

Evaluation Development and Use in Social Work Practice

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Background: Social workers entering the profession typically receive little, if any, content or training on evaluation practice. This is, in part, due to limited course offerings outside of the typical courses in most schools of social work. In addition, practicing social workers who often serve in the role as field instructors have not fully embraced the use of research in practice, and tend to employ less rigorous evaluative methods.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to explore the development and use of evaluation knowledge among social work practitioners who supervise social work students.

Setting: Not applicable.

Intervention: Not applicable.

Research Design: A mixed method, sequential research design within the context of an exploratory study was used to determine factors that facilitate evaluation, identify and prioritize

evaluation competencies, and determine the extent to which evaluation constructs contribute to self efficacy, evaluation competency, evaluation influence, and leadership behaviors.

Data Collection and Analysis: A web-based survey was used followed by a participatory method that included the use of a web-based software to identify and prioritize activities that contribute to the development of evaluation knowledge and skill.

Findings: Results suggest social work education has a critical role in promoting evaluation practice, establishing evaluation practice competencies, and using evaluation results to inform policy and practice.

Keywords: *social work practice, field education, evaluation practice, Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), Educational Policy, and Accreditation Standards (EPAS)*

Effective social work practice is expected to demonstrate its effectiveness systematically and concretely. This is not surprising, as the increased need for professional accountability in human service organizations is paramount. Social workers must be competent and possess the knowledge and skills to justify the outcome of services. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) has established the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) [2008] to support competent practice, and currently requires all accredited schools of social work to “provide competency based education that consist of measurable practice behaviors that are comprised of knowledge, values, and skills” (pg. 3). In addition, EPAS goes a step further by establishing a core competency (2.1.10d) that focuses entirely on evaluation and social workers ability to analyze, monitor, and evaluate interventions. One’s ability to produce designated levels of performance parallels theory and research on self-efficacy.

The purpose of this study is to better understand how social work practitioners develop and use evaluation in the field and to develop a set of practitioner generated evaluative practice/research competencies. The identification of activities that contribute to the development of evaluation knowledge and skill in social work practice will guide practice, education, and research efforts that support social work interventions and programs. This study seeks to answer inherently mixed methods questions including:

1. What factors facilitate evaluation practice in social work practice?

2. How do these factors impact knowledge, skill, and use of evaluation in social work practice?

The first question suggests a quantitative approach while the second question necessitates a qualitative response.

Bandura, the father of self-efficacy theory and research (as cited in Petrovich, 2004) is the “belief in one’s ability to organize and carry out actions needed to produce desired results” (p. 429). According to Bandura (1997), perceived self-efficacy controls human behavior through cognition, motivation, mood, and affect. People who are efficacious are more likely to have high aspirations, set high standards for themselves, engage in self-motivating behaviors, express confidence through their words and actions, and have lower levels of stress and anxiety.

In social work practice, self-efficacy has been used to understand behavioral responses in children and adolescents (Hamama, Ronen, & Rahav, 2008; Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Dittus, Gonzalez, & Bouris, 2008; Smith & Hall, 2008), to examine volunteers’ self-efficacy related to community involvement (Ohmer, 2007), and to explore treatment providers’ self-efficacy in the delivery of services (Gross et al., 2007). Fortune, Lee and Cavazos (2005) found a relationship between students’ social work self-efficacy and students’ satisfaction with field education where self-efficacy was described as trusting in one’s abilities to organize and execute the course of action required to produce given goals. Other applications of self-efficacy in social work education have included discussions of the educational processes, assessment of outcomes related to field instruction,

assessment of outcomes related to general social work self-efficacy, and conceptualizing and assessing the outcomes of research pedagogy (Holden, et al., 2007).

Evaluation self-efficacy, a relatively new concept within the field of social work practice (Holden et al., 2007) emphasizes an individual's level of confidence in conducting evaluation related tasks such as conducting research, designing evaluations, and analyzing data. The Evaluation Self-Efficacy Scale (ESE), developed by Holden et al, was designed to assess social work students' mastery of the EPAS related objectives. Within the 10-item scale, each ESE item measures an evaluation related behavior expected of MSW level students. Results indicate students were confident in areas such as searching electronic databases on the internet, reviewing social science theory and research and designing evaluation models that reflected social work values and ethics. However, they were less confident in analyzing data, creating research designs that evaluate practice outcomes, and activities related to program design and implementation. This new construct, evaluation self-efficacy, is critical to understanding evaluation practice within social work practice. An individual's evaluation self-efficacy serves as an indicator of perceived evaluation ability as well as signifies potential education and training needs related to evaluation. Evaluation self-efficacy is believed to contribute to evaluation competence but differs in that competency is the actual ability rather than perceived ability.

Social Work Education and Evaluation

As noted above, social work education serves to "prepare competent and effective professionals, to develop social work knowledge, and to provide leadership in the development of service delivery systems" (CSWE, 2001, p. 4). The CSWE EPAS (2008) emphasizes this in numerous ways: the recognition of field education as the signature pedagogy for social work education, and the development of ten core competencies and "measurable practice behaviors" expected of those who complete CSWE accredited programs. Field education, a mandated component of social work curriculums (CSWE, 2001, p. 11), is "systematically designed, supervised, coordinated and evaluated on the basis of criteria by which students demonstrate the achievement of program objectives. The relationship between field instructor and student is vital to the student's developing competence (Kittle & Gross, 2005). In addition to the transfer of practice knowledge and skill, field instructors are expected to provide quality feedback, establish learning objectives and assist students with professional development (Deal & Clements, 2006). The development of the ten core competencies provides a framework for accredited schools of social work to produce competent social work practitioners. Of the ten competencies, Educational Policy 2.1.10(d) is specific to evaluation practice, is the least developed in terms of specific measurable behaviors, and is the most likely to be misunderstood by schools of social work. The policy simply states, "social workers critically analyze, monitor, and evaluate intervention" (CSWE, EPAS, 2008),

which leads one to ponder—to *what extent do field instructors assist students in developing evaluation knowledge and skill?*

Additionally, organizations such as the American Evaluation Association (AEA) have established competence as a primary principle in the Guiding Principles for Evaluators document (AEA, 2009). The mission of AEA is “to improve evaluation practices and methods, increase evaluation use, promote evaluation as a profession, and support the contribution of evaluation to the generation of theory and knowledge about effective human action” (<http://www.eval.org>). Moreover, possessing requisite education, knowledge and skill in evaluation, evaluators are also encouraged to exhibit cultural competence, ethical decision making, and should continue to improve competence. Both AEA and CSWE recognize the field of social work as a profession through which evaluation makes a significant contribution to education, practice, and policy.

Method

Research Design

This study used a mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) in which the first phase of data collection, a quantitative questionnaire, explores practitioner knowledge and skill in evaluation and leadership issues among social work practitioners. The second phase of data collection (structured group process via concept mapping) derived through the use of Concept Systems Global software (Concept Systems

Incorporated, 2009), more directly addresses the issue of evaluation competency by identifying specific evaluation competencies in social work practice. The first method (questionnaire) provides a general overview of evaluation constructs and leadership behaviors in social work. The second method (concept mapping) provides a deeper and richer understanding of the issue through the use of qualitative data. The two sets of data are merged after analysis for comparison and interpretation is undertaken.

Sample

A nonrandom sample, specifically a snowball sample, of practicing social workers ($N = 119$) that provide field instructions were surveyed to determine perceptions on evaluation self-efficacy, evaluation use, and leadership behaviors in social work field practice. This type of sampling method was used in an attempt to identify additional participants through the recommendations of social workers that had participated in the study and with knowledge of others who would fit the study's criteria. A broad sample of field instructors allowed for analysis and comparison by program, specialty, race, gender, age, and years of experience, school affiliation, and geographic location. Following administration of the questionnaire, a subset ($N = 8$) of the larger sample of participants were selected to take part in the qualitative online process managed by the researcher and Concept Systems, Inc.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Survey Sample (N = 119)

Variable		N	P	SD
Gender	Male	20	16.8	—
	Female	98	82.4	—
	Missing	1	0.8	—
Ethnicity	Black/African American	38	31.9	—
	White/Caucasian	79	66.4	—
	Hispanic/Latino	1	0.8	—
	Missing	1	0.8	—
Age	(M = 45.20)			10.41
	20-29	7	5.8	—
	30-39	36	30.2	—
	40-49	30	25.2	—
	50-59	36	30.2	—
	60>	9	7.5	—
	Missing	1	0.8	—
Level of Education	Bachelor's Degree	7	5.9	—
	Master's Degree	90	75.6	—
	Specialist Degree	8	6.7	—
	Doctorate Degree	14	11.8	—
Practice Type	Health/Mental Health	44	37	—
	Child Welfare	40	33.6	—
	School Social Work	10	8.4	—
	Gerontology	4	3.4	—
	Forensics/Criminal Justice	5	4.2	—
	Administration	3	2.5	—
License Held	Other	13	10.9	—
	LMSW	22	18.5	—
	LCSW	37	31.1	—
	MFT	3	2.5	—
	None	54	45.4	—
Students Supervised	Missing	3	2.5	—
	BSW Only	10	8.4	—
	MSW Only	64	53.8	—

Variable		<i>N</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>SD</i>
	Both BSW and MSW	45	37.8	—
Years of Social Work Practice (M = 16.84)				9.13
	0-5	12	10	—
	6-10	23	19.3	—
	11-15	25	21	—
	16-20	25	21	—
	21-25	11	9.2	—
	26-30	12	10	—
	31-35	6	5	—
	36>	4	3.3	—
	Missing	1	0.8	—

An e-mail invitation sent to field instructors included information about the study, participant rights, and an internet link to the survey. Prior to participating in the study, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and security of survey information was maintained by the password protected online software. To encourage participation and limit harm, field instructors were informed that the study was voluntary, with an option of declining to participate by not responding to the invitation or requesting to be removed from the e-mail list, and that responses would be kept confidential. The deadline for completing the survey was left open.

Data Collection and Analysis

The primarily quantitative phase 1 data was collected through the use of a web-based survey, while the phase 2 data was obtained by the concept systems software. Upon receipt of the researcher's e-mail, the participant completes the web-based survey and returns it to the sender. The

data was then transferred into a database for analysis.

First Phase of Data Collection. A web-based survey was chosen as a way to survey participants because of its accessibility to working professionals, potential for wide distribution, and ease of data management (Ritter & Sue, 2007). Survey Monkey, a web-based software product created for survey design, collection and analysis of data, was used in this study. The 42-item survey consisted of four parts. The first 10 items consisted of demographic questions followed by 12 items taken from Holden's Evaluation Self-Efficacy (ESE). Chronbach's α for the 12 items of the ESE was .94 or greater. Part three of the survey consisted of 14 items that are specific to evaluation competence, evaluation influence, leadership and centrism. Leadership theory and centrism form the theoretical frameworks that provide conceptual clarity for the proposed variables and research questions. Centrism is the generation of knowledge by those who are grounded in a particular

culture or experience. The final six items were open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' response related to evaluation practice experience.

Second Phase of Data Collection. The second phase of data collection also employed the use of web-based software. Social work practitioners who agreed to participate in the second phase of data collection participated in a structured group process through the use of Concept Systems Global software (Concept Systems Incorporated, 2009). The three primary steps used to collect data in concept mapping are (1) sampling and preparation, (2) generation of ideas, and (3) structuring of statements (Kane & Trochim, 2007). Concept mapping analysis results, interpretation, and utilization will be discussed below. Step 1 of concept mapping involved recruiting key participants and developing a research focus. For the purpose of this study, social work practitioners' responses to the open-ended survey questions in phase 1 were used to guide the creation of a focused prompt. Approximately 50 stakeholders that hold diverse positions in social work practice were invited via e-mail to participate in the second phase of

this study. The group consisted of social work field directors, social work practitioners who had served as field instructors; social work practitioners with less than 2 years post graduate experience, and university professors of research and practice.

Due to the nature of social work practice, the MSW degree is considered the terminal degree for practice; the majority of participants were expected to have engaged in social work practice at some point in their careers. The second step of concept mapping emphasized the generation of ideas that is achieved through a brainstorming exercise. Participants were asked to generate as many statements as possible in response to the question—*What specific activities can help social work practitioners develop evaluation knowledge and skill?* Participants were informed there were no right or wrong answers and no limit to the number of statement items that could be provided. After doubled-barreled questions were divided and duplicate responses were removed, the focused prompt yielded a list of 62 statement items.

Table 2
Statements by Cluster with Ratings on Importance and Feasibility

Importance Rating	Statement	Feasibility Rating
	Cluster 1:Emphasis on Evaluation Policy	
4.73	1. Continuing education on evaluation best practices and information.	4.6
4.27	6. Focusing on the updated tools and technology surrounding evaluation.	4.3
4.73	13. Practitioner CEUs that focus on evaluation skill building would assist in building capacity.	4.4
4.27	15. Schools should gain funding to support effective evaluation education.	3.40

Importance Rating	Statement	Feasibility Rating
4.18	62. Increased evaluation content in licensing requirements.	3.5
4.44	Cluster 1 Average	4.04

Cluster 2: Agency Responsibilities		
4.18	2. Social work organizations/agencies reinforcing the acquisition of evaluation knowledge and skill (e.g., time off, reimbursement for training, etc.).	3.6
4.64	5. Help practitioners understand the policy connection to evaluation.	4.1
4.09	7. Sharing and exchanging ideas between the university and agency in terms of trends and basic evaluation techniques.	4.1
3.73	11. Practitioners have to evaluate the outcomes of chosen theories.	3.3
4.18	14. Practitioners have to be committed toward using theory in practice.	3.3
4.36	19. Agencies should invest in more evaluative software & tools(e.g., handheld devices, video cameras, other recording devices) to promote increased skill.	3.2
3.91	26. Connection to a professional organization (i.e. AEA) that promotes the use and understanding of evaluation.	4
4.45	30. Cooperatively partnering with universities and colleges to operationalize these skills in practice.	3.8
4	33. Practitioners have to be committed toward understanding theory in practice.	3.6
3.27	35. Agencies should gain knowledge on funding resources.	3.8
4.55	39. University and agency collaboration in regards to evaluation opportunities.	3.9
3.73	40. Focusing on the government and funding policies that address evaluation while students are in their practicum.	3.7
3.82	51. Agencies should receive training on how to build capacity for evaluation through grant writing.	4
4.07	Cluster 2 Average	3.72

Cluster 3: Field Practicum		
4.09	3. Incorporating this skill set in the performance evaluation.	3.9
4.18	8. This can be done through specialized evaluation projects.	4.1
4.64	9. Expose practitioners to various types of evaluation methods.	4.1
3.36	12. On-going and strategic role plays that involve processing and discussion among participants and facilitator.	3.4
4.55	18. An understanding of how evaluation is used in practice to guide program delivery and funding.	4.1
4.18	23. Incorporating skills sets in daily activities.	3.9

Importance Rating	Statement	Feasibility Rating
4.36	29. Social work organizations/agencies using evaluation to improve practice.	4
4.45	34. Provide practitioners with a clear definition/concept of evaluation.	4.4
3.91	37. Work on special projects related to their job.	4
4.36	41. Connecting these skills and knowledge to agency goals, outcomes, and strategic plans.	
4.09	43. Expose practitioners to various types of analysis tools.	3.9
4	52. Focusing on evaluation in the field can help build capacity regarding evaluation.	4.3
3.45	53. Reflective practice.	4
4.13	Cluster 3 Average	4.02

Cluster 4: Interpersonal Skills		
4.64	4. Hands on participation with a specific and detailed evaluation project.	4.2
4.09	17. Creating evaluation in-services for students.	4.3
4.18	20. Evaluation coaching between professors and students.	3.9
4	22. Being culturally competent.	3.8
3.55	55. Conducting statistical analysis.	3.7
3.82	56. Have students provide an evaluation in-service at their internships.	4
4.18	57. Group evaluation projects.	4.2
4.45	58. Allow students to conduct evaluations under supervision.	4.2
4.11	Cluster 4 Average	4.04

Cluster 5: Coursework/Academic		
4.64	10. Expose students to various types of evaluation methods.	4.5
3.91	16. Students should receive training on how to build capacity for evaluation through grant writing.	4.1
4.36	21. Mandatory research projects for students during graduate school.	4.2
4.64	24. Coursework related to evaluation as core curricula.	4.2
4.09	25. Teaching them how to create/construct logic models.	4
2.73	27. Requiring greater pre admissions coursework in research/evaluation, so that the little time spent in SW education could be spent on higher so that the little time spent in SW education could be spent on higher-level evaluation content.	2.3
4	28. Increasing accreditation requirements re: evaluation.	3.6
4.09	31. Teach students that effective social work practice is	4.2

Importance Rating	Statement	Feasibility Rating
	measured by practitioners ability to evaluate their practice.	
3.55	32. Designing surveys.	4.1
3.82	36. More research experience.	3.7
3.82	38. Teaching them how to design data collection forms using a logic model as a framework.	4.3
4	42. Tie all social work services to evaluation so that it becomes normal for the student when they become professionals.	3.3
4.45	44. Taking classes on evaluation that stress utility.	4.3
3.18	45. Students should gain knowledge on funding resources.	3.5
4.45	46. Integrate evaluation through the curriculum.	4.3
4.27	47. Teaching them the various types of evaluations.	4.3
4.45	48. Expose students to various types of analysis tools.	4.4
4.45	49. Taking classes on evaluation that stress the need for practice based evidence can help practitioners increase capacity.	4.4
3.36	50. Extensive literature review on evaluation as it relates to evaluation.	3.6
4.09	54. Schools should invest in more evaluative software & tools (e.g. handheld devices, video cameras, other recording devices) to promote increased skill.	3.4
4.45	59. Teaching on the foundation and importance of evaluation within the context of social work.	4.6
4.27	60. Offering seminars/brown bags to discuss how to incorporate the skill sets into daily tasks.	4.5
3.36	61. Increase the FT coursework for the MSW to 3 years, with part of that third year being devoted to additional evaluation content.	1.9
4.02	Cluster 5 Average	3.9

Step 3 of the concept mapping process involved structuring the statements by grouping them in a logical manner and rating each item. During the grouping or sorting process, participants were encouraged to sort the statements in a way that made sense to them with the conditions that all items could not be placed in one pile, every statement had to be sorted, and an item could not belong to more than one pile (Kane & Trochim,

2007). Following the sorting of items, each item was rated on a five point scale in terms of importance and feasibility, where 1 is defined as not at all important or feasible, 3 is defined as moderately important or feasible, and 5 is defined as extremely important or feasible. Rating of the statement items, in terms of importance and feasibility, increased understanding in how these activities

contribute to evaluation knowledge and skill.

Although concept mapping was administered after the initial survey, the results were expected to answer the central questions: *what factors facilitate evaluation in social work practice? How do these factors contribute to social work practice and policy?*—through the identification of specific activities that contribute to the development of evaluation knowledge and skill. The phase 1 data only provided general quantitative results related to field instructor knowledge and experience in evaluation practice. The phase 2 data provided more detailed information regarding specific evaluation activities and participants' rating of their level of importance and feasibility. The qualitative aspects of the phase 2 data collection process generated practical knowledge related to evaluation practice in social work practice.

Results

In response to the research question, a Kendall's tau correlation test was performed to determine the relationship between evaluation self-efficacy and leadership behaviors in social work. Kendall's tau was selected as the level of statistical analysis because data was collected at the ordinal level and the values were more conservative than Spearman's rho. The correlation between evaluation self-efficacy and inspiring a shared vision was $r = .417$, enabling others to act was $r = .374$, and modeling the way was $r = .356$. Thus, the average correlation between evaluation self-efficacy and leadership behaviors was $r = .382$, $p < .01$ (two-tailed) which indicates

the presence of a statistically significant positive correlation between the two variables.

Findings from the open-ended survey items (37 – 42) were grouped into similar categories or themes. The themes emphasized the value of evaluation practice, challenges associated with conducting evaluations, and social work practitioner experience as an important factor in developing evaluation knowledge and skill. Also, participants generated a significant number of statement items that addressed social work licensure and the accreditation of schools of social work. Overall the themes were present at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of social work practice. Responses were combined with rated items to measure leadership in terms of promotion of a shared vision between leaders and followers, participation in behaviors that increase levels of self-efficacy, and involvement in activities that promote long term, positive change at the individual, organizational and/or policy level.

In the second phase of data collection and analysis, participants included field instructors, field directors, MSW graduates with less than two years post masters experience, and university professors of research and practice. Findings indicated participants placed a high level of importance on emphasizing evaluation policy. The average rating range was 4.35 to 4.44 on a 5-point scale. When compared by field instructor and university instructor status, evaluation policy remained the most important issue. In fact, field instructor and university instructor ratings on importance resulted in a high correlation ($r = .8$).

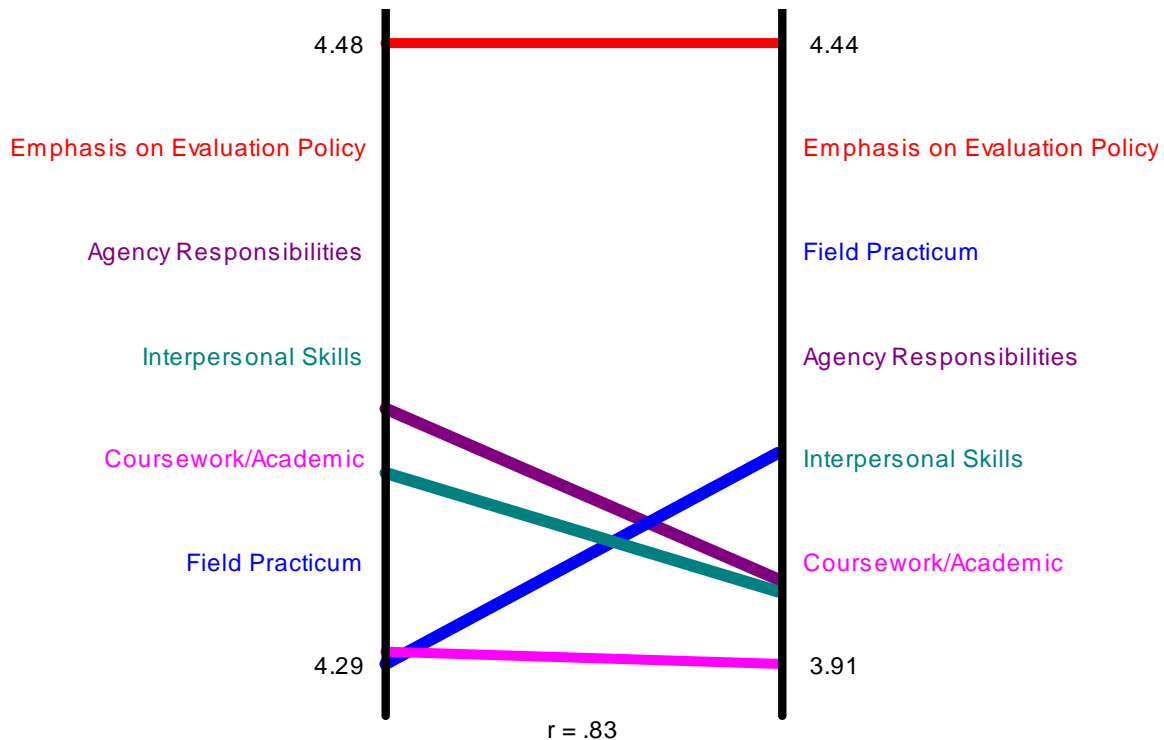


Figure 1. Pattern Match of Importance between Social Work Field Instructors and University Instructors

Ironically, their rating on the importance of the field practicum was the only area of disagreement. University instructors rated the statement items related to the field practicum as the second highest area, compared to social work field instructors who rated it as the least important area. These findings suggest a disconnection exists between the social work curriculum and “real world” experience. There may also be a problem of limited university involvement in the field practicum and not enough training for field instructors.

Participation in behaviors that increase levels of self-efficacy was measured by item 26. Item 26 asked: *how well do you evaluate your own practice interventions*. In response, 65.5% of respondents rated this item between 80 and 100 indicating they are certain they

can do this activity. Involvement in activities that promote long term positive changes at the individual, organizational, and policy levels were measured by items 24, 25, 27, 30 and 35. In response to item 24, which asked *how well do you use evaluation results to formulate social policies*, 53.7% of respondents rated the item between 80 and 100 indicating they are certain they can do this activity. Similarly, 53.8% of respondents rated item 25: *how well do you use evaluation results to influence social policies*—between 80 and 100. Sixty-three percent of respondents rated item 27—*how well do you communicate evaluation information differentially across client populations, colleagues, and communities*—between 80 and 100. In response to item 30: *how well do you effectively seek necessary organizational*

change within organizations as a result of evaluation efforts—, 56.3% of respondents rated this item between 80 and 100. The last measure of involvement in activities that promote long term, positive change at the individual, organizational and policy levels was item 35. Item 35: *does your ability to conduct evaluations help you to make decisions that benefit the organization—*received the highest response (74.7%) from field instructors indicating they are certain they can do this activity.

Findings from this study indicated a significant correlation ($r = .382, p < .01$) between evaluation self-efficacy and leadership behaviors in social work practice. However, findings in this area by Holden and colleagues' on evaluation self-efficacy has only been conducted in a pre-post format to assess student confidence in evaluation (Holden et al., 2007; Holden et al., 2008).

When asked general questions regarding skill in evaluation (i.e., *how well do you evaluate your own practice interventions; how well do you communicate evaluation information differentially across client populations, colleagues, and communities; and does your ability to conduct evaluations foster collaboration*), 63% to 78% of participants indicated they were certain they could do this activity. When the same individuals were asked questions specific to evaluation practice and their ability to create a group research design, design a descriptive data analysis, and design an inferential data analysis, only 36% to 50% of field instructors indicated they were certain they could do this. These findings are consistent with those of Penka and Kirk (1991). The researchers found that 78% to 92% of social workers rated themselves very skilled or skilled on general evaluation tasks but these rates

decreased to 27% to 42% on quantitative evaluation tasks. Similarly, Holden et al. (2007) found that advanced concentration students were least confident in their ability to design inferential data analysis, create a group research design, and design a study of the implementation of a program.

Discussion

Findings from this study suggest social work practitioners may face challenges understanding and incorporating evaluation in practice. One participant in this study reported, "Social workers themselves often devalue their own clinical practice as opportunities to conduct research and do not recognize the ongoing assessment and evaluation of interventions as being, in fact, research. These misperceptions can be dispelled by broadening the definition of research to include all evaluative processes in practice." Because evaluation practice permeates all facets of the profession and is used in a variety of ways, there is a need for theoretical and methodological pluralism in addressing evaluation issues. The current findings have implications for social work education, practice, and policy.

Strategies for teaching social workers evaluative skills should be accorded as a high priority in social work education and post-graduate training. In this study, several participants discussed their introduction to evaluation during their social work education, but were not afforded the opportunity to engage in specific evaluation activities, or receive follow-up training to maintain the skill. Some of the comments included: "Education in this area was so long ago; it is not a skill that I do in my work and

therefore it is not a strong skill.” “When it comes to evaluation practice, I have relied on what I learned in graduate school. I don’t recall a lot of the information.” “Completely—it’s remembering or refreshing that is needed.” “Limited option to do evaluation, due to heavy caseload, but education and training gave me the basics.”

Organizations that employ social work practitioners can support the development of evaluation knowledge and skill by promoting continuing education and training in evaluation, removing barriers to evaluation practice, and by using evaluation results to improve organizational practices and interventions. Some of the barriers to evaluation at the organization level included staff resistance, time constraints, and limited resources (Jacobson & Goheen, 2006). According to one field instructor in this study, “The main obstacle is time management and finding time to do research. It takes a lot of self control and skill to manage.” Organizations can remove barriers to evaluation by sponsoring trainings and brown-bag lunches that emphasize methods of incorporating evaluation in practice. They should also support continuing education by providing training stipends and professional leave. Lastly, organizations that employ social work practitioners should collaborate with regional or local schools of social work.

Also, of great significance is the role of social work organizations such as the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), which can serve as a mutually beneficial resource to enhance the capacity of its members and reinforce the value of evaluation. Currently, the only mandated continuing education requirement for social work practitioners is ethics (NASW, 2006). By encouraging

NASW to expand continuing education requirements to include evaluation, practitioners’ in the field can increase their skills in designing and assessing health and human service programs, and improve their program’s ability to meet Government Performance Regulation Accountability (GPRA) guidelines. This proactive policy change along with the aforementioned recommendations would ground and sustain evaluation in the culture of social work practice. After all, what value is ethics training to the agency that loses funding and must close its doors due to an inability to show measurable outcomes?

One of the major limitations in this study was the sampling method. The study used a snowball sample in phase 1 and a convenience sample in phase 2. The snowball sample was chosen because resources were limited and a probability sample would have been costly and time consuming. As a result, the research may have suffered from sampling bias as well as structural validity in that the instrument used has not been tested. Because data were collected at the ordinal level of measurement a more rigorous statistical analysis was not applicable; nor could a causal relationship between variables be suggested. Additionally, a shared meaning of “evaluation” may not have been consistently present with the respondents.

Although the concept mapping phase of the research methodology resulted in a useful conceptual framework for understanding activities that helped to develop evaluation knowledge and skill in social work practice, generalizability was limited due to the small sample size. A larger, more diverse sample would have allowed for more comparisons across groups (e.g., practitioners and university instructors, practitioners and students,

students and university instructors). It is important to note that analysis of the data and interpretation of the concept maps are limited to the validity of the statement items that were generated during the brainstorming process. Items that were omitted due to their similarity as well as those retained may have had an impact on the results. There may have been relevant statements that were not provided by the participants. Similarly, field instructors' responses may have been influenced by the survey used in phase 1.

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, there remain some questions regarding the benefits of evaluation practice in social work practice. Future research should further develop and test the concept of centrism. Practice models derived from centrism could help determine how effective the concept is when used in social work interventions. Similarly, some of the suggested activities to increase evaluation knowledge and skill should be empirically tested.

The use of concept mapping as a mixed method, participatory approach has great potential for including social work practitioners' views and experiences in the research process. This is one way to generate valuable evidence from the field in support of evidence-based practices. Future research in this area should involve students in the process. Not only would valuable information be derived from students; but, the participatory process would provide additional learning opportunities for students.

The findings of this study have only begun to scratch the surface of the importance of promoting evaluation within social work education and practice. Future research should explore how social work practice culture influences evaluation practice and the efficacy of evaluation in social work practice.

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