr & McComas, 2005). Early identification is crucial in order to get EBD students the resources and supports that they need to succeed in school. Previous research shows that early identification and early provision of services leads to better outcomes (Kauffman, 1999). This places importance on the properly and timely assessments of students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders. The current qualitative study seeks to examine whether current special education assessment processes, along with eligibility regulations, provide an adequate way to target the proper interventions in a timely manner. This research looks at the assessment process from the viewpoint of the professionals who work closest to the students. Findings indicate for school social work are also explored.