Gerontological Social Work Training: Facing the Future of an Aging California

Kelly Mills-Dick, MSW
Jaimie Simon, BA

University of California at Berkeley
Center for the Advanced Study of Aging Services

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Presentation Objectives

- Identify personnel needs in aging services
- Understand the application of a gerontological social work training model
- Apply techniques for evaluation of both training needs and outcomes
PERSONNEL NEEDS
in AGING SERVICES
Demographics

- Persons over 65 years of age make up 13% of the U.S. Population and by 2040 are expected to reach 21%.

- California population of people over 65 years of age is over 3.5 million and is estimated to increase by 172% over the next 40 years. *

- Non-Hispanic whites have become a minority in California.

- As the population increases, becomes more diverse, and places greater demands on public aging services, it is necessary to assess the adequacy of aging services personnel to meet the demands for service.

*Lee & Villa, 2000
Education and Training

- Social work is one of ten fastest growing professions *
- Only 5000 of 155,000 NASW members claim aging as primary field of practice
- Lack of trained social workers prepared to work in aging services **
- Lack of programs that provide gerontology education

* U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2001; ** CARES, 1990
Essential Social Work Skills

- Help clients to cope with change and loss
- Biopsychosocial, holistic approach
- Navigation through complex service system
- Tasks involve assessment, engagement, empowerment, counseling, development/coordination, monitoring, advocacy

Rosen & Zlotnik, 2001; Vourlekis & Greene, 1992
Public Programs

- Adult Protective Services
- Case Management
- In-Home Support Services
- Information & Referral
- Other Programs
Research Questions

- Characteristics of current aging services workforce.
- Preparedness of aging services personnel to meet needs of large, diverse population of older adults.
- Current and future personnel needs.
- Barriers to hiring trained personnel.
Methodology

- Survey of all county adult and aging services directors and AAA directors; n=55 out of possible 76 respondents.

- Response Rate: Overall = 72%
  - 74% of freestanding county agencies
  - 87% of county agencies collocated with AAA’s
  - 56% of freestanding AAA’s
Methodology

- The double-sided single page survey gathered information in the following areas:
  - Service areas currently offered
  - Current workforce/worker characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity, education and training)
  - Number and types of current vacancies
  - Barriers to filling positions
  - Perceived service gaps
  - Proposed and/or desired changes in state policies or programs that would help to meet future personnel needs in aging services.
Results

- Total aging services staff among the 55 responding agencies was 3,270.
- Gender: 75% Females, 25% Males
- Ethnicity:
  - Caucasian (50%)
  - African American (14%)
  - Asian American (13%)
  - Hispanic (18%)
  - Native American (<1%)
  - Pacific Islander (2%)
  - Other (2%)
# MSW Level Social Workers in Public Aging Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM</th>
<th>% CURRENT STAFF WITH MSW</th>
<th>% VACANCIES REQUIRING MSW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult Protective Services</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-home Supportive Services (IHSS)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Management</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and Referral</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Barriers to Hiring Aging Services Personnel

- Lack of qualified and properly educated applicants (72%)
- Inadequate salaries in aging services (70%)
- Insufficient numbers of ethnically diverse applicants (40%)
- High cost of living in the area (32%)
- Difficult working conditions (23%)
Implications

- Improve skill and education among aging services workers
- Develop programs that provide incentives for people to receive professional social work training and to enter aging services
- Increase minority representation in all positions in the field of aging
Model Programs

- **Title IV-E**
  - Provides stipends for MSW students interested in child welfare education and training

- **Hunter College**
  - Promotes minority participation at managerial level

- **Consortium for Social Work Training in Aging**
  - Provides stipends for MSW students interested in Aging
Future Research

- Aging-relevant education and training of aging services staff (e.g., certificates in gerontology, masters level gerontology degrees).
- Match between race/ethnicity of agency staff and client population.
- Impact of worker education and training on service adequacy and client outcomes.
GERONTOLOGICAL SOCIAL WORK:
TRAINING AND EDUCATION
Consortium for Social Work Training in Aging

• Three Schools of Social Work
  • University of California at Berkeley
  • San Francisco State University
  • San Jose State University

• Six Bay Area County Departments of Aging and Adult Services
Training Model

- Focuses on public sector aging services
- Comprehensive orientation to all the programs administered by their assigned county department
- Assignment to one of the county programs
Project Goals

• Increasing the capacity of the schools and county departments to train students in the field of aging
• Exposing students to the range of programs and services within the county departments
• Exposing students to the current and emerging policy issues which affect these service systems
• Providing opportunities for students to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for delivering quality, cost efficient services to clients served by these systems
Gerontological Content of Academic Programs

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aging-related courses</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students enrolled in aging courses</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students specializing in gerontology</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students doing fieldwork in public aging settings</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students hired in public aging settings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student Demographics  N=14

- Gender
  - 78.6% Female

- Age
  - Mean age, 33 years

- Race/Ethnicity
  - African-American 14%
  - Asian-American 29%
  - Caucasian 43%
  - Filipino 7%
  - Other 7%
Evaluation Methods

- Pre and Post-Project Assessment of:
  - Knowledge of aging and aging programs
  - Attitudes toward older adults
  - Opinions regarding social work with the elderly
Knowledge of Aging

• Measured through completion of three tasks
  • Palmore Facts on Aging Quiz
  • Definitions of eight aging program acronyms
  • Matching eight aging programs names with their descriptions
Knowledge of Aging

• Pre-Test
  • 50% of students answered 12 or more of the 25 questions correctly
  • Mean score of 12.64

• Post-Test
  • 85.7% of students answered 12 or more of the 25 questions correctly
  • Mean score of 15.57
Knowledge of Aging: Definitions of Acronyms

- Eight aging program acronyms
- Pre-Test
  - An average of 3.14 correct responses were given
- Post-Test
  - An average of 4.64 correct responses were given
Knowledge of Aging: Program Names/Descriptions

- Eight program names and descriptions
- Pre-Test
  - An average of 4.07 correct responses were given
- Post-Test
  - An average of 5.57 correct responses were given
Attitudes Toward Older Adults

- Measured using the Aging Semantic Differential
- Adjectives organized in three dimensions
  - Instrument-Ineffective
  - Autonomous-Dependent
  - Personal Acceptability-Unacceptability
Attitudes Toward Older Adults

- **Instrument-Ineffective Dimension**
  - Maximum Possible Score: 63
  - Pre-Test Mean: 37.39, Post-Test Mean: 33.79

- **Autonomous-Dependent Dimension**
  - Maximum Possible Score: 63
  - Pre-Test Mean: 36.54, Post-Test Mean: 32.64

- **Personal Acceptability-Unacceptability**
  - Maximum Possible Score: 98
  - Pre-Test Mean: 51.36, Post-Test Mean: 44.43
Attitudes Toward Older Adults

- Overall, there was a small but consistent movement of students’ attitudes toward seeing older adults in more positive terms.
### Opinions of and Interest in Gerontological Social Work

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<th>Pre-Project</th>
<th>Post- Project</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very likely to take job working with older adults</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>93% Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very likely to take a job in public social service</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>79% Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very likely to work with older adults in 5 years</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>79% Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed to a career in aging</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>71% Agree</td>
</tr>
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Student Feedback

• “It’s been great, being part of a project is fun – you learn from each other. Supervisor and staff have been very welcoming and contributed a lot to my learning experience.”

• “I felt extremely lucky to have been placed at my internship site – it changed my image of [a] ‘county’ agency! I had an incredibly positive experience with staff and supervisors.”

• “I’ve learned that the elderly population is one I’d like to work with in the future. I also learned that it’s a very rewarding population to work with.”

• “This internship has opened my eyes to the needs of the elderly, added to my skills enormously, and strengthened my commitment to working with older adults.”
Implications

• Evaluations indicate an increase in knowledge of aging and more positive attitudes toward older adults
  • Need to increase sample size, compare with MSW students not participating in the program

• Implications of students’ opinions of and interest in gerontological social work

• Career Tracking of program participants
Policy and Program Recommendations

- Increase the number of social workers, especially those trained and experienced in gerontology.
- Develop programs to recruit and train aging services workers.
- Increase emphasis on gerontology in University courses and programs.
- Create incentives and training programs for professional development.
- Continued evaluation of existing training and education programs.
- Increase funding to expand training and education opportunities and to provide more competitive salaries.
Contact information

UC Berkeley
Center for the Advanced Study of Aging Services
(510) 642-3285
http://cssr.berkeley.edu/aging/