Fall 2024 Editorial: Examining Social Work Education

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This issue contains 11 articles by 40 authors, both national and international. The majority are empirical papers, using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. More than one article presents a case study, which gives me an opportunity to promote this methodology. One of my first research projects was a case study of the child welfare system in the State of Indiana, as we were asked to focus *only* on Indiana's system (Barton et al., 2006). In my role as editor of *Advances in Social Work*, I see many manuscripts that are in-depth studies of a department, classroom, or grant program, for example. These provide detailed information about a particular context in a "real-world" setting, thus receive the designation of case study.

In their oft-cited work, Feagin at al. (2016) provide a broad definition: "A case study is here defined as an in-depth, multifaceted investigation, using qualitative research methods, of a single social phenomenon" (p. 2). The authors, as well as other authors (Thomas, 2011) understand that other methodologies may be used; the essential factor in the definition is the "single social phenomenon" aspect. An early, classic example is the Middletown study of Muncie Indiana, by Lynd and Lynd (1929). Thomas (2011) asserts this definition, "Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame—an object—within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates" (p. 513).

In my opinion, case study program evaluations are important in social work practice and education. I encourage researchers to frame their studies this way. Of course, one case study is not generalizable, but it can be added to a body of research that builds to broader understandings. Social work is in a prime position to contribute greatly through the use of case studies.

Finally, we take this opportunity to thank the 141 reviewers from 102 universities and institutions, 7 countries, 39 states and territories, who completed 183 reviews of 90 submissions in 2024 and along with the authors, editors, and board, make Advances in Social Work possible.

Research Benefitting Young People

Blakey, Ngui, Buraik, Vang, and Williams conducted a case study using grounded theory methodology which illuminated the words of Black high school students who felt marginalized and alienated in their school. Students identified the feeling of not mattering in a cold, racially insensitive environment that didn't reflect their identities, and connected the dots to the achievement gap and disciplinary sanctions.

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In examining the assessment and referral practices of school social workers, ***Love-Schropshire, Hicks, Johns, Keys, and Wade*** surveyed over 3700 school social workers. This case study of Michigan's school social work system revealed that material needs were the focus of the majority of referrals, with mental health needs trailing far behind. Concerningly, very few of the school social workers actually screened for firearm access, due to feeling unprepared to do so.

A study featuring semi-structured interviews with Black and Latine youth recently released from the juvenile justice system, by ***Mei, Bondoc, Meza, Bosco, and Barnert***, provided insights into how they are affected by systems such as their home, school, and neighborhood. These systems affect their health and well-being as the youth negotiate relationships, physical space, and resources. The authors provide suggestions for social workers to remedy health disparities and provide more support.

Critical Race Theory

Pajak connected social work practice with Critical Race Theory, in order to aid our understanding of how this important theory can shape the work we do. This conceptual paper explained the legal origins of Critical Race Theory and outlined the major principles of the theory. Through a careful literature search, and a consideration of the critiques of Critical Race Theory, the author asserted that it is a strong framework for meeting the Council on Social Work's Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards on antiracist and anti-oppressive practices.

Social Work Education

In the case study conducted by ***Moore, Young, and Gray,*** the implicit curriculum of a BSW/MSW program examined the policies, procedures, advising, student participation, and commitment to inclusive excellence, among other issues. The Likert-style survey was distributed to graduating BSW and MSW students. An important aspect of the findings was that the majority of students believed the programs allowed them to speak up about diversity issues important to them, with no significant difference based on based on race/ethnicity, online versus face-to-face, or first-generation student status. However, a significant difference did exist in relation to a student's sexual orientation, with students from diverse sexual orientations feeling less comfortable about speaking up.

Boyce, Clockston, Sullivan, and Cottrell conducted an autoethnographic study of their curriculum development process. They provide an in-depth exploration of their own educational experiences, which uncovered their own biases and helped them work towards more progressive and equitable models of education. They learned new ways of sharing content, grading, and accepting the expertise of others. The authors assert that design justice can increase students' engagement, sense of belonging, and ultimately degree completion.

Another case study of social work education, by ***Velez, Avila, and Doh***, evaluated the processes and pitfalls of implementing a federal behavioral workforce grant. The goal of training historically underserved and underrepresented students in a predominantly white

institution located in a predominantly white state was a good one, but was challenging to execute. Readers will benefit from information about program structure, institutional context, and demographic data. In particular, the lessons learned about the barriers to recruiting financially strapped students of color, barriers created by the institution's financial policies, will be illuminating to those seeking to enact similar programs.

Gearhart uses St. Louis as a case study in order to understand the racist policies of the 1900s that contributed to the decline of Black neighborhoods and the detriment of the city overall. Social work education should be examined for racist policy and practice, particularly in the divide of micro and macro social work practice. Antiracist practice and education can begin only when we understand the institutional racism we have condoned.

From the start of graduate social work education Ethiopia's Addis Ababa University in 2004, a tremendous amount of research has been conducted through master's and PhD theses. *Mehari, Butterfield, and Kebede* provide a quantitative case study examining the methodology and subject matters of the research conducted. They found that 81% employed qualitative methods, since thesis advisors were well-educated in qualitative methodology. The most-researched thematic areas addressed issues dealing with children, women, gender, health and healthcare services, families, marriage, divorce, and community development.

While the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational delivery is often discussed, its effects on formal faculty mentoring are less well known. *Holcomb* used a narrative methodology to learn the experiences of 10 social work faculty who were teachers and mentees during that challenging time. Participants, who were located across the United States, reported four main themes: four themes: 1) framing professional development during the pandemic, 2) shifting focus and deepening of mentoring relationship, 3) adjusting to virtual mentoring, and 4) impact of faculty and leadership attrition. Many found that while their mentoring relationship was professional in beginning, a friendship formed to help them through this time of collective trauma.

COVID-19 and Mutual Aid

The paper by *Milligan, Saavedra, Littman, Dunbar, Boyett, Morris, and Sarantakos* focused on people helping people during the COVID-19 pandemic, outside of social work education. Their qualitative study interviewed 25 individuals engaged in mutual aid in Colorado, examining the perceived benefits of providing and receiving care through mutual aid in the early months of the pandemic. They found that nonhierarchical care offered entry points to equitable ways of supporting communities through and beyond crisis. The decentered institutional decision making provided redistributed power and agency to meet community needs. The experiences of mutual aid participants propose a significant ideological shift, and suggest a need for future expansions of and changes to social work practice to embrace non-hierarchical care.

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