

1988 Graduating Master's Level Social Work Students' Interest in Working with Aging

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BACKGROUND

- Service needs of aging populations are increasing dramatically
- World wide currently almost 500 million people are over 65 and this number to increase to over 1 billion by 2030 (NIA 2007)
- Utah has the 6th fastest growth rate of people over 65 (Utah Department of Human Services)
- US Department of Labor predicts rapid job growth demands among gerontology social work (US Department of Labor 2007)

OBJECTIVE

- To determine graduating master's level social worker's interest in working with an aging population
- To see how interest in working with elderly compares with other traditional social work populations
- To determine how clinical and educational exposure affects practice interests

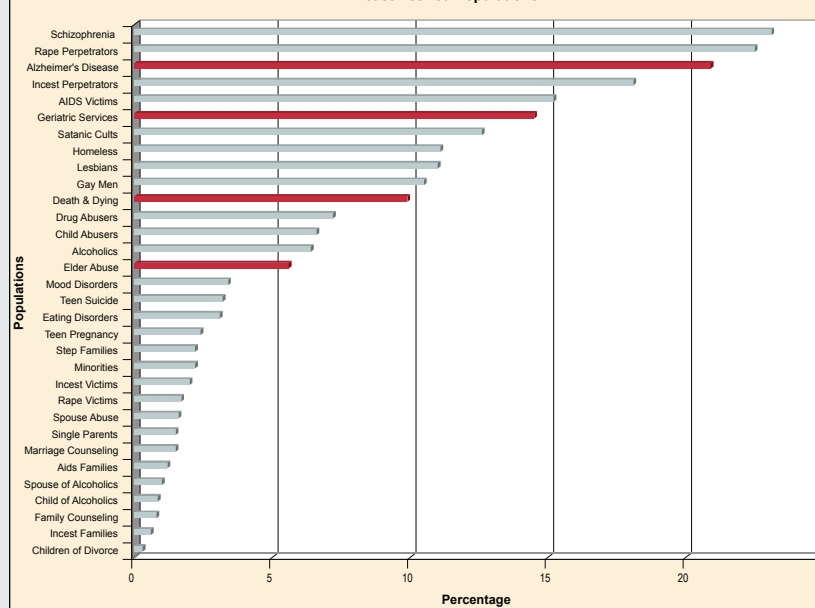
METHODS

- Practice preference surveys were mailed to 100 social work graduate schools around the US for distribution to students
- The survey asked for a ranking of interest in working with and clinical and classroom exposure to selective population using a 1-5 Likert-scale (1=low 5=high)
- Participants were also asked to list 3 most and 3 least desired populations
- Amount of classroom and clinical exposure was compared to interest to determine correlation
- Spearman correlation coefficients were calculated to compare survey responses

RESULTS

- 1050 surveys were returned and analyzed
- Of the 32 populations queried, 3 of the 4 least desired populations were related to aging
- The desire to work with a population was significantly correlated with classroom exposure ($\rho = 0.714, z=3.97$) and particularly clinical experience with the population ($\rho = 0.769, z=4.28$)
- The amount of classroom work and clinical exposure to a population also were very highly correlated ($\rho = 0.926, z=5.156$)

Frequency of Population Listed as Least Desirable



Relative Interest & Experience with Selected Populations

Population	Desirable Mean	Classroom Mean	Clinical Mean
Alzheimer's Disease	2.14	1.80	1.80
Elder Abuse	2.35	1.87	1.69
Rape Perpetrators	2.38	2.13	1.76
Geriatric Services	2.47	2.13	2.34
Satanic Cults	2.47	1.47	1.49
Gay Men	2.51	2.09	1.81
Lesbians	2.54	2.09	1.81
Incest Perpetrators	2.59	2.44	2.08
Death and Dying	2.67	2.36	2.22
AIDS Victims	2.78	2.66	2.83
Schizophrenia	2.80	3.03	2.78
AIDS Families	2.95	2.05	1.48
Alcoholics	2.96	2.77	2.85
Drug Addictions	3.06	2.70	2.86
Homeless	3.07	3.05	3.04
Mood Disorders	3.09	3.05	3.04
Eating Disorders	3.25	2.31	2.06
Spouse of Alcoholics	3.26	2.62	2.81
Rape Victims	3.27	2.41	2.39
Spouse Abuse	3.34	2.75	2.72
Incest Families	3.36	2.61	2.47
Child Abuse	3.47	2.97	3.02
Incest Victims	3.48	2.66	2.83
Teen Pregnancy	3.52	2.57	2.51
Teen Suicide	3.57	2.57	2.38
Children of Alcoholics	3.57	2.68	3.05
Minorities	3.58	3.35	3.35
Step Families	3.61	2.70	2.87
Single Parents	3.74	2.83	3.22
Couples of Divorce	3.84	2.81	3.12
Couples Counseling	3.91	3.34	2.91
Family Counseling	4.10	3.37	3.32

*Each score represents the mean on a 1-5 Likert-scale. 1=lowest 5=highest

CONCLUSIONS

- Based on the 1988 data there is a critical lack of interest in working with aging among social workers
- Clinical and classroom exposure have a significant impact on desire to work with clinical populations
- Institutions and agencies seeking to increase students desire to work with the elderly should increase clinical and classroom training opportunities