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Successful Student Recruitment for Public Child Welfare: Results From California's Title IV-E MSW Stipend Program Evaluation

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Data on seven cohorts of MSW students revealed successful recruitment efforts of the California Social Work Education Center Title IV-E program to select students most suitable for work in public child welfare. Compared to non-IV-E students, racially diverse IV-E students were more committed to direct services and case management but not drawn to private practice. Unlike non-IV-E students, IV-E students preferred work with poor and at risk families, but not clinical clients. The IV-E students' future goals tended toward service, not career advancement. Additionally, a high percentage of IV-E graduates remain in child welfare at least three years post-graduation.

KEYWORDS *Title IV-E, social work, public child welfare, retention, recruitment, diversity, children and families*

MSW STIPEND PROGRAM EVALUATION

In response to his concern that social workers were using their MSW degrees to work with the “worried well” from the middle class, Harold Specht, Dean of the School of Social Welfare at the University of California at Berkeley from 1977 to 1995 began a movement in California. Dean Specht feared that social workers were abandoning the mission of social work by opting for private practice with individuals rather than advocacy for the poor and disadvantaged communities (Specht & Courtney, 1994). With support from Zellerbach Family Fund and in collaboration with San Francisco Bay Area county social services agencies and graduate schools of social work a coalition was formed

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in 1987, known as the *Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC)*. Three years later this effort joined with the California Chapter of NASW, the 58 California social service departments, and 10 graduate schools of social work and resulted in the formation of California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) (California Social Work Education Center, 2000). With funding from Federal Title IV-E Foster Care education funds and a focus on public child welfare, CalSWEC set out to fulfill Dean Specht's vision to improve social workers' commitment to work in the public sector with vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families. When it began, the CalSWEC Program established a mission to facilitate the integration of education and practice to assure effective, culturally competent service delivery to the people of California. The guidelines of the Title IV-E funding stream directed this mission toward the public child welfare system (California Social Work Education Center, 2000). CalSWEC goals required an evaluation of the program to determine whether the mission and goals of the CalSWEC consortium were achieved. Fulfilling one aspect of the evaluation was a comparison between the IV-E students and other MSW students in the consortium universities. The assumption was that IV-E students would reflect the diversity of California and the child welfare population to a greater degree, and would be more inclined to work with underprivileged and disadvantaged children and families than would non-IV-E MSW students.

The CalSWEC Title IV-E program offers stipends to MSW students in a year for year exchange for work in public child welfare. With the aim of infusing public child welfare with workers who have the professional MSW degree, the program emphasized recruitment of agency workers who wanted to improve their skills by obtaining an MSW. Another CalSWEC goal is to attract a racially and ethnically diverse body of students who are committed to work with child welfare clients. The IV-E MSW student selection process varies somewhat from school to school, but all students must first be accepted into the graduate school prior to selection by the IV-E stipend program. The schools then follow the CalSWEC Program Guide regarding the recruitment of prospective students:

The CalSWEC IV-E program seeks to increase the number and diversity of well-trained and highly committed MSWs in California county child welfare services. Recruitment is focused on (in order of priority):

- Current staff members of county public social service agencies and employees of the California Department of Social Services, who are qualified for admission to an MSW program;
- Applicants who reflect the diverse client populations currently served by public child welfare in California;
- Other qualified individuals with demonstrated commitment to careers providing high quality, culturally competent practice in public child welfare services. (California Social Work Education Center, 2011, Section IV, A-4)

Within the guidelines schools differ in the actual process of recruitment and selection, but many programs interview applicants, and/or require exams or essays.

This study purposed to examine the effectiveness of the CalSWEC IV-E program to recruit and select students with characteristics and work commitment that best fulfilled CalSWEC's goal of "recruiting and preparing a diverse group of social workers for careers in public human service with special emphasis on child welfare" (California Social Work Education Center, 1999, p. 10). The study compared Title IV-E MSW students with nonIV-E MSW students on diversity of background, prior work experience in child welfare, practice preferences, and career motivations and aspirations.

Background

Professional commitment and traditional values favoring disadvantaged populations are central to social work education as reflected by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (NASW, 1999). During the 1970s and 1980s, however, the field experienced co-occurring increases in caseloads and decreases in funding (Ellett & Leighninger, 2007; NASW, 2003) which led to a reduction in the proportion of workers with professional social work degrees in public agencies including public child welfare. This phenomenon, known as the *deprofessionalization of social work*, sparked a movement to reinvigorate social work's commitment to the reprofessionalization of the field by emphasizing the importance of hiring workers with professional social work degrees.

NASW shared the concern that deprofessionalization and reclassification created a situation in which social work positions were reclassified to less than a social work degree. Due to budget cuts and lack of resources, vacancies in agencies were filled by persons with little or no social work training. In a policy statement NASW noted that the majority of social work positions were held by workers who were not professionally trained in social work. This prompted NASW to encourage public and private organizations to provide employees the opportunity to advance their knowledge and skills with undergraduate and graduate social work degrees (NASW, 2003).

In 1999 California's Department of Social Services revised its manual for child welfare services that included staff requirements. Section 31-070 states:

At least 50 percent of the professional staff providing emergency response services, and at least 50 percent of the professional staff providing family maintenance services, shall possess a master's degree in social work, or its equivalent in education and/or experience as certified by the State Personnel Board or a county civil service board. (California Department of Social Services, 2011, p. 32.2)

and

One hundred (100) percent of the supervisors of staff providing emergency response and family maintenance services shall possess a master's degree in social work, or its equivalent in education and/or experience as certified by the State Personnel Board or a county civil service board. (California Department of Social Services, 2011, p. 32.2)

The shortage of professionally trained social workers in all social services fields in California also prompted state representative Dion Aroner to conduct special legislative hearings in 2001 and 2002 to determine the extent of and solution to the problem. The hearings revealed an estimated need for 3,400 additional social workers, which was twice the workforce in California's ten largest county child welfare agencies. Additionally, only 25% of child welfare social workers in the year 2000 had MSW degrees, which heightened concerns about the workforce (Aroner & Deichert, 2002). Adding to the problem, social services organizations including child welfare continue to struggle with high social worker turnover rates. The national annual turnover rate for child protective services workers increased from 19% in 2000 (Child Welfare League of America, 2001) to 22.1% in 2004 (APHSA, 2005). Ensuring that child welfare is staffed with professionally educated, skilled, and committed social workers has become of paramount concern to the field.

Prior Research

Research on social work students' professional commitment indicates that social work education positively effects MSWs' professional commitment. Specifically, caseworkers with social work degrees are more likely to be committed to social work values and are better prepared for the work than are caseworkers with other degrees (Dhooper, Royse, & Wolfe, 1990). Social work curricula in the children and families concentration target more of the necessary knowledge, skills and values components necessary for child welfare practitioners than non-social work degreed curricula (Folaron & Hostetter, 2007). The curricula are geared toward the skills necessary for work in child welfare, including interviewing, doing assessments, and analyzing policy, and so forth. This may explain findings that about half of graduating MSWs remain in the field of their specialization rather than opting for another field and that the highest percentage (80%) remain in the field of children and families (York, Denton, & Moran, 1990).

Commitment to poor and disadvantaged populations is stronger for social work students than for non-social work students (Roff, Adams, & Kemmack, 1984), which is particularly true for MSW students and minority students (Abell & McDonnell, 1990; Perry, 2003; Rubin & Johnson, 1984;

Van Soest, 1996), but not for MSW students preparing for private practice (Perry, 2003; Rubin & Johnson, 1984). MSWs interested in private practice are the professionals Dean Specht suspected were abandoning their mission for work with “the worried well” (Specht & Courtney, 1994).

Some studies have documented the commitment of Title IV-E MSWs to child welfare (Gomez et al., 2010; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2009). Others studies have linked commitment to child welfare to retention in the field (Ellett, Ellett, & Rugutt, 2003; Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001; Ellis, Ellett, & DeWeaver, 2006; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2009; Smith, 2005). In addition, IV-E MSWs are more likely to remain in the field (Rosenthal & Waters, 2006).

Social work students do appear to possess the attitudes necessary for working with the poor or disadvantaged, and Title IV-E students, especially those with prior work experience in child welfare, are perhaps more committed to the field, and are more likely to stay employed in public child welfare. The question remains whether the IV-E programs fulfill the goal to recruit a diverse body of students and child welfare workers motivated to work in the service of others rather than in private practice? Also in question is whether their practice preferences and goals would be suitable for work in child welfare? To answer these questions this study examined the racial/ethnic composition, prior work experience, practice preferences, motives, and career aspirations of Title IV-E MSW students and compared them to non-IV-E MSW students. Because of the link between the IV-E students in this study and participants in another study of CalSWEC's IV-E graduates, this study also examines the retention rates of California IV-E students three years post-graduation.

Based on the literature and the goals of the CalSWEC program this study compared the IV-E students with non-IV-E students to address the following research questions and hypotheses:

1. Does the CalSWEC IV-E program recruit a diverse body of students that mirror the population in the child welfare system?
 - Hypotheses 1: IV-E MSW students will be more racially diverse than the non-IV-E students.
2. Do MSW students selected for the IV-E program have more prior work experience in child welfare than do the MSW students not selected for the IV-E program?
 - Hypotheses 2: IV-E MSW students will have more prior work experience in child welfare than the non-IV-E students.
3. Does the CalSWEC IV-E program recruit students with social work motivations, goals, and practice preferences that are suitable for work in public child welfare?
 - Hypothesis 3: IV-E students' social work practice preferences will reflect those necessary for commitment to child welfare, specifically working in direct services with clients, but not in mental health or clinical settings.

- Hypothesis 4: IV-E MSW students will prefer working with families at risk, including the poor and homeless, but not clinical clients.
- Hypothesis 5: IV-E MSW students' motivations and goals will tend toward the service of others and not career advancement or private practice.
- Hypothesis 6: IV-E students with prior work experience in child welfare will express the strongest preferences for work related to public child welfare.

The final question for this study: Do CalSWEC IV-E MSWs remain in child welfare up to three years post-graduation?

METHODS

Begun in 1991, the Entry/Graduation Study was designed as a pre-post cohort survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the CalSWEC Title IV-E program's effort to recruit and educate MSW students for work in public child welfare. This study focused on the Entry cohorts.

Sample

The sampling frame for the larger study included all entering MSW students in accredited California Social Work and Social Welfare programs in California from 1991 to 2000. In total 8,831 surveys were received. This study did not include surveys from baseline data, administered prior to the start of the IV-E program. Participants with missing or ambiguous IV-E status were also excluded. The final sample of 5,740 included 1,003 Title IV-E and 4,737 non-IV-E students.

Measures

The survey consisted of demographic information, including racial/ethnic background and prior child welfare work experience (PCW), and questions related to social work, including preferences for fields of practice and client populations, motivations for obtaining an MSW, and career aspirations, which were the areas of interest in this study.

PREFERENCES FOR FIELDS OF PRACTICE

Questions on preference ratings of fields of practice were adapted from Rubin and Johnson (1984), Rubin, Johnson and DeWeaver (1986), and Amy Butler (1990). Using a 7-point scale from 1 (*low appeal*) to 7 (*high appeal*), students rated 10 fields of practice according to their level of appeal for future job possibilities in social work.

PREFERENCES FOR CLIENT POPULATIONS

Also adapted from Rubin and Johnson (1984), Rubin et al. (1986), and Amy Butler (1990), students rated their preferences for 21 client populations using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*low appeal*) to 7 (*high appeal*).

MOTIVATIONS FOR OBTAINING AN MSW

Based on the work of Abell and McDonnell (1990), students were asked their motivations for entering graduate school. They rated the degree of importance from 1 (*not important at all*) to 5 (*very important*) on six items regarding their decision to enter graduate school.

CAREER ASPIRATIONS

Lastly, based on the works of Rubin and Johnson (1984), Rubin et al. (1986), and Amy Butler (1990), participants rated the importance they placed on job characteristics relating to career aspirations for choosing future jobs using a rating scale ranging from 1 (*not important at all*) to 4 (*very important*).

Data Collection Procedures

The first surveys were administered in 1991 three years before the CalSWEC Title IV-E stipends were offered. The surveys were mailed to faculty at each of the participating CalSWEC universities. Social work faculty distributed the surveys to incoming MSW students during new student orientation, in a seminar class, or in orientation packets. Surveys were returned anonymously to CalSWEC's central office. The process was repeated each year until 2000 when the last cohort of new MSW students was surveyed. A total of 10 cohorts of entering MSW students received the survey. In this study only the 1994 to 2000 cohorts were analyzed.

Data Analyses

Crosstabs with chi-square statistics compared IV-E students with non-IV-E students on demographic variables of race/ethnicity, gender, family socioeconomic status, and PCW. Principal components analyses (PCA) with varimax rotation were performed on each of the rating scales to identify strong statistical aggregations of items that operationalize each measurement dimension. Chronbach alpha reliabilities were calculated on the items for each of the PCA components and means of the component items were calculated and used as the variables for the final analyses of the hypotheses.

To check for cohort effects, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted on calculated variables by year of entry. The data were analyzed separately by student group (IV-E and non-IV-E) using the Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Multivariate analyses of variance

(MANOVAs) compared groups (IV-E/non-IV-E and PCW/No PCW) on the calculated variables of preferences for fields of practice and client populations, motivations for obtaining an MSW, and career aspirations.

RESULTS

Results are described in the following order: (a) description of the sample, (b) PCA and Chronbach alpha reliabilities, (c) one-way ANOVAs, and (d) MANOVAs. Lastly, the results relating survey participants to retention of MSWs in public child welfare are presented.

Description of Sample

Table 1 includes frequencies, percentages, and chi-square statistics of demographic characteristics by IV-E and non-IV-E status. Significant differences between the IV-E and non-IV-E students occur for race/ethnicity, PCW, and socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds. A significant chi-square confirmed hypothesis 1, that IV-E students would have racial/ethnic diversity. More African American, American Indian, and Hispanic students and a fewer Caucasian

TABLE 1 Numbers and Percentages of Students and Chi-Square Statistics by Demographics and Student Status

Demographics	IV-E <i>n</i> = 1003	Non-IV-E <i>n</i> = 4737	Chi-square	<i>Df</i>
Gender	Missing = 1	Missing = 23		
Women	849 (85%)	3,888 (82%)	2.96*	1
Men	153 (15%)	826 (18%)		
Race/ethnicity	Missing = 7	Missing = 31		
African American	165 (17%)	353 (8%)		
American Indian	20 (2%)	39 (1%)		
Asian	106 (11%)	505 (10%)	198.7**	5
Caucasian	363 (36%)	2,708 (57%)		
Hispanic/Latino	255 (25%)	750 (16%)		
Multi-cultural/Other	87 (9%)	351 (8%)		
Socioeconomic status in childhood	Missing = 13	Missing = 64		
lower income	355 (36%)	1,088 (23%)	81.8**	2
middle income	56 (57%)	2,992 (64%)		
upper income	66 (7%)	593 (13%)		
PCW	Missing = 3	Missing = 20		
No	239 (24%)	1,803 (62%)	73.7**	1
Yes	761 (76%)	2,914 (38%)		

Note. Percentages in parentheses are within IV-E and non-IV-E column groups.

p* < .10, *p* < .05.

students than expected were in the IV-E group. Conversely, fewer African American, American Indian, and Hispanic students and more Caucasian students than expected were in the non-IV-E group. Another significant chi-square revealed that more IV-E students than expected had some type of public or non-profit child welfare work experience (PCW) and fewer than expected had no PCW. The reverse was true for the non-IV-E students, but to a lesser degree.

Not hypothesized, a significant chi-square showed that more IV-E students and fewer non-IV-E students than expected came from lower income backgrounds. Fewer IV-E students and more non-IV-E students than expected came from upper income backgrounds.

Principal Component Analyses and Reliabilities

A PCA with varimax rotation was performed on each of the rating scales in order to identify statistical aggregations and create variables for analyses. Chronbach alpha reliabilities were calculated on component items and means of the items for each component in the PCA were calculated to compute the variables for the final analyses of the hypotheses.

PREFERENCES FOR FIELD OF PRACTICE AND CLIENT POPULATIONS

In the PCA of student preferences for fields of practice, three components emerged, which correspond to three main fields of practice in social work curricula. The first component, *Clinical Practice*, was defined by the first four items: (a) family and marital therapy, (b) counseling, (c) psychotherapy, and (d) group work (Chronbach alpha of .83). Component/item loadings ranged from .90 to .81, which explained 30.28% of variance. The second component, *Management, Administration and Planning (MAP)*, was defined by the next three items: (a) program/policy design, (b) community organization, and (c) administration ($\alpha = .69$). Loadings ranged from .86 to .74, which explained 21.83% of variance. The third component, *Direct Services*, was defined by the last three items: (a) casework, (b) client advocacy, and (c) protective services ($\alpha = .54$). Loadings ranged from .83 to .62, which explained 16.72% of variance. The means of the items of these three components were used in the final analyses.

Again using PCA for the 21 client populations' items six components emerged. The first component, *Disabled and Fragile*, was defined by the first four items: (a) the physically disabled, (b) the developmentally disabled, (c) the aged, and (d) chronically mentally disabled ($\alpha = .76$). Loading ranged from .83 to .61, which explained 13.0% of the variance. The second component, *Families at Risk*, was defined by the next five items: (a) abused and neglected children, (b) abusive parents, (c) turbulence during adolescence, (d) teenage mothers with limited resources, and (e) people who

want to adopt a child ($\alpha = .74$). Loadings ranged from .87 to .44, which explained 12.7% of variance. The third component, *Poor and Homeless*, was defined by the next three items: (a) homeless families, (b) homeless adults, and (c) people in poverty needing links to resources ($\alpha = .84$). Loadings ranged from .84 to .78, which explained 11.7% of variance. The fourth component, *Clinical Clients*, was defined by the next three items: (a) marital and/or family problems, (b) people who are depressed, and (c) college students in emotional crisis ($\alpha = .60$). Loadings ranged from .76 to .52, which explained 9.7% of the variance. The fifth component, labeled *Justice System*, was defined by the next three items: (a) adult criminal offenders, (b) juvenile status offenders, and (c) alcohol or substance abusers ($\alpha = .70$). Loadings ranged from .81 to .55, which explained 9.6% of the variance. The sixth and final component, labeled *AIDS/Health Care*, was defined by the last three items: (a) adults with AIDS, (b) children with AIDS, and (c) hospital discharge planning in health care ($\alpha = .72$). The loadings ranged from .83 to .49, and explained 9.4% of the variance. Means were calculated for the items on the six components.

MOTIVATIONS FOR OBTAINING AN MSW

In the PCA for the seven items of this scale, two components emerged. In the initial analysis, two of the items loaded above .30 on both components, and were dropped. In the second analysis the remaining items loaded distinctly on two separate components. The first component, *Service Orientation*, was defined by the first two items: (a) through social work I will be able to make an important contribution to individuals and society, and (b) a desire to enhance my potential for serving economically disadvantaged clients ($\alpha = .62$). Loadings ranged from .88 to .76, which explained 30.3% of the variance. The second component, *Career Orientation*, was defined by the last three items: (a) a desire to prepare myself for private practice, (b) a desire to increase my potential for promotion/job advancement, and (c) the Master's is a logical extension of my BSW ($\alpha = .36$). Loadings ranged from .76 to .56, which explained 26.4% of the variance. Because of the low reliability for this component it was not used in further analyses.

CAREER ASPIRATIONS

In the PCA for the seven items in this measure two components emerged. The first component, *Career Advancement*, was defined by the first five items of participants' ratings of how important it would be to: (a) choose your own clients, (b) do primarily psychotherapy (c) work with highly motivated clients, (d) earn above average income, and (e) have flexible work hours ($\alpha = .41$). Loadings ranged from .73 to .50, which explained 26.9% of the variance. The second component, *Service to Others*, was defined by the next two items: (a) help the most economically disadvantaged people in

the community, and (b) work with social workers or other professionals as a team ($\alpha = .58$). Loadings ranged from .77 to .76, which explained 18.7% of the variance. Means of component items were calculated.

One-Way and MANOVAs

One-way ANOVAs by year of entry were conducted to check for cohort effects. The data were also analyzed separately by student group (IV-E and non-IV-E). Using the Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons there were no significant differences by year of administration on the study variables. We were therefore confident in pooling the data for all cohorts for the remaining analyses.

For a 2×2 MANOVA, Table 2 presents the number of students, means, standard deviations, main effects statistics, and effect sizes, of the students' ratings for the component variables by IV-E status. The main effects by PCW and significant interaction effects of the variables by IV-E status and PCW are presented in the text.

TABLE 2 Numbers of Students, Means, Standard Deviations, and Main Effects Statistics for Components by Title IV-E Status

Component	IV-E			Non-IV-E			<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	ETA
	<i>n</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>sd</i>			
Preference for field of practice									
Clinical practice	1,000	5.00	1.33	4,724	5.22	1.36	1,5694	8.55**	.002
MAP	1,001	4.56	1.40	4,723	4.42	1.45	6.53*	.001	
Direct services	1,002	5.48	0.97	4,725	4.93	1.13	158.66***	.027	
Preferences for client populations									
Disabled/fragile	1,000	3.62	1.35	4,726	3.86	1.37	13.29***	.002	
Families at risk	1,000	5.54	0.90	4,726	4.89	1.25	1,5695	228.53***	.039
Homeless & poor	1,000	5.12	1.26	4,725	4.76	1.39	42.64***	.007	
Clinical clients	1,000	4.59	1.25	4,726	4.80	1.27	11.32***	.002	
Justice system	1,000	4.36	1.38	4,723	4.10	1.43	25.67***	.004	
AIDS/health care	1,000	4.40	1.39	4,724	4.57	1.43	7.03**	.001	
Motivations for obtaining an MSW									
Service orientation	1,002	4.59	0.63	4,732	4.51	0.61	1,5707	19.18***	.001
Career aspirations									
Service to others	1,000	3.51	0.51	4,725	3.34	0.57	1,5698	59.27***	.010
Career advancement	1,001	2.66	0.48	4,728	2.72	0.47	8.71**	.002	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

PREFERENCES FOR FIELD OF PRACTICE

The significant main effects for IV-E status on students' practice preferences in Table 2 confirmed hypothesis 3 that when compared to non-IV-E students, IV-E students would prefer to work directly with clients but not in mental health or clinical settings. The IV-E students rated direct services significantly higher and clinical practice significantly lower than did the non-IV-E students. IV-E students also preferred MAP to a greater degree than did non-IV-E students, although this had not been hypothesized.

Students with PCW were significantly more likely to prefer direct services [$F(1, 5694) = 13.07, p < .001, \eta^2 = .001$] and less likely to prefer clinical practice [$F(1, 5694) = 4.41, p < .05, \eta^2 = .002$] than students with no PCW. There were no differences by PCW in ratings for MAP. In support of hypothesis 6, the significant interaction effect for clinical practice indicates that IV-E students with PCW were the least likely to prefer clinical practice [$F(1, 5694) = 3.90, p < .05, \eta^2 = .001$].

PREFERENCES FOR CLIENT POPULATIONS

The significant main effects for IV-E status support hypothesis 4 that the IV-E students' mean preferences for client populations would be greater for families at risk, poor & homeless clients, and justice system clients than that of non-IV-E students. In addition, IV-E students were significantly less likely than non-IV-E students to prefer clinical clients, disabled & fragile clients, and AIDS/health care clients.

Similar to IV-E students, students with PCW were significantly more likely to prefer to work with families at risk [$F(1, 5695) = 59.88, p < .001, \eta^2 = .010$], the poor & homeless [$F(1, 5695) = 4.36, p < .05, \eta^2 = .001$], and the justice system clients [$F(1, 5695) = 7.68, p < .01, \eta^2 = .001$] than were students with no PCW. In addition, students with PCW were significantly less likely to prefer working with disabled/fragile clients [$F(1, 5695) = 31.20, p < .001, \eta^2 = .005$], and clinical clients [$F(1, 5695) = 7.53, p < .01, \eta^2 = .001$] than were students with no PCW. There were no differences by PCW in ratings for AIDS/healthcare.

In support of hypothesis 6, a significant interaction effect in indicated that IV-E students with PCW were the most likely to prefer working with families at risk [$F(1, 5695) = 31.35, p < .001, \eta^2 = .005$] and justice system clients [$F(1, 5695) = 6.29, p < .05, \eta^2 = .001$]. non-IV-E students with no PCW were the least likely to prefer working with both of these client populations.

MOTIVATIONS FOR OBTAINING AN MSW AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS

The significant main effect in Table 2 for motivations for obtaining an MSW supports hypothesis 5 that IV-E Students' would be more oriented toward service than would non-IV-E students. The main effects for career aspirations

show that IV-E students rated service to others significantly higher and career advancement significantly lower in importance than did the non-IV-E students.

There were no difference by PCW for ratings on motivations for obtaining an MSW, but a significant interaction effect indicated that non-IV-E students with no PCW were the least likely to prefer service orientation [$F(1, 5706) = 8.51, p < .01, \eta^2 = .001$]. For career aspirations, students with PCW reported significantly higher ratings for service to others [$F(1, 5698) = 7.01, p < .01, \eta^2 = .001$] and significantly lower ratings for career advancement [$F(1, 5698) = 9.69, p < .01, \eta^2 = .002$] than did the students with no PCW.

RETENTION OF CALSWEC TITLE IV-E MSWS

These findings, although significant and promising to the field of child welfare, are contingent upon the retention of the IV-E MSWs after entering the field. Although this survey was submitted anonymously by the participants, the surveys were sent only to universities participating in the CalSWEC Title IV-E program. Any entering IV-E students in these universities would be participants in CalSWEC's Title IV-E program, because CalSWEC is the only IV-E program in California that selects students at the beginning of their MSW education.

CalSWEC tracks all students and graduates as they progress through their MSW and as they complete their 2–3 year work obligation in public child welfare following graduation. At that time CalSWEC MSWs are invited to participate in a retention study, which examines the MSWs' work status and work experiences (See Jacquet et al., 2007, for a description of the study). The response rate for the years comparable to the years in this study was 48%. The surveys were administered approximately 3.5 years post-graduation and retention for participants was 82%. County child welfare human resources offices were contacted to inquire whether non-responders were still employed at the agencies. With this additional information, status of all but 7% of the CalSWEC MSWs was confirmed. Assuming that the 7% were no longer with their payback agency, retention for the whole sample was 63%. However, 23% of leavers continued to work for public child welfare at other agencies. This increased retention of CalSWEC MSWs in public child welfare to 67%. At least 63% of CalSWEC MSWs remained with their original payback agency, and at least 67% remained in public child welfare for more than three years post-graduation.

DISCUSSION

True to its mission CalSWEC's IV-E program did recruit and select students with characteristics and preferences suited for work in public child welfare.

More ethnically diverse than non-IV-E students, the racial/ethnic composition of IV-E students provides a comparable match for the diversity of the clients in California's child welfare system, which according to Needell et al. (2011) has higher percentages of African American, and American Indian client populations than the population at large. Literature on practitioner/client ethnic matching is mixed, but some clinical findings indicate that clients are more likely to stay in therapy with practitioners of the same background (Flaherty & Adams, 1998). Clients may be more responsive to social workers of similar racial/ethnic heritage particularly at intake. Most studies on ethnic matching are in the medical and mental health fields and measure long term relationships rather than clients' initial responses to professionals (see, for example: Gamst et al., 2004; Shin et al., 2005; Ziguras, Klimidis, Lewis, & Stuart, 2003).

Not hypothesized but interesting, IV-E students were more likely than non-IV-E students to report that they came from lower income families. This finding may imply that IV-E MSW students who grew up in low-income families would have a better understanding of the needs of impoverished populations.

IV-E students were also more likely than non-IV-E students to report that they had prior work experience in child welfare. That experience gives them a background from which to draw, as well as the wherewithal to know what they are getting into. Some workers have reported that it is best to know what to expect when working in child welfare (Jacquet et al., 2007).

IV-E students reported that they were more motivated to serve others and to work with the poor and at risk children and families than were non-IV-E students. This finding is in keeping with CalSWEC's primary goal to reprofessionalize child welfare and improve the commitment of social workers to work in the public sector with vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families. Commitment to child welfare is paramount to retaining workers in the field (Ellett et al., 2003; Ellis et al., 2006; Freund, 2005; Mor Barak et al., 2001; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2009; Smith, 2005; see also DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008, for a review of the research). The link between this study's participants and participants in CalSWEC's retention study provides some evidence that IV-E MSW students' commitment to child welfare enhances retention. The CalSWEC MSWs have a 67% retention rate for at least three years.

Although not expected, IV-E students were interested in MAP, which may reflect career plans in child welfare, that is, a desire to move into supervisory or managerial positions within the organization. Workers have reported that having a good supervisor makes a difference in whether they stay in child welfare (Jacquet et al., 2007). Many studies report a link between supervision and retention (Ellett et al., 2003; Ellett & Millar, 2004; Kleinpeter et al., 2003; Landsman, 2001; Mor Barak et al., 2001; Rycraft, 1994; Samantrai, 1992; Smith, 2005; U.S. General Accounting Office [GAO], 2003; Westbrook

et al., 2006). This link can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, workers may remain in agencies if they have quality supervision. On the other hand, if agencies promote workers to supervisory and managerial positions, they may be more likely to remain in the agencies.

The juxtaposition of IV-E status and prior work experience in child welfare supports CalSWEC's goal to reprofessionalize child welfare by the efforts to recruit workers who do not have professional degrees. Both IV-E students and those with PCW favored working directly with clients, were service oriented, and preferred to work with the client populations found in the child welfare system, that is, children and families at risk, the poor and homeless, and those who find themselves caught up in the criminal justice system including those involved with substance abuse. As an aside, a significant portion of children are brought to the attention of child welfare because of substance abusing parents (U.S. GAO, 1997).

IV-E students who had worked in child welfare were the most motivated to serve others and wanted to work with families at risk. They were also the least likely to prefer clinical practice, which is a reflection of Harry Specht's vision in creating CalSWEC, and a clear indication of the successful recruitment efforts of the organization.

Limitations and Statistical Discussion

Although this study has viable information, generalizability to other states may be compromised by differences in geographic and demographic characteristics among states. In addition, the recruitment and selection processes among the Title IV-E programs in other states differ as well. Some states recruit only child welfare workers, while others recruit students in only their final year in the MSW program.

It should also be noted that the results of the PCAs were very clean and the loadings for the most part were strong in magnitude. These findings further document the quality and interpretability of the measures used in this study as well as the original content classification of the items, particularly with regard to the preferences for field of practice and client populations.

Effect sizes for the significant findings in this study are small; however, as Glenn and Shelton (1983) point out, preoccupation with the variance explained can lead one to disregard important relationships among variables. The students in this study are not a heterogeneous population. They are all graduate students in the same field, social work. Finding differences is not as likely as in a randomly selected sample from a diverse population. Individually the significant differences in these findings may not appear relevant or noteworthy, but when looked at in total, the collection of significant findings draws a picture of a group of MSWs with the characteristics that display dedication and commitment to the field of public child welfare and the clients involved. These MSW students were recruited for just that purpose. The

cumulative preferences for IV-E students may contribute to their commitment to the field of child welfare, a commitment that might lead to better practice and longevity in their work. Future research on student recruitment might benefit from mixed methods of both quantitative and qualitative studies. Qualitative interviews, for example, may document stronger differences between IV-E and non-IV-E students than quantitative survey methods alone.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Social workers come from multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds, are excited about their careers, and have distinctive opinions on various issues, including a stronger democratic identity and more assertive voice regarding insufficient spending on welfare, social problems, and racial issues (Hodge, 2003, 2004). This study takes this notion a step further by differentiating IV-E MSW students from other MSW students, and drills down into characteristics, preferences, and goals particularly suitable for work in public child welfare. The findings support CalSWEC's efforts to recruit and select students as racially and ethnically diverse as the California child welfare system, and students committed to practice areas and client populations most commonly associated with the public child welfare system. With findings in other studies demonstrating the importance of commitment to the field, the findings in this study offers the prospect of continuous cohorts of MSWs committed to child welfare and likely to remain in the field.

Turnover of social workers in child welfare is costly for agencies and families. For agencies it means increased costs of recruitment and training. For caseworkers it means filling in the gaps until replacements are hired. For children and families it leads to higher rates of maltreatment (Wagner et al., 2006), and negatively impacts permanency (Flower et al., 2005).

The link between retention and commitment in child welfare has been well documented (Mor Barak et al., 2001; Ellett et al., 2003; Ellis et al., 2006; Smith, 2005). When IV-E programs recruit students who express a commitment to child welfare, it is apt to lead to increased retention of the MSWs in public child welfare agencies. With the connection between the IV-E students in this study and the IV-E MSWs in CalSWEC's retention study, the findings in both studies validate that notion. The benefit to the field of child welfare is that CalSWEC MSWs have high retention rates in public child welfare agencies (Jacquet et al., 2007; Jones & Okamura, 2000).

The long-term effect of infusing the child welfare workforce with committed IV-E MSW can be thought of in terms of path dependency, theorized by North (1990), and based on the idea that a body or system once set in motion will continue to move. Path dependency functions with positive feedback and increasing returns. It can be viewed as a circular feedback loop between policies and the extent of the political and moral support

afforded them, which over time can produce positive effects (Rothstein, 1998). Applied to child welfare, when increased numbers of IV-E MSWs with a commitment to child welfare are supported in their work and careers the effect could mean positive incremental change in the system.

CalSWEC's policy to target child welfare workers who wish to obtain advanced degrees to increase their knowledge and skills in social work was supported by the data in this study. Significantly more CalSWEC MSWs who worked in child welfare before getting their degrees remained in child welfare after completing their work obligation than did those with no prior work experience in child welfare (Jacquet et al., 2007). When committed child welfare workers are provided with the opportunity to earn a professional MSW degree it becomes a win/win situation for the workers and the field of child welfare.

This study demonstrates that CalSWEC's IV-E programs and policies have made strides in their goals to recruit students with the characteristics, attitudes and commitment for service to the disadvantaged, the poor, and children and families. With the shortages in professionally trained social workers in California, particularly in public child welfare, the results of this study frame a promising future for the field.

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