



**Professional Social Work Education in Child Welfare: Assessing Practice Knowledge and Skills**

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# Professional Social Work Education in Child Welfare: Assessing Practice Knowledge and Skills

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Historically, the profession of social work has held a leadership role in the field of child welfare. Since the inception of the social work profession in the late nineteenth century and through the efforts of individuals like Jane Addams of the Settlement House movement and Mary Richmond of the charity organization movement, the social work profession has long recognized the responsibility to address social problems related to child welfare (Addams, 1903, as cited in Pumphrey & Pumphrey, 1961; Richmond, 1897, as cited in Pumphrey & Pumphrey, 1961). "The authority and permission for social workers to act in relation to these problems has been sanctioned by the community, the client group served, and the profession" (Kadushin & Martin, 1988, p. 5).

Since the early 1900s, there have been tremendous transitions in child welfare and its connection to schools of social work. Zlotnik (1997a) outlines a 60-year history of collaborations between schools of social work and child welfare agencies that led to today's proliferation of partnerships between schools of social work and state child welfare agencies. Most notably, child welfare lost status among the fields of social work practice during the decade of the 1980s. Although the task of child welfare workers continued to become more complex, many brought limited social work education to their positions (Vinokur-Kaplan & Hartman, 1986). As a result of the weakening partnership between schools of social work and child welfare agencies, a special meeting of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) was called in 1986 to address the issues (Kadushin & Martin, 1988). Since then, schools of social work have entered into collaborations with public child welfare agen-

cies to improve child welfare standing in the profession.

Opportunities provided in a number of significant public policies (for example, Child Welfare Provisions of the Social Security Act, 1935; Public Law 96-272) allow schools of social work to receive Title IV-E funding for professional development of child welfare workers. Schools of social work in collaboration with state child welfare agencies can be funded through Title IV-E for curriculum development, classroom instruction, and field instruction that are related to the mission of the child welfare agency. Curriculum development around child welfare-specific content has been stressed as an ongoing need to assure quality child welfare services (Pecora, 1989). Today, hundreds of these partnerships throughout the country (Zlotnik, 1997b) are spending millions of federal dollars to professionally educate Bachelor of Social Work and Master of Social Work students for careers in child welfare. Unfortunately, there is not a corresponding proliferation of evaluation research that attempts to measure the effectiveness of these partnerships. The need for program evaluation has been emphasized as a need in the literature for some time (Wells, 1994; Zlotnik, 1997b). The federal government, however, is becoming increasingly interested in outcomes, and in some states reporting systems are being put in place.

This article provides a comprehensive description and evaluation of a partnership between a school of social work and a state department of child protective services. The evaluation focuses on student learning and on an exploratory examination of the perception of practice changes in the agency.

## Review of the Literature

The objective of this literature review is to iden-

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tify the research describing the impact of social work education on child welfare. An extensive review of the literature was conducted; articles were identified, described, and conclusions were drawn regarding their relevancy to the issue of the impact of the reintroduction of the profession of social work in public child welfare practice.

The empirical literature addressing the impact of reintroducing the profession of social work to the child welfare field is sparse. Ten articles that relate to the impact of social work on child welfare were identified (Albers, Reilly & Rittner, 1993; Booz-Allen & Hamilton, 1987; Dhooper, Royse & Wolfe, 1990; Jones, 1966; Lieberamn, Hornby & Russell, 1988; Moran, Frans & Gibson, 1995; Olsen & Holmes, 1982; Rycraft, 1990; Vinokur-Kaplan, 1991; Burmham, 1997). Other research found focuses on retention (Vinokur-Kaplan, 1987; Rycraft 1994; Cicero-Reese & Black, 1998); the development, identification and evaluation of necessary competencies in traineeship programs (Cahn, 1997; Hodges, Morgan & Johnston, 1993); and the differences in field practice between BSW and MSW education child welfare workers (Alperin, 1996).

In assessing the impact of social work education to child welfare, many variables were studied throughout the literature. This review will only include the studies most relevant to the concepts in this article. Four general areas were identified: service delivery, job performance and preparedness, social work values, and the impact of a social work degree.

*Service Delivery.* MSWs were more found to be more effective in delivering substitute services, BSWs were most capable of providing supportive services to children (i.e., day mental health treatment), and overall social work trained staff were better at delivering the majority of services to families and children than non-social work trained staff (Olsen and Holmes, 1982). Social work trained staff were more effective in providing substitute care and supportive services, environmental services, and planning for ongoing contact between biological families and children in foster care

(Olsen and Holmes, 1982). In looking at effectiveness in planning, social work trained child welfare workers were more likely to have a permanent plan for a child in foster care within three years when compared to workers with other degrees (Albers, Reilly & Rittner, 1993).

*Job Performance and Preparedness.* Supervisors rated MSW's as performing the highest in terms of overall performance as compared to all non-MSW degreed staff when training and years of experience were controlled (Booz-Allen & Hamilton, 1987). The MSW degree was also rated as producing the best-prepared employee for the job and requiring the least amount of supervision and training when given a hypothetical new employee applicant (Booz-Allen & Hamilton, 1987).

*Social Work Values.* In assessing the impact of a degree on the management of a human service agency with respect to values and worker attitude, MSW students scored higher on the issues of social justice, individual freedom, human nature, and collective identity than MBA students (Moran, Frans & Gibson, 1995). MSWs were also more effective managers in human service organizations since they tended to hold values and possess personal qualities important to the job when age, gender, study design, and undergraduate education were controlled (Moran, Frans & Gibson, 1995). MSWs had the highest mean scores on a social work values instrument when compared to BSWs, who ranked second, followed by BA/BSs, and MA/MSs (Dhooper, Royse and Wolfe, 1990). Although these findings are substantively significant, the results did not reach statistical significance.

*Impact of a Social Work Degree.* In an evaluation of the partnership in Florida between a child welfare agency and university, most of the Title IV-E stipend graduates responded that the skills acquired in their MSW program were effectively used; two-thirds felt that they were able to efficiently change the agency; and all of the respondents reported personal changes, such as knowledge acquisition, ethics awareness, coping skills, and assertiveness (Burmham, 1997). Administrators

reported that the child welfare agency benefited from the partnership, and saw the MSW program employees as advocates for family preservation and family-based services (Burmham, 1997).

As evidenced by the lack of research examining the impact of social work education on the professionalism of child welfare, further empirical studies are needed. The study presented in this paper will add to the current body of research regarding the impact of the reintroduction of social work into child welfare. It will identify the impact of social work and child welfare partnership on the agency and the stipend participant, including the perceptions of both the administrators and students.

#### **Description of the Title IV-E Partnership**

In September of 1994, the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) School of Social Work, through the Center for Child Welfare, entered into a partnership agreement with the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, Child Protective Services Division (CPS), Region 03 (Dallas – Fort Worth Area). This partnership was based on a Title IV-E contract to provide professional education towards the Master of Social Work Degree for current employees of the agency. Additionally, the contract supported recruitment of BSW and MSW students into the field of child welfare. Contract year 1994-95 was a planning year, with the first students receiving a child welfare stipend, funded through Title IV-E, in the summer of 1995. Since the inception of the partnership, 222 MSW and BSW students have received or are currently receiving stipends.

The majority of the 222 students, 136, receiving stipends, are current employees of child protective services, and all are working towards their MSW while continuing to work full-time. Students receive a stipend each semester to cover tuition, books, and travel. Contractually, the student then owes the agency one-month for every two months the stipend is received. On average, employees/students take four years to complete their degrees. At

the time of graduation, they will continue to serve in CPS for a minimum of two years.

The other part of the Title IV-E program is the recruitment of BSW and MSW students into the field of child welfare. Students who choose to enter the program are required to focus their studies on family and children content areas and to do one field placement with CPS. For every semester in which the student receives a stipend, the student agrees to an employment commitment of twice the amount of time. Students only receive a stipend while they are doing a field placement. Therefore, for every semester of child welfare fieldwork, the student owes the department nine months of service. The majority of the students that are recruited into the program are in the BSW program (55 BSWs vs. 14 MSWs). As a result, many of these BSW graduates return to school to pursue their MSW as a stipend employee/student after a year of employment with CPS. In order to be eligible for the stipend, the worker must have been employed by CPS for one year.

#### **Partnership Arrangement**

UTA and the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services take pride in the collaborative nature of the partnership. Since the inception of the Title IV-E contract, there has been a joint committee made up of CPS and School of Social Work individuals. It serves an advisory function for curriculum development and evaluation. The committee is co-chaired by a UTA faculty member and a CPS program administrator, and membership of the committee is divided between faculty and CPS staff. Meetings take place four times a year, with a field placement sub-committee that meets three times a year. The field sub-committee helps coordinate placements that occur in the agency.

The advisory committee has been instrumental in the direction that curriculum development has taken. Faculty have been receptive to content needs expressed by CPS staff and have undertaken syllabus development for courses such as working with involuntary clients, substance abuse and maltreatment,

and an advanced policy class concerning family and children. Curriculum modules have also been developed to assist in the infusion of child welfare content primarily into the foundation curriculum. Examples include child welfare practice, international child welfare issues (policy and practice focus), child welfare research, and substance abuse.

Evaluation objectives and planning have also been integral tasks of the committee. To guide the efforts of the committee, goals and operationalized objectives were previously established and appropriate methods for analyzing each objective were specified (available through the Center for Child Welfare). Efforts to analyze these objectives were two-fold. The first, an on-going effort, was to determine the current level of child welfare content in courses so that it could be used as a baseline for annual analyses (Scannapieco & Bolen, 1998). The second effort was to determine the impact and success of the Title IV-E program from both the students' and the community's perspectives. This article discusses this second effort.

### **Evaluation**

This article presents the findings of surveys administered to both MSW Title IV-E students and to supervisors and administrators of Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (TDPRS). In both surveys, respondents were asked to provide demographic information as well as information about their status at work and in school. Students were also asked a series of questions concerning their perceptions of the impact of their graduate education on their professional aptitude. Similarly, supervisors and administrators were asked their perceptions of whether employees with Masters in Social Work degrees could be differentiated from other Bachelor-level employees. One of the key limitations to this measurement strategy is that it is the perception of impact and not directly measuring outcomes for children and families.

To present the results, the methodology of both surveys is discussed, followed by discussions of the

student survey and the administrator survey respectively. In discussing each survey, the sample will first be presented, followed by the respondents' perception of the effectiveness of the Masters program. Next will be a discussion of correlates of the respondents' perception of effectiveness. Final sections compare the findings of the two surveys, discuss the findings, and suggest recommendations for future surveys.

### **Methodology**

The student survey was mailed to all current or past MSW Title IV-E students enrolled at UTA and currently employed at Child Protective Services in the Dallas/Fort Worth Region. Of the 118 surveys mailed, 50 were returned, a response rate of 42% percent. The administrative survey was mailed to all supervisors and higher-level administrators in TDRPS. Of the 103 surveys mailed, 46 were returned, a response rate of 45%. All surveys were anonymous.

### **Results: Student Survey**

#### *Characteristics of Sample*

The majority of the participants were female (86%) and Caucasian (68%). Seventy percent of the respondents were currently working in a Child Protective Specialist role, while 30% were CPS supervisors or administrators. Approximately 40% of the participants had been employed in a child welfare position, most often in TDPRS, for less than five years; another approximately 40% had been employed more than five but less than 15 years.

#### *Perception of Students to Impact of Program*

Students were asked 37 questions concerning their perception of the impact of the Masters level program on their professional aptitude. These questions were divided into categories based upon the type of impact, including their relationship to TDPRS, to the community, and to the profession, as well as skill acquisition. These results are presented in Table 1. Shaded questions are those that were asked on both the student and administrator surveys. Because many mean scores were between 3 and 3.5, indicating little change, percentages of students who

**Table 1. Students' Perception of Impact of the Title IV-E Program**

| Question   | Mean <sup>1</sup> | Agree <sup>2</sup> | Disagree <sup>3</sup> |
|--|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>RELATIONSHIP OF EMPLOYEE TO TDPRS</b>   | <b>3.5</b>        | <b>51</b>          | <b>15</b>             |
| 2. More committed to TDPRS   | 3.1               | 34                 | 26                    |
| 3. More likely to remain with TDPRS  | 3.4               | 48                 | 20                    |
| 4. TDPRS SUPPORTED ME WHILE PURSUING MSSW  | 4.0               | 74                 | 8                     |
| 8. Other people in agency seek my advice more  | 2.9               | 20                 | 20                    |
| 10. Feel I am more valuable to TDPRS   | 3.8               | 64                 | 20                    |
| 14. Have higher job satisfaction   | 3.0               | 36                 | 30                    |
| 15. Have increased level of well being/happiness   | 3.6               | 56                 | 18                    |
| 23. Better communication skills with co-workers  | 3.3               | 52                 | 8                     |
| 32. Require less supervision   | 3.5               | 54                 | 10                    |
| 36. Upon completion of MSSW, will stay with TDPRS  | 3.4               | 36                 | 14                    |
| 37. Feel salary should increase  | 4.7               | 88                 | 0                     |
| <b>RELATIONSHIP OF EMPLOYEE TO COMMUNITY</b>   | <b>3.6</b>        | <b>48</b>          | <b>11</b>             |
| 1. As committed to child welfare practice  | 3.9               | 60                 | 12                    |
| 6. Better knowledge of community resources   | 3.0               | 28                 | 30                    |
| 9. Better understanding of dynamics of child welfare system and helped me serve clients more effectively | 4.2               | 70                 | 6                     |
| 12. More credible in court   | 3.7               | 46                 | 8                     |
| 13. Others view my opinion with greater regard   | 3.1               | 36                 | 20                    |
| 26. Better communication skills with other agencies  | 3.5               | 46                 | 12                    |
| 30. More comfortable presenting to community agencies  | 3.6               | 52                 | 10                    |
| 31. More comfortable presenting in court   | 3.5               | 46                 | 10                    |
| 34. Am more credible in court  | 3.6               | 44                 | 6                     |
| <b>EMPLOYEE AND SOCIAL WORK</b>  | <b>3.9</b>        | <b>57</b>          | <b>8</b>              |
| 11. Am more respected in field of social work  | 3.4               | 44                 | 18                    |
| 33. Better understanding of social work values   | 4.1               | 58                 | 4                     |
| 35. Better understanding of social work ethics   | 4.1               | 70                 | 2                     |
| <b>EMPLOYEE AND SKILL ACQUISITION</b>  | <b>3.7</b>        | <b>57</b>          | <b>10</b>             |
| 5. Better able to serve clients  | 4.2               | 80                 | 8                     |
| 7. Prior to MSSW did not seek out knowledge/answers as much as after MSSW                                | 3.2               | 34                 | 28                    |
| 16. Better at setting goals with clients   | 3.4               | 42                 | 16                    |
| 17. Better listening skills  | 3.7               | 54                 | 8                     |
| 18. More advanced assessment skills  | 4.1               | 74                 | 2                     |
| 19. More sound decision-making skills  | 3.7               | 56                 | 10                    |
| 20. Better ability to find alternate solutions to identified 7. client challenges                        | 3.8               | 68                 | 6                     |
| 21. Better ability to use various interventions with clients   | 4.1               | 70                 | 2                     |
| 22. More creativity in job   | 3.5               | 50                 | 12                    |
| 23. More cultivated ability for critical thinking  | 4.1               | 68                 | 2                     |
| 24. Better communication skills with clients   | 3.7               | 58                 | 8                     |
| 27. Understand group dynamics better   | 4.0               | 66                 | 2                     |
| 28. Better understanding of DSM-IV   | 3.3               | 42                 | 22                    |
| 29. More thorough, clear, and concise in narratives  | 3.5               | 38                 | 8                     |

<sup>1</sup>The range of the Likert scale was 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

<sup>2</sup>The percentage of students who scored this scale as either 4 (agree) or 5 (strongly agree).

<sup>3</sup>The percentage of students who scored this scale as either 1 (disagree) or 2 (strongly disagree).

either agreed or disagreed with the statement were also included for comparison purposes.

Overall, students did believe that their Masters level education had a positive impact on their professional abilities. While scores among groups were close, the greatest improvement was in the students' relationship to the social work profession, and the least improvement was in their relationship with TDPRS. The students with the lowest scores reflected other professionals' impressions of the students (e.g., "Other people in agency seek my advice more" and "Others view my opinion with greater regard."), a better knowledge of community resources, greater job satisfaction, and a greater commitment to TDPRS. Areas that reflected the greatest impact of the Masters level education were a better understanding of social work values, ethics, and child welfare dynamics, better assessment skills, critical thinking, and a better ability to use various interventions with clients. The highest score, however, was for the question asking whether they believed their salary should increase as a result of their education.

While findings, by mean, are not necessarily encouraging, when examining the percentages of students who agreed that their Master's level education had improved their skills and relationships with agencies and the profession, the findings are more encouraging. For three of the four categories, 50% or more of the students agreed or strongly agreed that their Master's level education had improved their skills and relationship with TDPRS and the profession. For the students' relationship to the community, 48% agreed that it had improved. Conversely, only between 8% and 15% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that their Master's level education had been beneficial. Because of the type of scale employed, this is probably the more accurate analysis.

#### ***Correlates of the Perception of Students to Impact of Program***

The final set of analyses attempted to determine what might affect the students' perception of how the Master's level program had effected their professional

aptitude. These results are shown in Table 2 (page 50).

In general, only a few variables were significantly related. The students' perception of increased skills was related to their undergraduate degree, with students having either a BSW or a Bachelor in psychology stating that their skill level was more affected by their Master's level education. Additionally, the five students with previous BSW stipends were more likely than those with current stipends to state that their skill level was affected by their Master's level education. The students' perception of how much their Masters level education affected their relationship with TDPRS was related to three variables—their county, ethnicity, and whether they had discontinued their stipend. Minorities were more likely to believe that their Master's level education had improved their relationship with TDPRS, as were students in Tarrant County (Fort Worth).

The two students who discontinued the program differed significantly on several variables. They were less likely to STET the impact of their Master's level education on their relationship with TDPRS. In addition, they were not as committed to TDPRS and were much more likely to consider employment outside TDPRS. Finally, they were less likely to believe that their salary should increase as a result of having an MSW.

#### **Results: Administrators Survey**

##### ***Characteristics of the Sample***

Most administrators were Caucasians (75%) and females (80%). Less than half of all administrators had a Masters level education. Most respondents were supervisors; only 15% were program directors and 4% were program administrators. Uniformly, respondents had many years of experience. While the mean level of experience was 15 to 18 years, based upon how it was measured, only 16% to 18% had less than 10 years of experience and 29% (child welfare experience) to 42% (social work experience) had more than 20 years of experience.

**Table 2. Student Survey: Correlates of Impact**

|   | Employee & Skills Acquisition | Relationship of Employee to TDPRS | Committed to TDPRS | Will Leave TDPRS | Feels Salary Should Increase |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Undergraduate degree<sup>1</sup></b> |                               |                                   |                    |                  |                              |
| BSW                                     | 3.84*                         | 3.54                              | 3.15               | 2.57             | 4.85                         |
| Bach.—Psychology                        | 3.99                          | 3.51                              | 3.00               | 2.63             | 4.75                         |
| Other                                   | 3.46                          | 3.30                              | 2.93               | 2.79             | 4.64                         |
| <b>County<sup>1</sup></b>               |                               |                                   |                    |                  |                              |
| Tarrant                                 | 3.75                          | 3.78*                             | 3.40               | 2.43             | 4.50                         |
| Dallas                                  | 3.91                          | 3.28                              | 2.67               | 2.82             | 4.82                         |
| Rural                                   | 3.54                          | 3.35                              | 3.07               | 2.50             | 4.71                         |
| <b>Discontinued stipend<sup>2</sup></b> |                               |                                   |                    |                  |                              |
| No                                      | 3.74                          | 3.50**                            | 3.14**             | 2.55*            | 4.73**                       |
| Yes (n = 2)                             | 3.83                          | 2.67                              | 1.50               | 4.00             | 4.00                         |
| <b>Ethnicity<sup>2</sup></b>            |                               |                                   |                    |                  |                              |
| Caucasian                               | 3.66                          | 3.33*                             | 3.03               | 2.62             | 4.62                         |
| Minority                                | 3.91                          | 3.70                              | 3.13               | 2.65             | 4.81                         |
| <b>BSW stipend<sup>2</sup></b>          |                               |                                   |                    |                  |                              |
| No                                      | 3.71*                         | 3.40                              | 3.07               | 2.56             | 4.68                         |
| Yes (n = 5)                             | 4.20                          | 3.55                              | 2.8                | 3.40             | 4.80                         |

Note: Due to the small number of respondents, findings were considered substantive if  $p < .10$ . \* $p < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ .

<sup>1</sup> One-way ANOVA

<sup>2</sup> Independent samples t - test

**Perception of Administrators to Impact of the Program**

Employers were also asked a series of questions to determine their perception of the impact of the Title IV-E program upon the larger community. Areas assessed were the impact on TDPRS, the larger community, the social work profession, the students' approach to work, and their acquisition of skills. Responses are presented in Table 3.

Administrators had a somewhat muted perception of the impact of the Title IV-E program. Mean scores for areas ranged only from 2.9 to 3.4, indicating either no or only a slight impact. No scores on individual questions were below 2.4,

however, indicating that the impact of the Title IV-E program, or more specifically the comparison of MSWs to Bachelor's level workers, was always either neutral or positive.

The area in which the greatest impact was shown was the employees' relationship to the social work profession. The better usage of social work theory in practice, along with an increased understanding of social work ethics and values, had the highest responses in this area. The individual question with the highest response, however, was the level of commitment of the student to TDPRS. Administrators scored MSWs as having a much higher level of commitment to TDPRS than



**Table 3. Administrators' Perception of Impact of the Title IV-E Program**

| Question  | Mean <sup>1</sup> | Percent            |                       |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
|   |                   | Agree <sup>2</sup> | Disagree <sup>3</sup> |
| <b>RELATIONSHIP OF EMPLOYEE TO TDPRS</b>                                      | <b>3.1</b>        | <b>34.6</b>        | <b>27.6</b>           |
| 10. Better communication skills with co-workers                               | 3.1               | 22.7               | 34.1                  |
| 17. Require less supervision  | 3.1               | 30.5               | 32.6                  |
| 21. Contribute new information to CPS   | 2.6               | 51.2               | 13.0                  |
| 22. Less prone to burnout   | 3.1               | 16.3               | 39.6                  |
| 23. Effectively manage larger caseloads                                       | 3.0               | 18.6               | 32.6                  |
| 31. Bring professionalism to TDPRS  | 2.4               | 61.4               | 15.9                  |
| 32. More likely to be promoted within the agency                              | 3.4               | 51.2               | 21.0                  |
| 33. More committed to TDPRS   | 4.2               | 25.0               | 31.9                  |
| <b>APPROACH TO WORK</b>   | <b>2.9</b>        | <b>29.8</b>        | <b>28.5</b>           |
| 12. Understand workplace group dynamics better                                | 3.1               | 27.1               | 36.4                  |
| 24. Better abilities in handling difficult situations                         | 3.1               | 23.3               | 27.9                  |
| 25. Show greater efficiency in work   | 3.3               | 30.2               | 30.3                  |
| 27. Better personal stress management   | 2.5               | 29.5               | 27.3                  |
| 30. Greater willingness to help other employees                               | 2.6               | 38.6               | 20.4                  |
| <b>RELATIONSHIP OF EMPLOYEE TO COMMUNITY</b>                                  | <b>2.9</b>        | <b>37.9</b>        | <b>23.7</b>           |
| 11. Better communication skills with other agencies                           | 2.6               | 31.8               | 29.5                  |
| 15. More comfortable presenting to community agencies                         | 2.6               | 36.3               | 15.9                  |
| 16. More comfortable presenting in court                                      | 2.7               | 37.2               | 20.9                  |
| 20. Better knowledge of community resources                                   | 3.5               | 18.1               | 40.9                  |
| 34. More credibility with other professionals/agencies                        | 3.0               | 65.9               | 11.3                  |
| <b>EMPLOYEE AND SOCIAL WORK</b>   | <b>3.4</b>        | <b>44.6</b>        | <b>21.8</b>           |
| 18. Better understanding of social work values                                | 3.6               | 45.5               | 20.4                  |
| 19. Better understanding of social work ethics                                | 3.6               | 50.0               | 13.5                  |
| 26. More culturally sensitive   | 3.1               | 27.2               | 40.9                  |
| 28. Take advantage of continuing education more                               | 3.1               | 54.6               | 20.5                  |
| 29. Better usage of social work theory in work                                | 3.8               | 45.5               | 13.6                  |
| <b>EMPLOYEE AND SKILL ACQUISITION</b>   | <b>2.9</b>        | <b>34.0</b>        | <b>25.6</b>           |
| 1. Better at setting goals with clients                                       | 2.4               | 24.5               | 35.6                  |
| 2. Better listening skills  | 2.4               | 34.0               | 20.4                  |
| 3. More advanced assessment skills  | 3.4               | 38.6               | 27.3                  |
| 4. More sound decision-making skills  | 2.8               | 31.8               | 31.8                  |
| 5. Better ability to find alternate solutions to identified client challenges | 3.3               | 27.3               | 27.3                  |
| 6. Better ability to use various interventions with clients                   | 2.5               | 47.8               | 18.1                  |
| 7. More creativity in job   | 3.6               | 29.5               | 20.5                  |
| 8. More cultivated ability for critical thinking                              | 2.6               | 40.9               | 29.5                  |
| 9. Better communication skills with clients                                   | 3.4               | 31.8               | 29.5                  |
| 13. Better understanding of DSM-IV  | 2.6               | 44.2               | 14.0                  |
| 14. More thorough, clear, and concise in narratives                           | 3.0               | 23.3               | 27.9                  |

<sup>1</sup>The range of the Likert scale was 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

<sup>2</sup>The percentage of students who scored this scale as either 4 (agree) or 5 (strongly agree).

<sup>3</sup>The percentage of students who scored this scale as either 1 (disagree) or 2 (strongly disagree).

Bachelors level workers.

When the percentages of responses in agreement and disagreement were tallied, they generally offered support to the neutral to slightly positive response of the administrators. For only one area, approach to work, was the percentage of responses in agreement and disagreement similar. For other areas, however, differences between those who agreed and disagreed were never wide, ranging from 7 percentage points for the relationship of the employee to TDPRS to 23 percentage points for the relationship of the employee to the social work profession.

#### **Correlates of the Perception of Administrators to Impact of Program**

In the final analysis of correlates of the administrators' perception of impact, a series of important correlates were found. Importantly, the administrators' educational background was a consistent correlate of their perception of the impact of the program, with differences both by highest degree attained and type of degree. Administrators with a Master's degree rated students' acquisition of skills and their relationship to the larger community as greater than did administrators with a Bachelor's education. The relationship was even stronger for type of degree. Administrators with a social work education were more likely than administrators with other types of degrees to rate the impact as positive across four of the five areas. Only in the workers' approach to their employment were no significant differences noted.

Two other correlates were also of interest. First, administrators who were or had been Title IV-E students were more likely to rate the impact as positive along two of the three areas of interest. Second, administrators with more years of child welfare experience were marginally less likely to report a positive impact. Although the relationship was weak, it was part of a trend in which administrators with more years of social work or child welfare experience perceived less of a difference between Bachelors level employees and those with MSWs.

None of these differences (other than the one noted above) approached significance, however, and correlations were always below 0.3.

#### **Comparison of Students' to Administrators' Perception of Impact**

Students consistently rated their perception of the impact of a Masters education as more beneficial than did administrators. Of the 19 questions that were similar across both surveys, 15 were ranked an average of .6 points higher by students than by administrators, and with a range of .1 to 1.6 points. The trend continued when comparing all questions across areas of interest, as the students' responses were from .4 to .8 points higher in each area than those of administrators.

For only four questions did the administrators' responses exceed those of students, and responses for three of the four questions were fairly close (Table 5). The most interesting response was on the question that asked whether students were more committed to TDPRS as a result of their Masters level education. Interestingly, administrators had a much more positive response than did students.

#### **Discussion**

The purpose of both the students' and administrators' surveys was to determine the impact of the Title IV-E program on child welfare practice and more specifically, if having a MSW positively influences the quality of child welfare practice. Discussions of the findings need to be placed in the context of the limitations of this study. Although the sample size was small, it did appear to be representative of all employees in the Dallas/Fort Worth region who received a stipend to obtain an MSW at The University of Texas at Arlington and of all administrators at child protective services in the Dallas/Fort Worth region. Determining the impact of educational level on the quality of practice is a difficult task and one with which the field is currently struggling. The use of social worker and administrator perceptions as a measure of

**Table 4. Correlates of Administrators' Perception of Impact**

|   | Relationship of Employee to Community | Employee Skills Acquisition | Employee and Social Work | Relationship of Employee to TDPRS | Approach to Work |
|---|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Educational degree<sup>1</sup></b>     |                                       |                             |                          |                                   |                  |
| Bachelors                                 | 2.68***                               | 2.77*                       | 3.08                     | 2.85                              | 2.87             |
| Masters                                   | 3.56                                  | 3.26                        | 3.53                     | 3.22                              | 3.06             |
| <b>Educational degree<sup>1</sup></b>     |                                       |                             |                          |                                   |                  |
| Social Work                               | 3.57***                               | 3.27*                       | 3.61**                   | 3.30**                            | 3.10             |
| Other                                     | 2.67                                  | 2.75                        | 2.99                     | 2.76                              | 2.83             |
| <b>Title IV-E employee<sup>1</sup></b>    |                                       |                             |                          |                                   |                  |
| No  | 2.87*                                 | 2.82*                       | 3.08*                    | 2.79**                            | 2.83             |
| Yes                                       | 3.55                                  | 3.28                        | 3.67                     | 3.41                              | 3.17             |
| <b>Years in child welfare<sup>2</sup></b> | -0.089                                | -0.174                      | -0.184                   | -0.273*                           | -0.157           |

Note: Due to the small number of respondents, findings were considered substantive if  $p < .10$ . \* $P < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ .

<sup>1</sup>One-way ANOVA

<sup>2</sup>Independent samples t - test

impact on practice is limited and subjective. As indicated, the goal of this study was to begin to measure the impact of social work on the field of child welfare.

This goal was achieved, as was an additional goal of assessing the difference in perception of impact of the Title IV-E program between the students themselves and the administrators that supervised the students. Impact of the program was, however, defined somewhat differently across surveys. For the Title IV-E student survey, it appeared to be defined as the improvement, due to the Masters level social work education, in the relationship of the employee to TDPRS, the profession, and the community as a whole, as well as the increased acquisition of skills. For the administrators' survey, it appeared to be defined as the increased performance in MSW workers, as com-

pared to Bachelors level workers, across the previous domains, but also a domain that could be labeled "approach to work." The slight difference in definitions is probably not a problem. On the other hand, the lack of an a priori operationalization of the perception of impact did not always allow the student and administrator surveys to be assessed along similar domains.

Even though the domains were established subjectively for purposes of this article, the information gathered does appear to provide important information. Concerning the student survey, it was encouraging to note their generally positive perception of the impact of their education, a finding also reported by Burmham (1997). Approximately 50% of students agreed that their education had improved not only their relationships with their employers, community, and the profession, but also

**Table 5. Questions to which Administrators and Students Responded**

|  | Student | Administrator |
|--|---------|---------------|
| Require less supervision   | 3.5     | 3.1           |
| More committed to TDPRS  | 3.1     | 4.2*          |
| Better communication skills with other agencies                            | 3.5     | 2.6           |
| More comfortable presenting to community agencies                          | 3.6     | 2.6           |
| More comfortable presenting in court                                       | 3.5     | 2.7           |
| Better knowledge of community resources                                    | 3.0     | 3.5*          |
| Better understanding of social work values                                 | 4.1     | 3.6           |
| Better understanding of social work ethics                                 | 4.1     | 3.6           |
| Better at setting goals with clients                                       | 3.4     | 2.4           |
| Better listening skills  | 3.7     | 2.4           |
| More advanced assessment skills  | 4.1     | 3.4           |
| More sound decision-making skills  | 3.7     | 2.8           |
| Better ability to find alternate solutions to identified client challenges | 3.8     | 3.3           |
| Better ability to use various interventions with clients                   | 4.1     | 2.5           |
| More creativity in job   | 3.5     | 3.6*          |
| More cultivated ability for critical thinking                              | 4.1     | 2.6           |
| Better communication skills with clients                                   | 3.7     | 3.4           |
| Better understanding of DSM-IV   | 3.3     | 2.6           |
| More thorough, clear, and concise in narratives                            | 3.5     | 3.0           |

\*Note: The administrators' score is higher than the students' score

had positively affected their acquisition of skills. Contrary to what Booz-Allen and Hamilton (1987) found, the findings for this study were not as encouraging for administrators. Only 30% to 45% of administrators agreed that MSWs exhibited better professional relationships, skills, and employment dynamics than Bachelors level workers. On the other hand, 22% to 29% disagreed that workers with MSWs were better than Bachelors level workers, suggesting that administrators were mixed in their perception of the impact of workers with MSWs.

Another aim was to determine whether specific factors related to students' and administrators' perception of the impact of the Title IV-E program. For students, the only variable of interest was whether they had discontinued the stipend program. With only two students reporting a discontinuation, however, these findings are unreliable. For adminis-

trators, the most important factor appeared to be the administrator's level of education.

Administrators with either a Masters degree, as compared to a Bachelors degree, or with a major in social work, as compared to another major, consistently rated Masters level workers as better than Bachelors level workers. In a closer examination of the scores, however, MSW administrators consistently had the highest scores, with administrators with Bachelors degrees in something other than social work or psychology having the lowest scores. Administrators with BSWs, a Bachelors degree in psychology, or a Masters degree in something other than social work had similar scores, although BSWs had marginally higher scores than the other two groups.

It appears, then, that it is the combination of the social work degree and the Masters level education made the most difference in perception. It

could be that child welfare, more so than other areas, is inimitably identified with social work values and ethics. As such, it would be expected that Masters level social work administrators would have expectations for the delivery of services within TDPRS that are most commensurate with a social work philosophy. In turn, they are probably more able to recognize the advantages of utilizing MSWs for the provision of services. In this perspective, and as consistent with previous findings (Albers, Reilly & Rittner, 1993; Booz -Allen & Hamilton, 1987; Olsen and Holmes 1982), MSWs are both better at delivering and recognizing child welfare services that are steeped in social work values and ethics. This perspective is based, however, upon the assumption that the services based upon social work values and ethics are indeed superior to those of another model. An alternate hypothesis is that what was being measured was elitism, or, the perspective that the model with which one was trained is superior. In this perspective, social workers would naturally rate their model as superior, while individuals with a Master in psychology or another field might rate another method of delivery as superior.

This issue cannot be resolved within this paper and may be more philosophical than empirical. Given that the social work model is an appropriate model for the delivery of child welfare services, however, this survey does suggest the following. Those individuals with the most training in recognizing the proper application of a social work model do believe that MSWs are better able to apply this model across domains than Bachelors level workers, a finding that was also supported previously (Booz-Allen and Hamilton, 1987). Adding to the previous research (Burmham, 1997), this study supports that the Title IV-E program is effective in developing skills, values, and ethics in students that are pertinent and critical to the appropriate delivery of services.

The implications this has for child welfare practice should not be minimized. At a time of rising child abuse and neglect reports, of out-of-home placements, and child deaths from maltreatment, social work educated and trained child welfare workers need to be the standard for the ideal worker.

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