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Amanda Cloninger
Clinical Social Work and
Administrative Leadership: an
Analysis of MSW Programs in the
United States

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore graduate level clinical social work programs' preparation of students for administrative leadership. Relevant literature shows that social workers are attaining positions in management and administrative leadership without the needed skills and knowledge to competently perform the job. Further, even when clinical social workers are not in positions of management or administration, they are asked to perform duties related to management and administration, for which they are often not trained. This lack of training has contributed to the underrepresentation of clinical social workers in administrative leadership positions at agencies in which they are employed. A content analysis of the course catalogs of 30 clinical social work graduate programs was performed to determine if clinical social work education is preparing students, in any form and to any degree, for administrative leadership. The findings indicate that while opportunity is available to clinical social work students to engage in management/administration coursework, this opportunity is promoted at very few schools, and such coursework is required at even fewer institutions. Despite this, schools state that social workers often do assume management/administrative roles following graduation, with many schools stating that their graduate education prepares their students for leadership roles. The implications of the findings are discussed and suggestions for future research are provided.

**CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK AND ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP: AN ANALYSIS
OF MSW PROGRAMS IN THE UNITED STATES**

A project based upon independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work

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2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my parents for their unconditional support, encouragement, and love throughout my graduate school endeavors, as well as my grandparents for inspiring this journey. To the many supervisors, managers and administrators that I have had the good fortune to work with through the years, thank you for impressing upon me the importance of a broad skillset and for nourishing my interest in administration. Finally, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Dominique Steinberg, whose support, patience, positivity, and interest in this project has been so valuable.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore graduate level clinical social work programs' preparation of students for administrative leadership. Specifically, this study sought to address the following question: *Is clinical social work education preparing students for administrative leadership?*

One reason for conducting this study was an identified debate in the literature around which degree preparation is best suited for management positions in organizations in which social workers comprise at least some or all of its staff. In the late 20th century, Gummer (1987) spoke to the perception of agencies that social workers lack applicable business and management skills as well as the personality traits needed to successfully execute agency functions, pointing out that social workers must learn to balance the technical with the ideological in order ensure that social work values are preserved in the decision making processes in agencies. The lack of social workers in professional administration is still an issue, as a fairly recent study of social service agency directors (Brown, 2008) noted. For example, of agencies surveyed just a few years ago (Brown, 2008), still only 57% of their directors held a master's degree of any kind and of those who did, fewer than half held an M.S.W. (many were M.B.A. graduates). Even more recently, 49 board chairs of human service organizations were surveyed in a study (Hoefler, Watson, & Preble, 2013) that found that the favored degree by chairs for leadership positions is still an M.B.A., with only 26% of the board chairs choosing an M.S.W. as the preferred degree for an executive position; they cited the belief that an M.S.W. graduate would not be well prepared for the demands of an executive role.

In addition to a debate around degree preparation, Patti (2009) shows that 27% of L.C.S.W. members of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) spend 20 or more hours per week engaged in management activities. Many report feeling undertrained for such duties, and despite their mastery of direct practice skills, these skills do not translate well into management roles (Knee, 2014). Responding to such disparity, the 2010 Social Work Congress set forth *Imperatives for the Next Decade*, which specifically calls for increased management content in social work education (NASW, 2010).

Currently, there is a lack of research regarding clinical social workers' specific access to coursework that could potentially prepare them for roles that they may be asked to fill in their careers and that could maintain organizational values consistent with professional social work values. There is an identified need for change in education and attitudes of clinical social work educators in teaching administration to students, as made evident by the *Imperatives for the Next Decade* (NASW, 2010); and in order to explore this issue further, the study reported here documents the availability of courses in several United States clinical social work programs specifically intended to develop skills and competencies needed for administrative leadership by social work professionals.

The study explored this issue through a content analysis of the course catalogues of 30 clinical social work programs in the United States to determine if clinical social work students are required or even provided the opportunity to take courses specifically intended to develop skills and competencies needed for administrative leadership. This document first provides an overview of current literature on this topic (Chapter II), followed by a description of the study's methodology in Chapter III. Chapter IV presents the major findings of the study, and Chapter V provides a discussion of the findings along with implications. The next chapter, Chapter II,

reviews the professional literature in order to provide a context for understanding the current trends in the field as they relate to organizational administration/management in social work.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This literature review focuses on current trends in the field of social work that give rise to the research question. This chapter is divided into five sections, each relevant to the question at hand. The first section presents research on the training of master's level social workers and is followed by the second section, which addresses the literature on the career patterns of social workers following graduation. The third section focuses on a debate in the literature around the most suitable degree for administrative leadership positions in human service organizations. Finally, this chapter concludes with two sections on the implications of these trends for the profession in a broader sense as well as the relevance of this literature to the research question.

M.S.W. Training

Informal observation of the field suggests that social work students appear to exhibit a lack of interest in specialization in administrative practice, and literature on the subject has painted this disinterest as a crisis in social work leadership (Patti, 2009). In fact, as the Council on Social Work Education (2013) reports, only 25.6% of all M.S.W. programs in 2011 offered a concentration in administration or management practice. A total of 34 programs featured in the study reported 1,578 students enrolled in the specialty concentration compared to 23,038 students enrolled in a direct practice/clinical concentration. Further, the majority of social work students both specialize in and engage in direct practice following graduation (Choi, Urbanski, Fortune, & Rogers, 2015), and the literature has begun to address concern not only regarding the lack of management and leadership training of social work students but also the discrepancy between the interests of social work students in pursuing the degree in order to practice privately

and the commitment of the profession to underserved populations, social justice, and macro-level issues (Maschi, Baer, & Turner, 2011).

Specifically, a trend since the 1980's has become apparent – that students are pursuing the M.S.W. to engage in direct clinical practice. For example, in a study by D'Aprix, Dunlap, Abel, and Edwards (2004), student opinions of the M.S.W degree were collected in 23 qualitative interviews to assess values and training goals of new graduate students. Findings of the study reveal that the majority of students surveyed cited the marketability and practicality of the degree and opportunity to train for and practice clinically in a reduced amount of time by comparison to other degrees qualifying for similar clinical practice. Ultimately, the study seeks to demonstrate both the lack of students interested in policy practice or working at the systems level to effect change as well as the divergence of what students seek in their training and the values and historic commitment of the profession to serving oppressed and vulnerable clients (NASW, 2014).

Findings on M.S.W career interests and training are relevant to the question at hand, as they illustrate that the career interests of many M.S.W students currently do not include administration practice and are instead focus on private clinical practice. Thus, as the current research seems to demonstrate, there will soon be a shortage of social work administration graduates to fill positions in human service administration due to retirement of current administrators. The question for this study was, therefore, just how well social work students specializing in direct/clinical practice are being *also* trained, in any way and to any degree, to potentially ascend to positions in social work administration. The next section addresses the patterns and nature of the work that social work graduates often engage in during their careers.

Career Patterns

The literature widely suggests that after receiving their M.S.W. social workers generally take jobs in direct practice regardless of their area of specialization. A study by Choi, Urbanski, Fortune and Rogers (2015), which surveyed 246 social workers from a mid-size northeastern M.S.W. program 12 months after their graduation about their education and career, found that 71% were employed by a non-profit agency and 83% employed in a direct service role and the study noted concerns about the ability of these direct practice social workers to move into management and administration roles. Of additional concern was their ability to take on more macro-level responsibilities even if their specialization was macro practice. The authors believe that competition from other fields, the failure of social work education to make macro social work inclusive of administration and management, and the organizational perception of social workers as unqualified for administrative positions each prevent social workers from attaining these roles.

Ironically enough, although M.S.W. graduates are likely to be employed in direct practice, surveys of social workers show that these positions often entail significant time engaged in management related tasks and activities. They are, therefore, directly involved in administrative work even if they are not hired for top-management positions. For example, in the early part of this century, the Center for Health Workforce Studies (2006) conducted a large-scale survey of over 250,000 licensed social workers in the United States. According to this study, 20% of social workers that participated in the study said that they actually spend more than 20 hours per week engaged in management or administration tasks, while 69% of all respondents reported at least some time engaged in such tasks. Further, it would appear that even when social workers are afforded mobility into management or administrative leadership

positions, rarely have they been trained for management; rather, they are expected to perform the job without training and without adequate support (Wimpfheimer, 2004). The next section will present literature on the preferred degree of those in administrative leadership.

Degree debate

A debate arises in the literature around which degree and preparation is best suited for administrative leadership positions in organizations in which social workers comprise at least some or all of its staff. For instance, Brown (2008), who conducted a study of social service agency directors, concluded that of agencies surveyed only 57% of their directors held a master's degree of any kind. Further, of those who held master's degrees, less than half held an M.S.W., and in fact, many of them were M.B.A. graduates. To follow these statistics, 49 board chairs of human service organizations were surveyed in a mixed-methods study by Hoefler, Watson, and Preble (2013) and reported that the favored degree was the M.B.A., with only 26% of board chairs choosing the M.S.W. as the preferred degree for an executive position within the agency, citing their belief that an M.S.W. graduate would not be as prepared for the demands of the position as would an M.B.A. graduate. In short, the organizations were considered to be businesses that required individuals in administration with the ability to run it as such. "The person would have enough background in social work to understand the mission – the ED works everyday with business leaders and needs to understand how to run an organization with the head as well as the heart" (Hoefler, Watson, & Preble, 2013, p. 443). In fact, highly cited was the need for an understanding of finance and fund raising. "One put it simply, 'No margin = no mission.' Another stated, 'Without (good financial management) we would not be in business and able to serve our needy clients'." (Hoefler, Watson, & Preble, 2013, p. 442).

In contrast, those few who did prefer to have an M.S.W. in administrative positions expressed the importance of understanding social issues and suggested that support in the areas of business and administrative matters could be ascertained from board members. Arguments to hire an M.S.W. included the nature of nonprofit organizations and the need to understand it as different from that of a for profit business organization: “The ED must understand the processes and needs to run an agency. This is most likely found with an M.S.W. There are other key positions in an organization that could benefit from other master’s degree.” And another said “Social work is the foundation. You can hire essential staff to support the other functions. You don’t hire garden variety CPA to run a nonprofit.” Finally, respondents who preferred either degree claimed that staff holding these respective degrees could be hired to support the need in the complementary area. Ultimately, the study provides recommendations for adjustments to M.S.W. education to include skills that board chairs seek including finance, accounting and marketing --which may, in the end, entail hiring social work educators with M.B.A. degrees.

In summary, many arguments both for and against social workers - not M.B.A.s or M.P.A.s - leading social service organizations can be found in the literature. The argument for an M.S.W. in administration leans primarily on the presumption that a social worker can bring expertise and commitment to values and ethics of the profession to social work administration although not without a solid knowledge of management skills, generally recommended to be woven into curricula across specialization areas (Hart, 1984). The following section will discuss the difference between the human service organization and a for-profit business organization.

Skills Needed

Although debate does exist as to what degree is most appropriate for administrative leadership positions, a consensus regarding what skills and attributes are essential to such positions is in fact reached in the literature (Hoefler, 2003). For example, in response to social workers ascending to management and administrative positions without adequate preparation, The National Network of Social Work Managers (2013) maintains national management practice standards outlining 46 standards over four domains: executive leadership; resource management; strategic management; and community collaboration.

In terms of skills, Hoefler (1993 & 2003) has contributed an initial study as well as a follow up to the question of which ones management and administration positions require. In the 2003 follow-up study by Hoefler, nonprofit and government administrations as well as social work and public administration educators were surveyed on 37 skills obtained from a review of relevant literature (Hoefler, 2003). Respondents rated each skill on a seven-point scale in order of its importance. Top skills across all professions were commitment to clients, professionalism, oral communication and written communication, leadership and decision-making. Rated least important were statistics, accounting and previous experience in the agency of hire. This suggests that even if M.S.W. students were not receiving adequate training in areas such as management and finance, their ability to properly execute agency functions at the administrative leadership level would not necessarily be limited.

Several studies seeking to address this question aim to analyze what social work managers do in their roles and adapt the tasks and duties to recommendations for the social work community. In a study by Menefee and Thompson (1994) of social work managers, respondents reported that “no longer are social work managers predominantly concerned with structures,

processes, and conditions within the agency; they now give equal if not more attention to the entire context of service delivery by actively monitoring and managing the boundary between the external environment and internal organization arrangement.” (p. 14). Further, Menefee and Thompson (1994) show that social work managers are now more involved in future oriented planning of the agency, analysis of budgets, development of teams to respond to community needs, and policy practice. Each of these studies suggest that due to the evolving nature of the role of the social work manager, executive level skills may infiltrate their roles. This demonstrates a need for social workers to recognize the importance of and learn both administrative and management skills. The following section will address the response of social work education to the demonstrated need of social work students to learn these skills.

Social Work Education

Despite their training and knowledge of direct practice skills, Knee (2014) found in a study in the early part of this century that M.S.W. education left practitioners ill-prepared for demands of administrative leadership. In response to such disparity in curricula and the skills and attributes needed for administrative leadership positions, the 2010 Social Work Congress set forth Imperatives for the Next Decade, which specifically calls for increased management content in social work education (NASW, 2010). However, in a study by Ezell, Chernesky, & Healy (2004), graduate students specializing in administration practice at three different institutions were surveyed to determine the overall climate at the schools regarding management and administration content. Respondents reported pervasive beliefs held by students and faculty alike “that the correct and/or only career path to administration was from clinical social worker to supervisor and then to manager, and that it was possible for anyone to become an administrator over time” (Ezell et al., 2004, p. 16). The study further addresses the lack of macro

or administration content in foundation level coursework required of both clinical and administration students, pointing out the practical examples used in these courses tended to be taken from clinical or direct practice perspectives, leaving out the administration or management viewpoint. The study concludes with suggestions of hiring faculty to teach foundation courses who can speak intelligently to both micro and macro perspectives, as well as reorganizing foundation curriculum to be more macro-inclusive and, indeed, inclusive of increased management or administration content.

This study bears relevance to the research question as the structure of social work education, being divided into macro/micro practice concentrations, creates barriers for social work students to acquire knowledge and skills in management and administration. The literature advocates for a change in the structure of social work education in order to address this, suggesting that perhaps structuring, at certain schools, M.S.W. foundation courses instead at the BSW level and providing management content only at the M.S.W. level could solve the issues created by the macro/micro divide (Patti, 2000; Perlmutter, 2006). The following section will discuss implications of the literature presented.

Implications

As Rosenberg and McBride (2015) point out, the lack of attention to administrative practice in social work education not only affects social workers experiences in the professional setting in terms of understanding of organizational dynamics, negotiation, and overall assessment of job opportunities, but it informs perceptions of social work as a profession. Social workers are increasingly replaced in top positions by those holding M.B.A. or M.P.A. degrees, a trend that serves to “reinforce the low status, negative images, and frequent misperceptions of the social work profession. Such realities and perceptions may further depress the already low

number of social work students initially seeking management careers. They may also motivate early-career college graduates with interests in human services to seek an M.B.A. or nonprofit management degree rather than an M.S.W.” (Rosenberg & McBride, 2015, p. 6). Lack of administration content in clinical social work education – where the majority of social work students chose their concentration – not only has implications for individual social workers, it appears to affect the profession on a larger level. This is significant to the study because it demonstrates the need for more literature around this phenomenon. The following section presents a conclusion to this review.

Conclusion

This review of the related literature illustrates several problem areas relevant to the research question of this study. First, if and when social workers gain access to management roles in the field, they are doing so without the education and knowledge needed to exhibit competency in these roles. Second, social workers appear to fail in their ability to acquire administrative positions because of perceptions about their training and its appropriateness for such a job. Ironically enough, the majority of social workers who specialize in clinical/direct practice are nonetheless performing management tasks and sometimes even acquiring positions in administration. Unfortunately, however, there is still a lack of research regarding clinical social workers’ specific access to preparation for roles that they may be asked to fill in their careers, such as those in management; while most of the related literature identifies a need for change in education and in attitudes of educators in teaching administration to students. Finally, while some literature has reviewed the scope and nature of courses that teach social work administration, studies that document the availability of such courses – specifically as it applies

to clinical social work programs – are still missing in action. The next chapter outlines the methodology used to implement this study.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This study sought to explore nature/degree of preparation for administrative leadership in graduate level clinical social work education. Specifically, the study addressed the following question: *Is clinical social work education preparing students for administrative leadership?* In order to gain insight and understanding into the research question, a qualitative content analysis of the course catalogues of 30 clinical social work programs in the United States was performed. Content analysis requires a systematic reading of text data through which categories are assigned to the content within a coding frame (Krippendorff, 2004). The content analysis in this study explored if clinical social work students are required or even provided the opportunity to take courses specifically intended to develop skills and competencies needed for administrative leadership. This design was chosen as a systematic means by which to arrive at an interpretation of clinical social work curricula and thus answer the study question.

Sample

Purposive sampling was utilized in this study. M.S.W. programs selected for inclusion in the study were located in the United States and possessed, at the time of the study, accreditation by the Council for Social Work Education, and their courses were reviewed for nature of administrative coursework. Courses reviewed were obtained through online course catalogues for the 2015-2016 academic year. While each state is not represented in the sample, effort was made to obtain a sample that was representative of the entire United States by ensuring the inclusion of M.S.W. programs located in each regional division of the country.

Ethics and Safeguard

Course catalogues reviewed for this study were taken from the public domain; thus, there was no use of human subjects. Consequently, the study did not require informed consent, and the potential of harm to the sample of this study is virtually nil.

Data Collection

In order to determine the extent to which graduate clinical social work programs prepared their students for administrative leadership, the current professional literature was reviewed to determine what competencies and skills are recommended for positions at the administrative leadership level. Studies describe tasks related to planning, financial management, and management of agency resources (Hoefler, Watson, & Preble, 2013; Menefee & Thompson, 1994). Ultimately, the coding frame was built out of the recommendations of the National Network of Social Work Managers, which outlines four domains of competencies as follows: executive leadership, resource management, strategic management, and community collaboration.

In the initial process of creating a coding frame, each program's course catalog was first read thoroughly. Subcategories under each domain were identified (both deductively from the coding frame domains as well as inductively from concepts that emerged from the data) and used for searching within the course catalogue. Each program's graduation requirements were also reviewed to determine if the programs require any coursework that could prepare graduates for administrative leadership. Additionally, the schools' elective requirements were reviewed to determine the extent to which programs promote or encourage clinical social work students to engage in coursework in administration or management. Course content data were coded using MAXQDA software, and curricula requirements were recorded in an excel spreadsheet.

Analysis

As noted above, course content data were coded using MAXQDA software. Trial phases of coding were conducted for a period of time, after which material was coded in a final phase and then partially recoded after a period of 14 days. Data were then interpreted to finally determine whether or not clinical social work programs seem to be preparing graduates for administrative leadership in the field (Krippendorff, 2004).

Study Limitations

This study examined only course catalogs of selected graduate level clinical social work programs in the United States. Although this method provided insight into the training and academic preparation of clinical social work students, it is limited only to what course descriptions provide. It is possible that an examination of course syllabi could reveal that students are being prepared for leadership positions in ways that are excluded from the short course descriptions reviewed. Indeed, preparation for administrative leadership could occur by institutions not explicitly stated in course catalogs or other online web content. The following chapter will discuss findings of this content analysis.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This chapter presents findings of the content analysis of 30 clinical social work programs in the United States. The chapter first identifies schools used as part of the sample, followed by a description of the characteristics of the sample collected. The chapter concludes with major findings of the study and is followed by a discussion chapter on the findings.

Characteristics of the Sample

The sample used in this study was composed of 30 graduate level clinical social work programs in the United States. Each program possessed, at the time of the study, accreditation by the Council for Social Work Education. Further, each program that was reviewed offers concentration coursework in clinical social work. Twenty-seven programs offer concentrations in both clinical social work and a variation of management and policy practice. Only three programs offer purely clinical concentrations. As shown in the below chart, in order to ensure representation of the entire United States, programs included as part of the sample were selected from each regional division of the country.

M.S.W. Programs Selected for Inclusion

<u>Northeast</u>	<u>Midwest</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>
New England	East North Central	South Atlantic	Mountain
Boston College	University of Chicago	Virginia Commonwealth University	Arizona State University
Simmons College	Ohio State University	Florida State University	University of Denver
Smith College	University of Wisconsin - Madison	University of North Carolina	University of Nevada - Las Vegas
Boston University		University of Maryland	
Mid-Atlantic	West North Central	East South Central	Pacific
CUNY Hunter	University of Kansas	University of Alabama	San Diego State University
Columbia University	University of Minnesota - Twin Cities	University of Kentucky	Portland State University
Rutgers University	University of Missouri	University of Mississippi	University of Washington
			University of California at Berkley
		West South Central	
		Tulane University	
		University of Texas - Arlington	
		University of Oklahoma	
		University of Houston	

The content analysis was guided by the list of core competencies published by the National Network for Social Work Managers (2013). Competencies prescribed by this organization were used as subcategories under the domains of executive leadership, resource management, strategic management, and community collaboration. Subcategories of these domains were used to search within course offerings to determine the extent to which coursework existed in these schools that could potentially prepare clinical social workers to

assume administrative leadership positions. Under the domain of executive leadership, 34 courses were identified and coded to broadly prepare a graduate with executive leadership skills. These courses include non-profit administration, organizational management and theory, general administration, and general leadership. These course descriptions appear to prepare students for establishing and maintaining agency vision, goals, and objectives, as well as organizational culture. One hundred and seventy courses were coded as preparing graduates for policy practice and advocacy – a subcategory to the domain of executive leadership. Further, programs appear to prepare graduates well for management of diversity and cross-cultural understanding within organizations.

Under the domain of resource management, the following courses were coded: 21 courses on financial management; 14 courses on human resource management; four courses on information technology; and three courses that broadly covered financial, personnel and technology management.

Eighty-one courses with content related to strategic management were coded. Seven courses specifically on strategic planning were identified; 23 courses containing content related to law and/or legal issues were coded under risk management/legal affairs; 28 courses on program development and/or design were identified; two courses with content in marketing and public relations were identified; and 10 courses specifically on fundraising were coded.

Finally, 33 courses were identified that prepare students under the domain of community collaboration. Specifically, these courses prepare students for building and maintaining relationships with outside agencies, communities, and groups.

Substantive Findings

Clinical Programs Requiring Management/Administration Coursework. In addition to analysis of course descriptions offered by each program in the sample, a review of required coursework for graduation in clinical programs was performed to identify whether or not clinical programs require any coursework that could potentially prepare graduates for administrative leadership. This identification was again guided by the core competencies used to create the coding frame (National Association of Social Work Managers, 2013). Eighteen of the 30 schools were identified to require coursework that could prepare students for administrative leadership under the four domains. Eight of these 18 programs require one course in practice with communities and organizations. Descriptions of these courses appear to generally cover theory of human service organizations and agencies and to ensure that agencies are responding to the needs to communities. Two programs require a course in legal issues and ethics. Four programs require one course in advance macro social work, which appears to partially cover material related to administrative practice. For example, the University of Texas at Arlington requires a three-credit hour class of its clinical concentration students titled “Generalist Macro Practice,” which “examines generalist community and administrative practice roles, the perspectives of strengths, empowerment, evidence-based practice, and global practice along with the values of social justice, diversity, and participation. Specific attention is given to assessing community assets and needs” (University of Texas Arlington, 2016). It remains unclear the extent to which this course would prepare students for administrative practice based solely upon the course description, however.

The above-described courses *could* provide a degree of preparation for administrative leadership under the domains of the management and administration competencies. However, it

is notable that only two programs require coursework specifically in management or administration. One such program is Washington University of St. Louis (Missouri), which requires of its clinical social work students at least three credits in leadership/management coursework, leaving the student with a choice of courses to fulfill the requirement. Similarly, the University of Missouri requires its student to take one three-hour credit course titled “Fundamentals of Social Work Administration.”

The University of Houston (Texas) and Ohio State University each require one three-hour macro crossover course of their clinical concentration students. Further, at each institution half of the courses offered to fulfill this requirement are specifically in management/administration (e.g. resource management and strategic management).

Opportunities for Elective Coursework Preparing for Administrative Leadership. Since programs requiring coursework that could prepare a student for administrative leaderships appear to be limited, each program was reviewed to determine the opportunities for clinical social work students to engage in administrative coursework should they elect to do so. Programs reviewed generally require of their students between three and five elective courses in order to graduate. Generally, programs offering multiple concentrations do not restrict students from taking electives in management or leadership provided they meet necessary foundation curriculum prerequisites. Two programs allow students to take coursework from management concentrations only with the approval of the course instructor and/or the student’s faculty advisor. The University of Oklahoma and Columbia University (New York) restrict students outside of the administration track from registering from these courses.

Although students may appear relatively free to engage in administrative leadership coursework in their electives, schools promote the opportunity to do so to very different degrees.

Five of the 30 schools specifically encourage students in clinical concentrations to select elective coursework that further develops clinical skills. Conversely, five programs either encourage by way of promotion of administration elective coursework in their course catalogs to clinical concentration students or have built a curriculum that stresses the importance of such coursework. At the University of Chicago (Illinois), bridging courses are suggested to clinical concentration students:

Bridging courses—those courses likely to be of interest to both clinical and social administration students—bear on issues of supervision, management, and understanding organizational dynamics. Students also have the opportunity to gain interdisciplinary perspectives by taking courses in other graduate programs and professional schools of the University (University of Chicago, 2016).

Similarly, the Washington University in St. Louis (Missouri) both requires and promotes coursework in administration and management in line with its goal to prepare students for administrative positions:

The Mental Health concentration exposes students to a range of evidence-based assessment and treatment methods that aim to increase the functional capacity of individuals and larger systems addressing mental illness. It also provides critical skills for students interested in mental health programming, management and advocacy (Washington University in St. Louis, 2016).

Although many programs are able to provide at least some degree of opportunity for students to take elective coursework in administration, it should be noted that three programs in the sample offered only concentrations in clinical social work. At these institutions, coursework that could potentially prepare students for administrative leadership is largely limited to courses in policy or law. At Smith College School for Social Work (Massachusetts), students are given the opportunity to take various policy and advocacy courses as well as one course offered in law; however, the only course outside of these two that could potentially prepare students for

administrative leadership is lobbying and grant writing, falling under the domain of resource management.

Promotion of Leadership Training. Despite a general lack of required coursework that could provide graduates with preparation for administrative leadership roles, it was widely observed that schools claim to provide training and curriculum necessary to produce “leaders” of its graduates, arguing that clinical social workers often assume administrative roles within agencies. The University of California at Berkley does not require management or leadership coursework of its clinical social work students. However, it states on its website that graduates assume leadership positions in mental health systems following the school’s preparation of students for such positions. Further, the program’s mission statement promotes its focus on “leadership development.” The University of Minnesota’s program website states the following:

The central mission of the Master of Social Work Program is the preparation of students for advanced social work practice and leadership in the following areas: Clinical Mental Health; Community Practice; Families and Children; Health, Disability and Aging (University of Minnesota, 2016).

Similarly, this program does not require leadership or administrative coursework of its graduates.

The M.S.W. program at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas promotes training in the area of both direct practice and management and community practice, supported by this statement:

Graduates are employed in a wide variety of agencies, positions, and areas of service, such as mental health, aging services, domestic violence, child welfare, school social work, healthcare services, geriatric social work, and substance abuse treatment and prevention. In addition, social workers may advance to positions of management of social service agencies or establish their own private practice (University of Nevada at Las Vegas, 2016).

While this program does not require students to engage in management coursework, students are required to take one three-hour course in legal and ethical issues, which falls under the domain of strategic management.

In addition to statements around leadership training and the potential for graduates to assume administrative positions following graduation, course catalogs were found to include statements on the ability of all graduates – regardless of concentration – to practice at multiple levels. The University of Montana’s program website, for example, states as follows:

At the University of Montana we are committed to excellence, creativity, and innovation in social work education. Today’s graduate-level social worker must be able to work with a diverse clientele and engage in practice at multiple levels, from counseling to community change (The University of Montana, 2016).

Despite this statement, the program’s course catalog states that clinical concentration students “choose” electives in clinical practice. Therefore, although the school does require one policy practice course of its graduates, it does not require any further coursework that could prepare graduates to practice at an administrative level.

Summary

Content analysis of the sample consisting of 30 schools of social work in the United States suggests that due to the division of M.S.W. programs into multiple concentrations at many schools, opportunity does exist for clinical social work students to engage in courses that could potentially prepare them for administrative leadership, at least theoretically. However, at many schools these tracks are viewed as mutually exclusive, creating a barrier that possibly prevents clinical students from taking administrative coursework. For programs that only offer clinical concentrations, coursework that could potentially prepare graduates for administrative leadership seems to be limited to policy, law, and lobby and grant writing courses. In essence, it appears from this catalog review that taking courses in management or administration is promoted to

clinical social work students at very few schools. Despite this, programs reviewed often stated that graduates assume management/administrative roles following graduation and are being prepared for leadership roles in their graduate education. The findings of this content analysis and their implications with regard to answering the overall research question that drove this study will be discussed further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This chapter offers a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature reviewed (see Chapter II), which generally suggest that clinical social work students are not being prepared for administrative leadership with a few programs included in the study that might be seen as outliers to this general finding. After the findings of this study are compared and contrasted with the literature reviewed, implications for social work practice as well as recommendations for future research will be provided. Finally, this chapter will address the biases and limitations of this study and offer concluding remarks.

Coursework Preparing Graduates for Administrative Leadership

The literature highlights a need for the preparation of clinical and direct practice social work in leadership and management, providing recommended skills necessary to satisfactorily perform management and administrative duties. Generally speaking, it suggests that social workers are not being adequately prepared, regardless of concentration, and points out that as current social work administrators begin retiring, there will be a shortage of new social workers trained to fill their positions. The findings of this study suggest that concern noted in the literature is warranted at least to some degree.

There is debate in the literature around what skills and attributes are most important for administrative leadership. For example, some argue that skills like communication, commitment to clients, and professionalism are paramount, while others suggest that a strong understanding and know-how in such areas as finance and strategic management is more essential (Hoefler, 2003).

The question is, what are schools doing, if anything, to help social workers gain any skills whatsoever – whether of the first type noted above or the second – to be able to engage in any

form of top-level management in the field? In fact, many schools in the United States do generally require that students take at least one course that could in theory provide some training for administrative leadership in a broad sense. For example, courses such as community and organizational practice or generalist macro practice, required by several programs, could in fact provide a foundation for clinical students to think at the administrative level. However, in terms of studies that stress the need for knowledge in areas such as finance and strategic management, only two programs included in the study require (at the time of review) a specific course in management or administration.

The majority of the programs in the sample do provide an opportunity to take elective coursework in these subject areas *if* a student specializing in clinical social work has an interest in management/administration. However, the literature points to the general disinterest of students and faculty alike in engaging in social work administration training and/or education. Thus, although the opportunity does appear to exist, studies (D'Aprix et al., 2004; Ezell et al., 2004) suggest that due to students' greater interest in private practice along with the apparent disinterest of faculty in teaching social work administration and the general belief that the way to administrative leadership is through clinical/direct practice positions, students are probably not going to choose management/administrative electives even if the opportunity to do so does exist, compounding the problem. In fact, only five programs of the 30 surveyed for this study actually promote administration elective coursework to clinical students, making the likelihood even smaller.

In summary, this study largely confirms what the current literature seems to argue, which is that while students may be provided *opportunities* to engage in social work management or administration coursework, they are unlikely to do so as evidenced by the growing trends in the

field to pursue private practice along with a general lack of enthusiasm for promoting and encouraging this direction by M.S.W. degree programs.

Implications for Social Work Practice

The findings of this study, when compared and contrasted with the relevant literature, do imply that clinical social workers are not being prepared in their graduate-level education for administrative leadership. The irony is, of course, that clinical social workers who do not attain jobs at the administrative leadership level are still asked to perform administrative and management duties, for which they report feeling unprepared (Center for Workforce Studies, 2006). This paradox results to some degree in the profession's retaining a lower status in and value to the broader society, which could be influenced for the better with increased representation in administrative leadership of agencies and if clinical social workers were perceived as competent in a large range of administrative/management skills often expected in their workplaces.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research on attitudes of clinical social work students as well as clinical social work educators toward administrative leadership could be helpful in determining the beliefs that may hold students back from interest in this content area. Likewise, social work educators could be surveyed to determine whether they encourage or discourage students' interest in attaining knowledge and skills in administrative leadership. Studies could also provide key information as to how social workers' attitudes toward administrative leadership are influenced before their careers even begin.

Looking beyond clinical social workers' graduate level preparation, it would be beneficial as well to explore attitudes of clinical social workers toward administrative leadership

roles during their careers. Specifically, surveys of clinical social workers to gauge their interest and aspirations toward leadership in the agencies in which they work could provide a glimpse into reasons why they rarely make it into executive leadership positions. Although a prior study has surveyed board directors for desired skills and abilities for leadership positions at the executive level (Hoefler, Watson, & Preble, 2013), an important part of the issue, I believe, lies in the aspirations – or lack thereof – of social workers and whether or not they even aspire to being in any positions of leadership. If this aspiration is lacking in the profession, it could be beneficial to also understand why so.

Limitations

This study's limitations arise largely from the fact that the sample of this study consisted of only 30 programs when there are so many programs across the country. To gain a true understanding of preparation for administrative leadership, a wider content analysis would be required with a larger sample as well as an expansion of content analyzed to include course syllabi. It is impossible to accurately gauge how well these programs are preparing their students their analysis of course descriptions and curricula alone.

Additionally, content analysis of syllabi could offer insight into the content that is being taught to clinical social work students to determine more accurately the training that students are receiving in their education for administrative leadership roles. It is entirely possible that clinical social work students are receiving a degree of training applicable to administrative leadership that is buried in the content of courses that do not bear titles directly related to administration or management.

Finally, doctoral program were not included in this study. It might well be that doctoral programs are preparing social workers for leadership roles in a way that master's program are

not, and while there are many fewer graduates at that level, it would be beneficial to learn more about whether that level of professional education provides greater opportunities for social workers to pursue the administrative/management direction.

Biases

I am currently an M.S.W. student whose personal beliefs and experiences as an M.S.W. student concentrating in clinical social work inform my desire to conduct this study. My own observations of clinical social workers in agency practice led to a desire to take coursework that would provide me with a broader skillset as a clinical social worker. My disappointment that such coursework and the opportunity to develop these skills was not offered to me prompted my desire to explore further the education and opportunities that other clinical social work students do or do not receive in this regard. Thus, I was biased in my belief that student experiences are possibly similar to mine at other institutions. The findings of this study largely confirm this; however, it is important to point out that this study did find that several institutions are recognizing the importance of instilling their clinical social work students with these skills, whether students take advantage of it or not. It is my belief that should this study be conducted on a wider sample, there is a likelihood that additional schools are specifically preparing, at least to some extent, their clinical social work students for some form and/or degree of administrative leadership in the field.

Conclusion

This study sought to answer whether or not clinical social work education is preparing its graduates for administrative leadership, and the findings largely confirm that while the opportunity to take courses that could potentially provide clinical social work students with preparation for administrative leadership is available, the schools – at least in this sample – do

not generally promote this opportunity or require students to take related coursework. This leads the author to believe that clinical social work students are not – or at least not systematically – being prepared overall for administrative leadership in and of their own profession. This lack in the study reflects the current empirical literature, which suggests a disinterest in social work administration by both educators and students along with a lack of preparation for leadership roles that they will inevitably be asked at some point in their careers to either perform or take on. This is unfortunate for the profession, which is already perceived by society to be incompetent in administrative skills. Even more unfortunately, it means that the profession lacks representation in executive leadership positions at the agencies which basically carry out its many social services. Future research should focus on understanding individual and systemic attitudes and their influences so that more attention is paid by the field to preparing its professionals for the management of the systems through which they conduct their practice.

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