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The Views of NASW Members in One State Toward Social Action

Janet C. Dickinson, PhD

Background

We all know that social workers are supposed to engaged in advocacy—but do they? This article is based on a 2003 survey of NASW members regarding attitudes about social action in one southeastern state. This article explores the relationships between attitudes about social action and the following demographic factors: sex, age, race, region of the country of MSW and where raised, length of time in state, employment status, type of agency in which respondent works, political affiliation, professional orientation, and extent of volunteer participation before, during, and after graduate school.

Jansson (2003) provides the following rationales for professional social workers to participate in policy advocacy:

- To promote the values that lie at the heart of social work and that are included in the profession's code of ethics, such as social justice, fairness, self-determination, and confidentiality.
- To promote the well-being of clients, consumers, and citizens by shaping the human services system to conform to the latest findings of social science and medical research.
- To create effective opposition to groups and citizens that run counter to the code of ethics and the well-being of clients, consumers, and citizens, and to put pressure on decision makers to approve and retain policies that advance citizens' well-being.
- To change the composition of government so that legislators and decision makers are more likely to advance such values as fairness and social justice, and promote the well-being of citizens (p. 34).

"Policy advocacy" or "social action" refers to social work activity that works towards changing social policy affecting vulnerable populations (Schneider & Lester, 2001; Jansson, 2003). The types of advocacy that "social action" includes are "cause" advocacy and "legislative" advocacy, which go beyond "client" advocacy (Schneider & Lester, 2001).

Over the past 40 years a few social work organizations have tried to reinforce the social work role in influencing social policy. In 1987 a group of social policy educators formed the Association on Community Organization and Social Administration (2002) which encouraged the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) to focus more on social policy issues. CSWE appeared to do this with the 1992/94 CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAs) (CSWE, 1992/94, 2001). Also, the NASW Code of Ethics approved in 1979 contained stronger guidelines for social action and the Code passed in 1996 was even stronger (Reamer, 1998; NASW, 1999). However, social work researchers still bemoan the gap between social work ethics, that includes social action, and actual social work practice that too often does not include social action (Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Specht & Courtney, 1994; Lens & Gibelman, 2000; Brill, 2001; Schneider & Lester, 2001).

Previous Studies

Reeser and Epstein (1990) surveyed a sample of NASW members in 1968 and 1986. The 1986 survey was done using the national NASW mailing list. They found that 37 percent of respondents approved the professional goal of "societal change" and 23 percent agreed with the goal of "attention and resources to the poor." They also found that respondents had much higher agreement with statements regarding consensus strategies, or institutionalized conflict (filing formal complaints and political campaigning), than with noninstitutionalized conflict (organizing and supporting protest groups).

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Reeser and Epstein (1990) also looked at the relationships of various demographic factors and social activism. In the 1968 survey, male respondents were significantly more likely to approve of the following: 1) activist goals, 2) public welfare conflict. 3) institutionalized social action behavior, 4) and noninstitutionalized social action behavior. However, in the 1986 sample this difference disappeared and women were slightly higher on some of these measures of social activism.

Reeser and Epstein (1990) also found that 1968 respondents who were under the age of 30 years were significantly more likely to approve of conflict strategies than respondents over the age of 60 years, while those over 60 years were more likely to approve of institutionalized social action behavior than respondents under the age of 30 years. In the 1986 sample, this difference by age was not found.

Reeser and Epstein (1990) also looked at political affiliations – Republican, Democrat, non-partisan, and left-wing alternative. In 1968, the "left-wing alternatives" showed significantly more approval for: activist goals, public welfare conflict, and noninstitutionalized social action behavior than any of the other three groups. Democrats showed more approval than Republicans for public welfare conflict and noninstitutionalized social action behavior. In 1984, the "left-wing alternatives" again showed significantly more approval for activist goals, public welfare conflict, noninstitutionalized social action behavior, and electoral social action behavior.

According to Reeser and Epstein (1990), in the 1968 survey, Blacks were significantly more likely to approve of the various measures of social activism. In the 1986 sample, Black respondents remained higher in their approval of all except conflict tactics in public welfare reform.

Reeser and Epstein (1990) also looked at role orientations of respondents. The three role orientations possible were professional orientation, careerist orientation, and client orientation. In 1968, five percent of respondents had a professional orientation, 27 percent had careerist orientations, and 37 percent had client orientations. In 1984 these rates were 25 percent, 35 percent, and 47 percent.

In 1989, Ezell (1993, 1994, 2001) randomly surveyed social workers in the state of Washington on attitudes regarding advocacy. Over 82 percent agreed with the statement that "advocacy should be a part of my official duties" and almost 93 percent agreed with the statement "advocacy is part of being a professional social worker" (2001). The advocacy activities that were practiced most often were examples of client advocacy (1994). Cause advocacy was practiced less often, such as "educating the public on an issue" (32.2 percent), "giving testimony to decision makers" (13.2%), "lobbying policy makers" (10 percent), and "influencing media coverage of an issue" (3.3 percent) (1994). When asked what keeps them from engaging in advocacy, the reason most respondents gave was lack of time. Other reasons were "lack of energy," "lack of resources," "not the best approach," and "a lack of training to do advocacy."

Methodology

In 1972, a small group of MSW students at a state university in one southeastern state surveyed the total state NASW membership regarding their attitudes toward social action; the survey elicited a 71 percent response rate (Furtick, Jones, Kesler, Maner, Sharwell, 1972). The 2003 research replicates that 1972 survey. The 1972 survey was modified slightly for use in 2003. Two sets of Likert-type items were included. The first group of attitude statements addresses the issue of general professional responsibility in relation to social action. The second group of statements addresses specific consensus and conflict social action tactics. A systematic sample was used to draw one third of the chapter's membership. Surveys were sent to 370 members by conventional mail.

Findings

Description of Respondents

The study was conducted beginning in March 2003. Of the 370 questionnaires mailed, 152 were returned for a response rate of 41 percent. Tables 1, 2, and 3 show the demographics of the respondents. The majority of respondents were over the age of 45 years, female, and white, and the majority received their MSWs in the southeastern U. S.

Table 1: Description of Respondents: Age, Sex, Race, Region of Country of Graduate Program

Descriptor	% of Respondents	Descriptor	% of Respondents
Ages		*Race*	
22-39 years	24.5%	White	79.4%
40-49 years	25.2	African American	18.1
50-59 years	36.4	Other	1.3
60+	13.9	Missing	1.3
Sex		*Regions of Country of MSWs*	
Female	85.2%	NE	12.9%
Male	14.8	SE	69
		NW	1.9
		SW	1.9
		MW	10.3

Table 2 reports responses on the education of the respondents' parents (used as a proxy for SES of childhood). The majority of those responding were raised in the southeast, and the vast majority had lived in the state for ten years or more.

Table 2: Description of Respondents: Fathers' and Mothers' Education, Region of Country in Which Raised, Years in the State

Descriptor	% of Respondents	Descriptor	% of Respondents
Fathers' Education		*Region of the Country Primarily Raised*	
1-9 years	7.1%	NE	16.8%
10-12 years	34.8	SE	57.4
13-16 years	38.1	NW	1.9
17+ years	18.7	SW	4.5
Mothers' Education		MW	16.1
1-9 years	14.8%	*Years Lived in the State*	
10-12 years	32.3	0-3 years	11%
13-16 years	30.3	4-9 years	17.4
17+ years	21.3	10+ years	71

Table 3 describes the respondents' employment status, the type agency in which they worked, and political affiliation. The majority was working full-time in the field of social work. Nineteen respondents did not answer the question about the type of agency they worked in, and 11 indicated a combination of different agency types so were excluded from the analysis. More respondents were in psychiatric settings or medical settings than elsewhere. Five respondents indicated that they considered themselves members of a few different political parties so were excluded from the analysis. Slightly more than half of the respondents were registered Democrats.

Table 3: Description of Respondents: Employment Status, Agency Type, and Political Affiliation

Descriptor	% of Respondents	Descriptor	% of Respondents
Employment Status		*Political Affiliation*	
Full-time (>20 hrs/week)	74.8%	None	13.5%
Part-time (<20 hrs/week)	11	Republican	13.5
Volunteer work in SW	0.6	Democrat	53.5
Employed but not in SW	0.6	Independent	16.1
Retired	3.9	Combination	3.2
Full-time SW student	3.2		
Agency Type			
Public Welfare	7.1%		
Psychiatric	20.6		
Family Service	5.2		
Medical	11.6		
Corrections	1.3		
School SW	3.2		
Academia	7.7		
Other	23.9		

Table 4 describes the extent of volunteer participation at three points in time – before, during, and after graduate school. The data does show that there was slightly more volunteer participation after graduate school than before graduate school. Since 143 of the respondents indicated whether they were politically active after graduate school, one might assume that 143 out of 155 respondents had their MSWs. However, only 139 of the respondents actually indicated the year that they received their MSWs.

Table 4: Extent of Volunteer Participation at Three Points in Time

Period of Time	% of Respondents	Period of Time	% of Respondents
Before Graduate School		*After Graduate School*	
None	17.4%	None	14.8%
Slightly	43.2	Slightly	32.9
Moderately	29	Moderately	31
Extensively	9	Extensively	13.5
Missing	1.3	Missing	7.7
During Graduate School			
None	23.9%		
Slightly	38.1		
Moderately	28.4		
Extensively	5.2		
Missing	4.5		

Table 5 contains reasons given for non-involvement in social action. The most frequent reasons given were lack of time or energy due to demands of job or family. Almost 28 percent of respondents indicated that they were currently active in social action on a volunteer basis at the time they completed the questionnaire.

Table 5: Reasons for Current Non-Involvement in Social Action

Reasons	% of Respondents
I do not have the inclination to become active	6.5%
I have not found any opportunities to participate that appeal to my interests	6.5
Legislation, such as the Hatch Act, or agency policy restricts my activities	3.2
I do not have the time or energy because of the demands of my job	12.9
I do not have the time or energy because of personal or family responsibilities	10.3
I do not have the time or energy because of demands of job and personal or family responsibilities	9
I am currently active	27.7

Respondents were asked where their primary obligation was (not shown). Five respondents did not answer this question. Of the respondents, 69.7 percent indicated their primary obligation was to clients, 20.6 percent indicated their profession, and 5.8 percent indicated their primary obligation was to their employer.

Response rates for statements regarding social action as a responsibility of individual social workers, the professional organization and social welfare agencies are in Table 6. There was fairly high, but not universal, agreement on these four statements which are all part of the NASW Code of Ethics.

Table 6: Percentages Who "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" with General Statements Regarding Social Work and Social Action

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree and Agree
1. Actions for improving social conditions should be a primary responsibility for all social workers.	33.5%	49%	82.5%
2. Social reform ideals should be a high priority of the social work profession.	36.1	52.9	89
3. Action undertaken by social workers for improving social conditions should be carried out through professional organizations.	21.3	52.9	74.2
4. Action for improving social conditions should be a function of every social work agency regardless of the method of specialization.	27.7	47.7	75.4

Table 7: Percentages Who "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" with Specific Tactics of Social Action

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree and Agree
1. Sharing its knowledge of the issues with the general public and with the policy makers in the form of "expert advisor."	50.3%	41.9%	92%
2. Writing letters to editors of newspapers to take a stand on the administration of public welfare.	42.6	49	91.6
3. Voluntarily speaking to a lay group concerning a social issue.	55.5	40	95.5
4. Working with an indigenous group such as welfare grievance committees to serve as advisor and resource person.	43.5	50.3	93.8
5. Encouraging clients to organize a union of common interests so they might be more powerful in obtaining their ends.	37.4	38.1	75.5
6. Taking up a sign and picketing or sitting down in a demonstration in sympathy with a client group.	11	27.7	38.7
7. Contacting local politicians in an effort to influence them on pending legislation.	59.4	38.1	97.5
8. Striking for better services for clients.	10.3	18.7	29
9. Striking for better conditions for SWs	11	21.9	32.9

Figure 1: Respondents' Mean Agreements with Statements Regarding Social Action

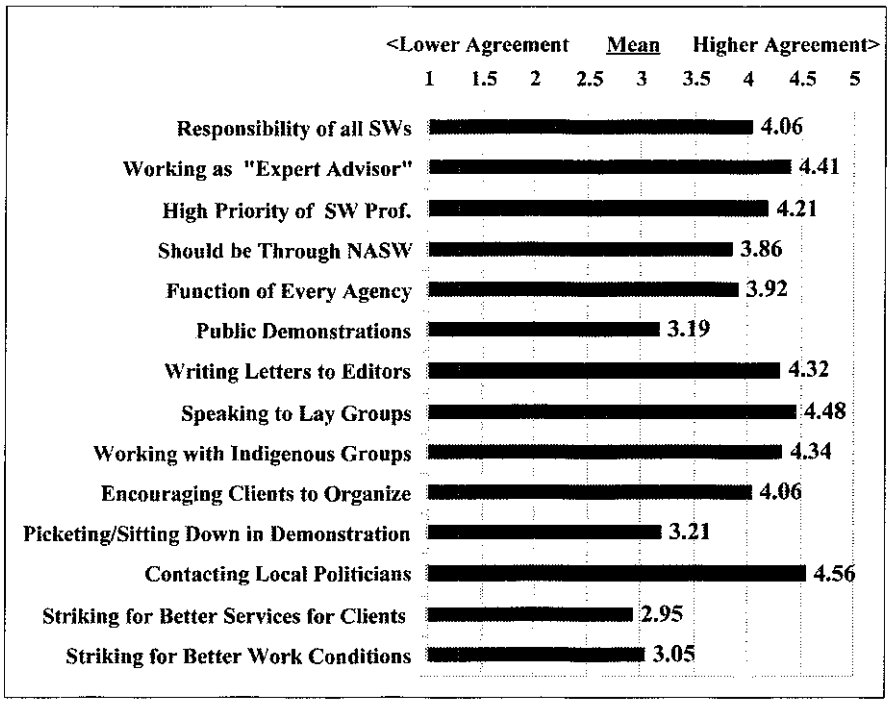

Table 7 (previous page) contains statements regarding specific tactics of social action. Respondents had high agreement with the consensus tactics of serving as an expert advisor, writing letters to editors, speaking to lay groups concerning social issues, working with indigenous groups, and contacting local politicians about pending legislation. The conflict tactics of demonstrating and striking had very low agreement.

Figure 1 describes the means of agreement for all of the statements depicted in Table 6 and Table 7. The higher the mean, the greater is the agreement. The following two statements had agreements over a mean of "4:" 1) social action should be the responsibility of all social workers; and 2) social action should be a high priority of the social work profession. As shown in Table 7, consensus tactics had the most support.

There were no statistically significant differences by sex, race, or whether or not a respondent was raised in the southeastern U. S. for any of the attitude statements. Older respondents were significantly less likely to agree with the statements: 1) encouraging clients to organize a union of common interests so they might be more powerful in obtaining their ends (p=.001); and 2) striking for better conditions for social workers (p=.038). However, the analysis of the relationship between age and extent of social action after graduate school showed a tendency of the older NASW members in this sample to be more politically active. The longer an individual had been in the state, the more likely they were to agree that actions for improving social conditions should be a primary responsibility for all social workers (sig. .034). There were no significant relationships between SES of childhood and attitudes towards social or political action.

Table 8: Mean Agreements with Statements and Political Affiliations (the higher the mean, the stronger the agreement)

Statements	Republicans (n=21)	Democrats (n=82)	Independents (n=25)	Unaffiliated (n=21)
1. Social actions should be a primary responsibility of all social workers (SWs).	3.67	4.11	4.20	4.05
2. SWs should serve as "expert advisor" to the general public and policy makers role.[a]	4.05	4.48	4.64	4.19
3. Social reform ideals should be a high priority of the social work profession.	3.81	4.29	4.32	4.1
4. Action for improving social conditions should be carried out through NASW.	3.62	3.95	3.88	3.81
5. Action for improving social conditions should be a function of every social work agency.	3.43	4.01	4.08	3.81
6. SWs should write letters to editors to take a stand on the administration of public welfare.	4.43	4.34	4.36	4.05
7. SWs should speak to lay groups on social issues.	4.33	4.55	4.48	4.38
8. SWs should work with an indigenous group as advisor and resource person.	4.1	4.39	4.46	4.33
9. SWs should encourage clients to organize to be more powerful in obtaining resources.	3.71	4.20	4.12	3.81
10. SWs should demonstrate with clients in sympathy with a client group.	2.9	3.37	3.24	2.9
11. SWs should contact local politicians to influence them on pending legislation.	4.62	4.58	4.60	4.43
12. SWs should strike for better client services.[a]	2.57	3.18	2.52	2.86
13. SWs should strike for better SW conditions [a]	2.62	3.25	2.76	2.95

[a] $p<.05$ intergroup difference in mean

Table 8 compares the mean agreement for respondents of indicating affiliation with different political parties. There were two significant intergroup differences in means; more respondents who were Democrats supported 1) serving as an "expert advisor," and 2) striking for better services. Another observation is that respondents who were Democrats or Independents indicated greater agreement with all of the statements ***except*** writing letters to editors and contacting politicians.

Table 9 (next page) compares means for respondents working in different types of agencies. There were some significant intergroup differences in means. Other interesting observations included: 1) respondents who worked in public welfare were in greatest agreement and those in psychiatric settings were in least agreement with the statement that social action should be a primary responsibility of all social workers; 2) respondents who worked in medical settings had the lowest agreement in the conflict strategies; and 3) respondents from academia were in the greatest agreement with encouraging clients to organize.

Table 10 (page 19) compares respondents' attitudes toward social action by the extent of their social action before, during, and after graduate school. Respondents who were likely to be more politically active before graduate schools were significantly more likely to agree with all of the statements ***except*** for the following: 1) action undertaken by social workers for improving social conditions should be carried out through professional

Table 9: Mean Agreements with Statements and Type of Agency (the higher the mean the stronger the agreement) excluding Family Service, Corrections, and School SW numbers <10

Statements	Public Welfare (n=11)	Mental Health (n=32)	Medical (n=18)	Academia (n=12)	Other (n=37)
1. Social actions should be a primary responsibility of all social workers (SWs).	4.27	3.91	3.83	4	4.03
2. SWs should serve as "expert advisor" to the general public and policy makers role.	4.55	4.34	4.28	4.58	4.43
3. Social reform ideals should be a high priority of the social work profession.	4.18	4.06	4.06	4.33	4.19
4. Action for improving social conditions should be carried out through NASW.	3.73	3.81	3.61	3.75	3.86
5. Action for improving social conditions should be a function of every social work agency.	4.36	3.75	3.44	4.17	3.86
6. SWs should write letters to editors to take a stand on the administration of public welfare.[a]	4.64	4.16	4.22	4.75	4.27
7. SWs should speak to lay groups on social issues.[a]	4.82	4.34	4.28	4.83	4.43
8. SWs should work with an indigenous group as advisor and resource person.	4.64	4.25	4.28	4.75	4.28
9. SWs should encourage clients to organize to be more powerful in obtaining resources.[a]	4	4.28	3.50	4.67	3.89
10. SWs should demonstrate with clients.[a]	3.36	3.23	2.56	3.92	3.22
11. SWs should contact local politicians to influence them on pending legislation.[a]	4.73	4.59	4.33	4.75	4.49
12. SWs should strike for better client services.	3.18	2.94	2.22	3.25	3.22
13. SWs should strike for better conditions for SWs.[a]	3.27	2.97	2.22	3.08	3.27

19 respondents did not answer the question about agency type and 26 answered more than 1 type of agency
[a] $p<.05$ intergroup difference in means

organizations; 2) encouraging clients to organize a union of common interests so they might be more powerful in obtaining their ends; 3) striking for better services for clients; and 4) striking for better conditions for social workers.

Respondents who were more politically active during graduate school were significantly more likely to agree with all of the statements ***except*** for the following: 1) working with an indigenous group such as welfare grievance committees to serve as advisor and resource person; and 2) encouraging clients to organize a union of common interests so they might be more powerful in obtaining their ends.

Respondents who were more politically active after graduate school were significantly more likely to agree with all of the statements ***except*** for: 1) action undertaken by social workers for improving social conditions should be carried out through professional organizations; 2) encouraging clients to organize a union of common interests so they might be more powerful in obtaining their ends; and 3) striking for better conditions for social workers.

Table 11 (page 20) shows the means of agreement based on whether respondents' primary obligation was to clients, the profession, or to their employer. Using analysis of variance, there were no significant intergroup differences in means. However, interesting observations can be made regarding: 1) the greater agreement with many of the statements when the primary obligation was to

Table 10: Pearson Correlations of Attitude Statements by Whether Respondents were Active in Social or Political Causes Before, During and after Graduate School

Statements	Before (n=153)	During (n=148)	After (n=143)
1. Actions for improving social conditions should be a primary responsibility for all social workers.	.199[a]	.339[b]	.204[a]
2. Sharing its knowledge of the issues with the general public and with the policy makers in the form of "expert advisor."	.197[a]	.222[b]	.256[b]
3. Social reform ideals should be a high priority of the social work profession.	.225[b]	.294[b]	.269[b]
4. Action undertaken by social workers for improving social conditions should be carried out through professional organizations.	.090	.232[b]	.135
5. Action for improving social conditions should be a function of every social work agency regardless of the method of specialization.	.213[b]	.229[b]	.237[b]
6. Writing letters to editors of newspapers to take a stand on the administration of public welfare.	.208[b]	.294[b]	.295[b]
7. Voluntarily speaking to a lay group concerning a social issue.	.184[a]	.263[b]	.314[b]
8. Working with an indigenous group such as welfare grievance committees to serve as advisor and resource person.	.171[a]	.154	.171[a]
9. Encouraging clients to organize a union of common interests so they might be more powerful in obtaining their ends.	.071	.117	.047
10. Demonstrating with a client group.	.214[b]	.306[b]	.292[b]
11. Contacting local politicians in an effort to influence them on legislation.	.211[b]	.298[b]	.412[b]
12. Striking for better services for clients.	.155	.241[b]	.218[b]
13. Striking for better conditions for SWs.	.148	.171[a]	.135

[a] <.05 [b] <.01

the profession, 2) greater agreement with a few statements when the primary obligation was to the clients, and 3) except for three statements, a fairly consistent trend for those feeling their primary obligation was to their employer to have less agreement, but, there were only nine respondents who fell in the last category.

Discussion

This study explores the relationships between attitudes about social action and various demographic variables for a sample of NASW members in one southeastern state. Regardless of the NASW Code of Ethics, only 82.5 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "actions for improving social conditions should be a primary responsibility for all social workers." This statement had greater approval from respondents in public welfare and academic settings. Similarly, 89 percent "strongly agreed" or "agreed" "social reform ideals should be a high priority of the social work profession." These findings were consistent with Ezell's (2001) findings. In the current study, respondents who indicated they were Democrats, Independents or had no political affiliation were more likely than Republicans to agree with both of these statements. Also, respondents who were socially active before, during and after graduate school were significantly more likely to agree with both of these statements than those who were less active.

While "striking for better services for clients"

Table 11: Mean Agreements with Statements by Primary Obligation (the higher the mean, the stronger the agreement)

Statements	Profession (n=32)	Clients (n=108	Employer (n=9)
1. Social actions should be a primary responsibility of all social workers (SWs).	4.38	4.02	4.11
2. SWs should serve as "expert advisor" to the general public and policymakers role.	4.37	4.44	4.22
3. Social reform ideals should be a high priority of the social work profession.	4.41	4.21	3.89
4. Action for improving social conditions should be carried out through NASW.	4.16	3.8	3.56
5. Action for improving social conditions should be a function of every social work agency.	4.09	3.91	3.56
6. SWs should write letters to editors to take a stand on the administration of public welfare.	4.44	4.31	4.11
7. SWs should speak to lay groups on social issues.	4.56	4.47	4.44
8. SWs should work with an indigenous group as advisor and resource person.	4.31	4.39	4.33
9. SWs should encourage clients to organize to be more powerful in obtaining resources.	4.03	4.12	3.78
10. SWs should demonstrate with clients.	3.22	3.26	2.89
11. SWs should contact local politicians to influence them on pending legislation.	4.72	4.53	4.56
12. SWs should strike for better client services.	3.13	2.95	2.44
13. SWs should strike for better conditions for SWs.	3.25	3.01	2.56

generally had a low approval rating, it did have more approval from respondents in the following settings: public welfare, psychiatric, and academic settings. Social action tactics involving demonstrations and strikes had minimal support, while serving as expert advisor, writing letters to editors, speaking to lay groups, organizing client groups, and contacting policy makers had strong approval. Social work educators should either teach about the need for all of these tactics at various times or they should teach clearer skills and require more practice in using tactics with which many social workers are already more comfortable. But, perhaps, some educators will see the need to teach both. These findings regarding conflict tactics were similar to Reeser and Epstein (1990) findings in the 1986 sample, except that their population approved of the conflict strategies to a greater extent, but still significantly less than for the consensus strategies.

In response to the statement that "action undertaken by social workers for improving social conditions should be carried out through professional organizations," 74.2 percent strongly agreed or agreed. Respondents who were more politically active during graduate school were significantly more likely to agree with this statement. Respondents who were more politically active before, during, and after graduate school were significantly more likely to agree with many of the conflict tactics. Respondents who were politically active before and after graduate school were significantly more likely to agree with the statement that social workers should work with indigenous groups as advisor or resource person. Respondents who

were politically active during graduate school were significantly more likely to approve of social workers striking for better services for clients and better conditions for social workers. Since the extent of respondents' activity before graduate school was a good predictor of later attitudes, this supports the contention of some that people choosing to go to a social work graduate program often enter the program already having values lending themselves to social work. The findings also support the need to encourage social activism during graduate school.

Recommendations for BSW and MSW Education

There are various ways in which policy practice skills can be strengthened through academic programs and continuing education. While some readers may think that the fact that 83 percent of respondents agreed, "actions for improving social conditions should be a primary responsibility for all social workers" is a very decent percentage, since this responsibility is part of the NASW Code of Ethics, the agreement should be closer to 100 percent. The Code of Ethics should be reflected in all course work.

The study findings that respondents in mental health and medical settings had less agreement with many of the statements in the survey than those in public welfare and other settings, demonstrates the need for social workers in clinical academic tracks to receive policy practice content in their coursework. The parts of the Code that more specifically address direct practice issues, such as confidentiality, are well known by all practitioners, while the parts of the Code that address the professional responsibility to work towards a more just society are often given significantly less attention in academia and continuing education. Academic programs and continuing education should emphasize this responsibility as a part of discussions about the social policy problems that affect our clients. Very concrete examples of problems that affect clients of direct practitioners are managed care limitations, social work licensing and certification policies, child welfare policies, lack of insurance parity for mental health treatment, and discrimination against the mentally ill.

A very important point to make is that all courses, including direct practice courses, should include components on policy practice since whatever work a direct practitioner can do is dependent on policies (Popple & Leighninger, 2004).

Since this study found that students who were politically active during graduate school were more likely to be politically active after graduation, it is important for educators to include actual practice in political action as part of course requirements.

Also, since the findings indicated that respondents were less comfortable with conflict strategies, some of the focus in courses should be on increasing the student comfort level with conflict strategies. A part of this is increasing the empowerment of professional social workers, and empowerment often comes from a sense of outrage over a society that is not just for all of its members. Another part of empowerment is to believe that a social worker has a right to question and influence unfair social policies. Since the findings of this study indicated that students who were politically active before graduate school were more likely to be active after graduate school, programs need to enable students to maintain that passion. For students who do not yet have that passion, programs need to teach, and provide opportunities to practice, the skills necessary to carry out a primary mission of social work, the altering of societal systems that are unjust.

There are great resources available to aid the teaching of these skills. *Becoming an Effective Policy Advocate: From Policy Practice to Social Justice* (Jansson, 2003) is one such resource. Jansson writes about various strategies and tactics that can be used in various circumstances in organizational settings, community settings, and in legislative settings. Jansson describes specific skills that are needed and gives examples of their application. Examples of tactics are using the mass media, taking a personal position with people in power, seeking positions of power, empowering others, organizing pressure on decision-makers, and

developing and using personal power resources.

Jansson (2003) and Schneider and Lester (2001), in *Social Work Advocacy*, provide frameworks to use in developing strategies for addressing various policy problems. Both frameworks have the same basic components:

- Identifying specific policy issues or problems
- Identifying values, ideology, interests and goals of stakeholders
- Setting goals
- Gathering facts about such things as extent and gravity of problem and how different groups of people are affected by the problem
- Planning a strategy the overall plan for addressing the problem
- Selecting tactics, specific skills and behaviors, that will be used in keeping with the strategy to diminish or eradicate the problem
- Organizing leadership for carrying out the strategy (these leaders should be involved beginning with Step #2)
- Building coalitions
- Evaluating whether goals have been met and positive and negative outcomes of advocacy efforts
- Back to drawing board if necessary

Another resource for educators is the organization, Influencing State Policy (ISP), http://www.statepolicy.org, a resource for teaching policy practice skills on the state level. The website has a reading list for policy practice, in general. The organization also offers a quarterly newsletter, *Influence*, that provides suggestions for teaching policy practice. The Fall 2003 (Vol. 7, No. 2) issue has a list of ideas for teaching hands-on policy practice skills for BSW and MSW students. This list was compiled from a Faculty Development Institute of the 49th Annual Program Meeting of CSWE. Some of the skills can be taught as parts of coursework or as part of field practica. The full list is available on the Statepolicy.org website. Examples of ideas from this list that can be part of coursework or field practica are:

- Have students identify a state or federal bill or piece of local legislation of interest to the field agency and analyze how its passage would affect the agency and the agency's clients, staff, and supporters.
- Have students track local, state, or federal legislation in an area of interest to the agency.
- Suggest that students write a letter to a local, state, or federal elected official supporting, opposing, or recommending changes to a proposed bill (if this is permitted given the agency's status; if not, the student should do this as a private citizen).
- Have students write a letter to the editor supporting, opposing, or recommending changes to a proposed piece of local, state, or federal legislation of interest to the field agency. (ISP, 2003)

All social work educators can and should continuously upgrade their teaching resources regarding policy practice. This may be done through CSWE meetings and participation in person and/or online in such groups as the Social Welfare Policy and Practice Group (http://www.policymagic.org/swppg.htm). Another opportunity for educators to upgrade their policy practice teaching skills is The Policy Conference that has been sponsored by the University of South Carolina School of Social Work since 1999. Co-sponsors since 1999 have been ISP, CSWE, the Association of Community Organization and Social Administration (ACOSA), NASW-PACE (Political Action for Candidate Election), and the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Social Work. This conference is also a good resource for practitioners (University of South Carolina, 2004).

The premise of social work field placements is that, when students practice professional behaviors in a field placement, they are more likely to con-

tinue to use these behaviors after they graduate. A 2003 national survey of 171 BSW programs found that students in 158 of the 171 programs had learning contracts for their field placements, but that only 115 of these programs had an objective regarding policy practice for all students in the learning contracts. One hundred and seven of the 171 programs responding required a policy paper as a seminar assignment. Cumulatively, the 171 programs had 4,872 students in field placements and 124 of these students were in placements that were primarily policy placements (more than 50 percent policy practice).

Thirty-six percent of respondents believed that placements that were primarily policy practice were "very compatible" with the generalist model, 42 percent respondents believed they were "somewhat compatible," and 22 percent responded "not sure," "should be discouraged," "incompatible," or they did not answer the question. Another question asked what proportion of time the respondents believed BSW students should engage in policy-related activities, if they are not in placements that consist of more than 50 percent policy practice activities. Twelve percent of the respondents believed that policy practice should be about 40 percent of a BSW student's time, 34 percent of the respondents believed that BSW students should spend 20 percent of their time or more on policy related activities, and 42 percent of respondents answered that it was "difficult to distinguish" whether the BSW student was doing direct practice or policy practice, and 4 percent believed that policy practice should make up less than five percent of a student's time (Dickinson, 2004, Under Development).

If, according to the NASW Code of Ethics, policy practice is supposed to be a responsibility of all professional social workers, then a learning objective for all field students should be that they demonstrate competence in the application of policy practice strategies and tactics to an identified social or policy problem.

Continuing Education

While many of these suggestions are easier to implement in academic settings, they all can also be used in continuing education workshops. Continuing education is also necessary to reinforce these skills. The professional support for using policy practice skills comes from the NASW Code of Ethics:

> **6.04 Social and Political Action**
> Social workers should engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully. Social workers should be aware of the impact of the political arena on practice and should advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice. (1996/1999 Code of Ethics).

The website for the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) lists 50 states that have licensing or certification boards that are members of their organization (ASWB, 2002). The Policy Manual of the ASWB contains one reference to continuing education on policy practice on the part of licensed social workers. "Administration or social policy" is the sixth of seven topics suggested as appropriate continuing education topics for licensed social work practitioners. The seventh topic is social work ethics (ASWB, 2001). One service the ASWB provides is the Approved Continuing Education (ACE) program. Of the approximately 75 ACE-approved providers listed, none offer continuing education in policy practice (ASWB, 2004). The rare mention of policy practice is ironic in light of the fact that it was policy practice on the part of NASW chapters that established state regulation of and for social workers. Unfortunately, and ironically, social workers may now choose to be licensed by the state and not join NASW. One strategy for increasing continuing education in policy practice is for the ASWB

to put more emphasis on it or to require a percentage of CE hours to be on policy practice.

NASW is another resource for policy practice continuing education. Also national NASW is the profession's official organization for influencing policy at the federal level and the state chapters for influencing policy at the state levels, depending on the extent of their staffing. NASW members and non-NASW members can make use of the national NASW website for advocacy information. The NASW Advocacy link on the NASW website provides information on: 1) grassroots advocacy, which includes information on contacting U.S. representatives and senators; 2) the Legislative Advocacy Network; 3) NASW key issues and positions; 4) the status of key issues in Congress, the White House, and federal agencies; 5) PACE (Political Action for Candidate Election) which endorses and contributes to candidates from any party who support NASW's policy agenda; and 6) publications regarding past advocacy actions of NASW (NASW, 2004a). NASW also offers: 1) a publication entitled "Promoting Economic Security Through Social Welfare Legislation"; 2) a Lobby Day toolkit; 3) the "Government Relations/Political Action Unit Quarterly Report;"; 4) a link to look up legislation; and 5) a legislative glossary (NASW, 2004a).

NASW also has an approval process for continuing education opportunities. The regulatory social work boards of 30 states also accept the NASW-approved continuing education opportunities for meeting their continuing education requirements (NASW, 2004b). While many opportunities are listed, too many to count, the only one coming close to policy practice is a workshop entitled "A Framework for Understanding Poverty – National Tour" presented by Aha! Process, Inc. and is offered in a few different locations. Almost all of the workshops address setting up a private practice, protecting yourself from malpractice, and specific treatment modalities with identified populations (NASW, 2004c). It appears that NASW is trying to compete with the services of the ASWB in order to keep or bring direct practitioners back into the NASW fold. They could do this while also emphasizing the need for policy practice continuing education. Almost 83 percent of the respondents in this survey agreed with the statement, also included in the NASW Code of Ethics, that "actions for improving social conditions should be a primary responsibility for all social workers." We expect and almost mandate policy practice but, if we do not provide the opportunity for policy practice continuing education, are we really equipping social workers to carry out this expectation and conform to their Code of Ethics.

An anecdotal reason that the writer has been given a few times for this lack of more opportunities to learn about policy practice is that social workers do not want to attend this kind of workshop. Regulatory bodies are supposedly established to primarily protect the public, but we also know that they often are set up to protect the profession. Policy practice primarily addresses that first motivation. How can we say that we are protecting the public if we are not concerned with, nor skilled to influence, policies at the national, state, and local level that dictate whether and which clients we can serve? From our social work training we know that the economy, educational policy, the legal system, and a myriad of other social welfare policies and services affect clients. Continuing education requirements should include learning and updating policy practice skills in order to do the most to create a society in which our clients can thrive. To quote a well-known question, "Which comes first, the chicken or the egg?" Do we first wait for individual social workers to get interested in policy practice OR do we raise the expectation that policy practice will be included in their practice, and increase the likelihood that it will be included, by offering policy practice skills training when various other social work skills are taught? Much of this needs to begin in BSW and/or MSW basic social work education but continuing education can reinforce what is learned in academic programs and teach skills to those who did not receive this message while in school.

The author has attended numerous policy workshops and the ones that were most helpful, while unfortunately rare, were those that taught

specific skills for influencing policy. Examples of topics that were the most helpful were: preparing for legislative testimony, talking to an individual legislator, and gathering facts to substantiate a problem. Workshops that inform participants about social problems and inadequate policies are a good beginning to motivate people, but this information without being taught the skills to alleviate the problems can be frustrating for busy social workers. This is similar to informing a mentally ill client of the symptoms and possible causes of his diagnosis, without teaching him or her how to deal with the symptoms and all the problems they have created. Jansson (2003) provides an excellent list of many policy practice skills (Table 3.1) that can be taught through separate continuing education sessions.

Conclusions

This study looked at the relationships of demographic variables to attitudes toward social action in a sample (N=370) of one state NASW chapter in 2003. Approximately fifteen percent of respondents felt neutral about or disagreed with the basic values reflected in the NASW Code of Ethics regarding the professional responsibility to "promote social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice." This aspect of the social work profession needs greater emphasis in the professional education of social workers.

Respondents had the highest approval for consensus tactics, such as being "expert advisor," writing letters to editors, voluntarily speaking to the public about social issues, serving as advisor or resource person for indigenous groups, and contacting politicians to try to influence legislation. Conflict tactics, such as demonstrating with and for clients, had approval from one-third or fewer respondents. Helping clients to gain power through organizing in order to obtain more resources was approved by about 75 percent of the respondents. Recommendations were made for social work educators and those in continuing education for training social workers in the use of these various policy practice strategies and tactics.

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