Social Work Perspectives of Nonprofit Agency Research Capacity and Culture

Presented to the Valley Providers Collaborative

November 10, 2016

Malawi, Africa

1992-1993 – Peace Corps Volunteer in the City of Blantyre, Homecraft Division

Literature

- Use of evidence-based practices (EBPs) is important (Howard, McMillen & Pollio, 2003).

- If agency capacity and culture do not support research and evaluation activities, the likelihood of using those research activities is diminished (Gandelman, DeSantis & Rietmeijer, 2006).

- When workplace culture is perceived by social workers as supportive, invested in research-based practices, and client-focused, they are less likely to experience burnout, remain in the job longer, be more satisfied with their work, and use research-based practices such as EBPs (Falkoski, 2012).

Current Study

Describe and compare
- workplace culture,
- the use of research-based practices, and
- continuous professional development

Focusing on nonprofit agencies in the San Fernando Valley

Who are these people?

- MSW research students (N=48; 31 face-to-face and 17 online)
- Comfort with research measured using the 9-item Research Self-Efficacy Scale (RSES) (Holden, Barker, Meenaghan, & Rosenberg, 1999)
  - Time 1 – before first research class (January 2013)
  - Time 2 – after first research class (May 2013)
  - Time 3 – after two more research classes (May 2014)
  - Time 4 – one year after graduation (July – August 2015; n=35)
- In-depth interviews conducted (September – October 2015; n=19)

Interview Questions

Greetings
- How have you been for the past year?!
  - What are you doing now?
  - Are you employed as a social worker?
    - If not, why not?
- Tell me a little bit about your current work situation.
  - Type of organization
  - Cliental served / caseload
  - Number of employees
  - Are you the only social worker? Part of a team?

Job Specific
- What does an average day look like for you?
- What types of resources do you access to help you do your job? Staff? Library? Research?
- If you were describing your job to a friend, what would you say about it?
- What are the barriers to you doing your job well?

Organization/Agency Specific
- What does your organization/agency do well?
- What could your organization/agency do better?
- Tell me about the culture of your organization.
- If you were describing your organization/agency to a friend, what would you say about it?

Education
- Looking back, what do you remember most about your education/time in school?
- Academically, what did you find most helpful about your education/CSUN?
- Now that you've been out for a year, what do you wish you had learned while you were in school?

Final Thoughts
- Is there anything you can think of that you would like to add? What have I missed?!

Current Sample

Name*	Cohort	Agency Setting	Agency Size	Caseload
Maria	Online	Clinic	Big	10
Joey	F2F – 2 year	Clinic	Big	25-30
Harold	Online	Group Home	Small	4
Karissa	F2F – 2 year	Medical / Palliative Care	Big	70-80
Sam	F2F – 2 year	Clinic	Big	11
Alexis	F2F – 2 year	Hospital	Small	49
Sandy	F2F – 3 year	Residential Youth Pgm	Big	45
Stacy	F2F – 2 year	Hospital	Small	20-30
Diane	F2F – 2 year	Hospital	Small	5
Mateo	Online	Clinic	Big	14-16
Maureen	F2F – 2 year	Hospital	Small	150

*all names are pseudonyms

Workplace Culture

- Support of fellow employees

- Support of supervisors

- Organizational effort

- Agency values/mission
  - Social work values vs. organizational values

- Job stress

Structured vs. Flexible

- Big agencies (n=6) are identified as structured or rigid in their expectations of staff
  - Money
  - Time
  - Use of EBPs

- More variability in small agencies, with half perceived as structured and half perceived as flexible.

Use of Research-Based Practice

Research vs. Resources

- "I use the internet"
  - Google, Yahoo, 211, Google Scholar...

- No access to necessary tools

- No research occurs

- Research is available, but it's done by others

It was actually really funny when I was sitting at a group meeting and they started talking about the research project, and they were throwing out terms that I had heard in the research class and I was like "oh my God, I know all this! This makes sense to me now." I'm not just sitting there like "...umm..." It was surprising. Especially because I didn't expect it in this job –
Alexis, small agency

Sporadic EBP use

1. Not at all
2. Not identified as EBP
3. Use, but no real training
4. Regularly use with training provided

- CBT and MAP most common

- DBT and IPT mentioned

Resources vs. Research

- Finding/learning about resources
  - Pride in providing for everyone – links back to culture

- Resources provided/readily available
  - Binder
  - Collaborating/Networking

- Client Autonomy vs. Social Worker Service – who does the work?

Continuous Professional Development

Formal

- Training in EBPs occurred at <u>big</u> agencies

Informal

- Training in EBPs occurred at <u>big</u> and <u>small</u> agencies

- Organic – depended on supervisor or social worker

"Other" Training

Timing of Training

Recommendations

1. Supervisors and colleagues are VERY important!

2. Training is useful
   1. Make sure it's clearly identified
   2. Timing matters – regular, consistent, training will help establish culture of success
   3. If agencies want people using EBPs, training needs to occur and there needs to be an expectation that an EBP will be the intervention of choice.

3. Appreciation is appreciated ☺

Thank You!

Special thanks to:

- Thomas E. Backer, Ph.D., Executive Director of Valley Nonprofit Resources for his unwavering support. Winning the HIRI Nonprofit Research Fellowship has been an invaluable experience.

- Rinet Sarkisyan and Noemi Quintanilla for their extraordinary work interviewing, transcribing, coding, and writing results. I'm really gonna miss you.

- The 19 former students who graduated in 2014 and enthusiastically shared their stories for this project. I still miss you!

Jodi L. Constantine Brown, Ph.D.

jodi.brown@csun.edu; 818-677-6364

References

- Falkoski, J. (2012). Burnout, employee engagement, and coping in high-risk occupations. *Journal of Psychological Issues in Organizational Culture, 2*(4), 49-63. doi: 10.1002/jpoc

- Gandelman, A.A., DeSantis, L.M. & Rietmeijer, C.A. (2006). Assessing community needs and agency capacity – an integral part of implementing effective evidence-based interventions. *AIDS Education and Prevention, 18*(A), 32-43.

- Holden, G., Barker, K., Meenaghan, T., & Rosenberg, G. (1999). Research self-efficacy: A new possibility for educational outcomes assessment. *Journal of Social Work Education, 35*, 463-476.

- Howard, M.O., McMillen, C.J., & Pollio, D. E. (2003). Teaching evidence-based practice: Toward a new paradigm for social work education. *Research in Social Work Practice, 13*(2), 234-259.