Attitudes of Members in One NASW Chapter About Social Action: A 1972 and 2003 Comparison Study

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Janet C. Dickinson, PhD

Introduction

This article is based on surveys done in 1972 and 2003 on attitudes toward social action of NASW members in one southeastern state. The objectives of this research were to: 1) describe the demographic changes in NASW membership between 1972 and 2003; and 2) determine whether there were any significant changes in attitudes toward social action between these two points in time. A 2004 article looks at the relationships between the 2003 demographic characteristics and attitudes toward social action and provides recommendations for the education of social workers in academia and in continuing educations (Dickinson, 2004).

Important factors that should influence social action on the part of social workers are the political and economic climates in which the social worker practices and the extent of client needs that are not being met by federal and local governments. However, there is real concern that unmet needs do not always spur social workers to respond with an increase in social action. The economic and political climates of interest for this research are the climates in 1972 and 2003. In 1972, the country was emerging from the 1960s and involved in the Vietnam War when domestic issues lost their place on the national political agenda. In 2003, domestic issues again are taking a backseat to concerns about military defense and war.

Organizational Efforts to Increase the Social Activism of Social Workers

There have been various efforts over the past 40 years to strengthen the social work role in influencing social policy. The first NASW Code of Ethics was adopted in 1960. That first Code was limited in addressing social action on the part of professional social workers. In 1968 the NASW Board of Directors, through their task force on urban crisis and public welfare problems, passed the first policy statement regarding the professional responsibility to change social systems in order to better meet the needs of vulnerable populations (Grosser, 1973). The 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)

In response to a lack of attention on the part of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) to social policy issues at its Annual Program Meetings (APM), a group of social policy educators started organizing in 1980 and in 1987 formed the Association on Community Organization and Social Administration (ACOSA). In the early 1980s, the Symposium on Community Organization and Social Administration (COSA) was held the day prior to the CSWE APM and gradually, and with a great deal of effort on the part of its members, became a recognized part of the APM. In 1991, ACOSA members attended a meeting at APM and had substantial input into CSWE's discussions on the inclusion of macro content in the proposed Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) (Association of Community Organization and Social Administration, 2002).

Due in large part to this pressure from ACOSA, CSWE did strengthen standards for including curriculum content on social welfare policy (CSWE, 2001). According to the 1992/94 EPAS, M.S.W. and B.S.W. graduates should be able to "analyze current social policy within the context of historical and contemporary factors that shape policy. Content must be presented about the political and organizational processes used to influence policy, the process of policy formulation, and the frameworks for analyzing social policies in light of principles of social and economic justice." (CSWE, 1992/94)

Due to this increased emphasis by CSWE on teaching social action in BSW and MSW programs, and the increased emphasis in the NASW Code of

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Ethics, one would expect that there would be significant changes between 1972 and 2003. However, social work researchers still discuss the gap between social work ethics that include social action and actual social work practice that too often does not include social action (Lens & Gibelman, 2000; Brill, 2001; Schneider & Lester, 2001). The findings from this survey in 1972 and 2003 will be compared to determine whether these changes have occurred in this population.

Literature Review

Table 1 shows a comparison of the findings of six surveys, in addition to the current survey, between 1968 and 2003 of attitudes about or actual social action on the part of social workers. Epstein surveyed New York City NASW members in 1968 and Reeser surveyed national NASW members in 1986 (Reeser & Epstein, 1990). In the 1968 survey, 53 percent of the respondents approved the professional goal of "societal change" compared to 37 percent

Table 1: Comparison of Survey Findings from 1968 to 2003

Authors, Year of Survey (Reference)	Sample	SampleSize	Findings
Epstein, 1968 (Reeser & Epstein, 1990)	NYC NASW Chapter members	1020	Respondents approval rates of the professional goals of: • "societal change" (53%) • "attention and resources to the poor" (51%) Respondents approval rates of the following strategies: • Studies and expert testimony (95%) • Communication with public officials (95%) • Supporting protest groups (44%) • Organizing protest groups (28%)
Furtick et al., 1972 (1972)	South Carolina NASW members	219	Respondents agreement rates with: • "Actions for improving social conditions should be a primary responsibility of all sw" (87%) • Contacting local politicians (>90%) • Writing letters to editors (86%) • Demonstrating with clients (32%)
Wolk, Not Available (1981)	Michigan NASW members	289	In the previous four years, respondents had participated in: • Testifying (6%) • Campaigning (30%) • Letters to Congress (49%)
Reeser, 1984 (Reeser & Epstein, 1990)	National NASW members	682	Respondents approval of the professional goals of: • "societal change" (37%) • "attention and resources to the poor" (23%) Respondents approval of the following strategies: • Studies and expert testimony (90%) • Communication with public officials (96%) • Supporting protest groups (48%) • Organizing protest groups (41%)
Ezell, 1989 (1994)	Washington State Certified Social Workers	353	Based on 1994 article, in the previous year, respondents had participated in: • Educating the public (80%) • Testifying (61%) • Lobbying (53%) • Campaigning (40%)
Hamilton & Fauri, 1997 (2001)	New York State Certified Social Workers	242	In the previous two years, respondents had: • Contacted government officials (60%) • Participated in demonstrations (25%) • Testified before legislative body (3%)
Dickinson, 2003 (Current Survey)	South Carolina NASW members	155	Respondents agreement rates with: • "Actions for improving social conditions should be a primary responsibility of all sw" (83%) • Contacting local politicians (98%) • Writing letters to editors (92%) • Demonstrating with clients (39%)

in 1986. In 1968, 51 percent approved of the goal of "attention and resources to the poor" compared to 23 percent in 1986. While one would expect some differences between attitudes in an NASW chapter in an urban area in the northeast U.S. and NASW members nationally, the direction of changes in the N.Y.C. survey is somewhat disturbing. Generally, Reeser and Epstein found that 1968 and 1984 respondents had much higher agreement with statements regarding consensus strategies (studies, expert testimony, and communication with public officials) than with statements regarding conflict strategies (organizing and supporting protest groups). The only exception was that 41 percent in the 1986 survey approved of organizing protest groups, while only 28 percent approved of this in 1968.

In 1989, Ezell (1993, 1994, 2001) randomly surveyed NASW members in the state of Washington on attitudes regarding advocacy. This population of social workers in the northwest may be more similar than a northeast sample to social workers in the southeast. About 90 percent of respondents indicated that they do advocacy as part of their job, about 75 percent use case advocacy and 25 percent advocate on behalf of a group of clients (1994). Over 82 percent agreed with the statement that "Advocacy should be a part of my official duties" and almost 93 percent agreed "advocacy is part of being a professional social worker" (2001). In the year prior to completing the survey, respondents had participated in "educating the public" (80 percent) "giving testimony to decision makers" (61 percent), "lobbying policy makers" (53 percent), and campaigning (40 percent) (1994). Ezell compared his findings with a survey Wolk did in 1981 in order to measure any changes in advocacy activity between the pre and post-Reagan. Political activities that increased during this time period were testifying and campaigning (1994).

Hamilton and Fauri (2001) surveyed 242 certified social workers (147 were NASW members) in New York State in 1997. They found that 60 percent of respondents had contacted government officials by phone, fax, letter, or email, and 25 percent

met with government officials in person. They also found that only three percent had testified before a federal, state, or government legislative body. Hamilton and Fauri found that "recruitment by a professional association to vote or to contact a government official is a significant predictor of political participation" (p<.0005).

Since these surveys used some different variables, it is difficult to make an exact comparison. Some of the surveys were based on attitudes, while others were based on actual participation. However, it appears that there may have been three cycles of attitudes about social action during this time – the more radical 1960s and early 1970s, the more conservative 1980s, and some increase of support for social action in the 1990s.

Methodology

In 1972, a small group of M. S. W. students at a large state university in a Southeastern State surveyed the total State NASW membership regarding their attitudes toward social action. The present study explores whether attitudes regarding social action have changed since 1972. In March 2003, every third member of the State's NASW Chapter was systematically surveyed.

The current survey asked a few demographic questions. The educational level of parents was used to approximate the socioeconomic level of respondents during their formative years. The 1972 survey was modified slightly for use in 2003, and 14 items were in the form of a Likert Scale where respondents indicated "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" in response to various statements about social action.

The findings from the 1972 survey are compared to the 2003 findings using cross tabulations and Pearson's x2 to compare social action at three points of time, before graduate school, during graduate school, and after graduate school and to compare respondents' feelings of obligation towards clients, the profession, and employers. T-tests for comparison of means are used to compare the 1972 and 2003 respondents' approval of various statements about social action. Levene's test for equality of means is used and specific significance for the

differences between 1972 and 2003 responses are provided.

For the current research, "social action" (also called "cause" advocacy and "legislative" advocacy) refers to social work activity that works towards changing social policy for vulnerable populations (Schneider & Lester, 2001). This is comparable to "policy practice" as defined by Jansson (2003).

Survey Instrument

The first group of attitude statements in the survey addresses the issue of professional responsibility: 1) all professional social workers should have the responsibility for improving social conditions; 2) social reform ideals should be a high priority of the social work profession; 3) social action should be carried out through the professional organization; and 4) every social agency, regardless of specialization, should engage in social action.

The second group of questions addresses agreement with specific tactics of social action. Many of the tactics are "Campaign" tactics, such as serving as an "expert advisor" to public groups and policymakers, writing letters to editors, speaking to a lay group about a social issue, serving as an advisor and resource person to an indigenous group, and personally lobbying a politician. Others are more "Contest" tactics - encouraging clients to organize to obtain ends, picketing, demonstrating, and striking.

Findings

Of the 370 questionnaires sent, 155 were returned for a response rate of 42 percent. The 2003 respondents were older, 20 percent more were female and five percent more were African American than the 1972 respondents. See Table 2. About the same proportion of respondents received their M. S. W. in the Southeast, 69 percent and 70 percent. The 1972 thesis did not break down the percentages that received their M. S. W. outside of the Southeastern U. S.. remained approximately the same, many more mothers, 21.3 percent, had completed graduate education, surpassing the percentage of fathers who had, 18.7 percent. Whereas 80 percent of 1972

Table 2: Description of Respondents: Age, Sex, Race, and Region of Country of MSW

Descriptor	2003 % of Respondents	1972 % of Respondents
Ages	(n=151)	(n=219)
22-29 years	8.6%	21%
30-34 years	8.6	15
35-39 years	7.3	9
40-44 years	8.6	9
45-49 years	16.6	11
50-54 years	20.5	9
55-59 years	15.9	9
60+	13.9	9
Sex	(n=155)	(n=219)
Female	85.2%	66%
Male	14.8	33
Race	(n=153)	(n-219)
White	79.4%	86%
African American	18.1	13
Other	1.3	1
Regions of Country of MSWs	(n=149)	(n=215)
NE	12.9%	*
SE	69	70%
NW	1.9	*
SW	1.9	*
MW	10.3	*

* Exact % not available

Table 3: Description of Respondents (continued): Fathers' and Mothers' Education, Region of Country Raised, Years in the State

Descriptor	2003 % of Respondents	1972 % of Respondents
Fathers' Education	(n=153)	(n=214)
1-5 years	1.3%	7%
6-9 years	5.8	14
10-12 years	34.8	31
13-16 years	38.1	28
17+ years	18.7	20
Mothers' Education	(n=153)	(n=214)
1-5 years	1.9%	2%
6-9 years	12.9	11
10-12 years	32.3	41
13-16 years	30.3	38
17+ years	21.3	8
Region of the Country Where Raised	(n=154)	(n=211)
NE	16.8%	*
SE	57.4	80%
NW	1.9	*
SW	4.5	*
MW	16.1	*
Years Lived in the State	(n=155)	(n=217)
0-3 years	11%	22%
4-9 years	17.4	17
10+ years	71	61

* Exact % not available

Greater percentages of the fathers had finished high school and college than was true in 1972. See Table 3. While the percentage of mothers who had completed fewer than nine years of schooling respondents had been raised in the South, slightly more than 57 percent of 2003 respondents had. In 1972, 11 percentage points more had been living in the state for fewer than three years, but in 2003, 10 percentage points more respondents had been living there for ten years or more than was true in 1972.

In 2003, more respondents were working full-time and part-time than in 1972. In 1972, many more respondents were retired or not employed in social work. (See Table 4.) Since the author did not have all of the original data from the 1972 study for respondents working in different settings, only summaries are provided for some settings. In 1972, more respondents were in psychiatric settings and working as school social workers than there were in 2003. In 1972, more than 20 percentage points more respondents indicated no political affiliation, and in 2003, 12 percentage points more indicated that they were "independents" than in 1972.

Tables 4 and 5

In relation to noninvolvement in social action at the time of the survey, 2003 respondents seemed to provide more reasons that were due to the demands of their jobs, in comparison to the 1972 respondents. See Table 5. In 2003 fewer respondents indicated a lack of inclination or the lack of opportunities to engage in social action.

Increases in volunteer participation for the 2003 respondents, compared to the 1972 respondents, during three time periods, before, during, and after graduate school, were all statistically different. See Table 6.

Table 6

Slightly more respondents in 2003 felt a greater obligation to their clients, but almost 14 percentage points more felt a greater obligation to the profession, and about 12 percent fewer felt their primary obligation was to their employers (Pearson x2 15.646 sig=.000). See Table 7.

Table 4: Description of Respondents (Continued): Employment Status, Agency Type, and Political Affiliation

Descriptor	2003 % of Respondents (n=155)	1972 % of Respondents (n=213)
Employment Status		
Full-time (>20 hrs/week)	74.8%	66%
Part-time (<20 hrs/week)	11	5
Volunteer work in SW	0.6	1
Employed but not in SW	0.6	4
Retired	3.9	24 (Not employed)
Full-time SW student	3.2	*
Agency Type	(n=136)	(n=163)
Public Welfare	7.1%	1 – 7% **
Psychiatric Setting	20.6	27
Family Service	5.2	1 – 7 **
Medical Setting	11.6	13
Corrections	1.3	1 – 7 **
School SW	3.2	10
Academia	7.7	*
Other	23.9	*
Political Affiliation	(n=155)	(n=217)
None	13.5%	35%
Republican	13.5	11
Democrat	53.5	50
Independent	16.1	4
Combination	3.2	*

*Not asked in 1972   ** Exact % not available for 1972*

Table 5: Reasons for Current (at time of survey) Non-Involvement in Social Action

Reasons	2003 % of Respondents (n=155)	1972 % of Respondents (n=219)
1. I do not have the inclination to become active.	6.5%	11%
2. I have not found any opportunities to participate in that appeal to my interests.	6.5	13
3. Legislation, such as the Hatch Act, or agency policy restricts my activities.	3.2	7
4. I do not have the time or energy because of the demands of my job.	12.9	7
5. I do not have the time or energy because personal or family responsibilities.	10.3	15
6. I am currently active.	27.7	35
7. Other	5.2	11
8. More than one answer	15.3	
9. Missing	12.3	3
Total	100%	102% *

Percentages were rounded off in 1972 thesis so total is more than 100%.

Table 6: Extent of Volunteer Participation During Three Periods of Time and Comparison of 1972 and 2003 Respondents

Period of Time	2003 % of Respondents	1972 % of Respondents	Pearson X2	Sig.
Before Graduate School	(n=153)	(n=216)	18.264	.000 [a]
None	17.4%	37%		
Slightly	43.2	29		
Moderately	29	29		
Extensively	9	6		
Total	100%	100%		
During Graduate School	(n=148)	(n=217)	10.168	.017 [b]
None	23.9%	38%		
Slightly	38.1	31		
Moderately	28.4	29		
Extensively	5.2	2		
Total	100%	100%		
After Graduate School	(n=143)	(n=216)	25.205	.000 [a]
None*	14.8%	37%		
Slightly	32.9	23		
Moderately	31	34		
Extensively	13.5	6		
Total	100%	100%		

*includes all students in 1972   [a]Sig <.001   [b]Sig <.05

Table 7: Professional Obligation

Primary Obligation	2003 % of Respondents (n=146)	1972 % of Respondents (n=206)
Client	54.8%	56.3%
Profession	21.9	8.3
Employer	23.3	35.4
Total	100%	100%

Pearson x2 15.646 Sig .000

Table 7

Comparing means of agreement (lowest "1" to highest "5") with the various statements regarding attitudes about social action, the following statements regarding beliefs about professional social action received the strongest agreement from 1972 and 2003 respondents: 1) actions for improving social conditions should be a primary responsibility for all social workers; and 2) social reform ideals should be a high priority of the social work profession. The following statements elicited lower agreement rates, but still the majority of respondents, in both 1972 and 2003: 1) action undertaken by social workers for improving social conditions should be carried out through professional organizations; and 2) every social agency should work to improve social conditions. See Table 8. There was a significantly greater mean agreement in 2003 with the statement that action undertaken by social workers for improving social conditions should be carried out through professional organizations (sig=.003). See Table 8.

The following statements elicited generally less agreement in both 1972 and 2003: 1) taking up a sign and picketing or sitting down in a demonstration in sympathy with a client group; and 2) striking for better services for clients and striking for better conditions for social. (Table 8)

Respondents in 2003 more strongly agreed that the following are appropriate tools for social workers: 1) public demonstrations (sig=000); 2) writing letters to newspapers (sig=018); 3) encouraging clients to organize (sig=.000); 4) picketing or sitting down in sympathy with client groups (sig=.000); and 5) striking for better services for clients (sig=.001).

In the 1972 survey, five social action tactics and received high rates of agreement (over 90 percent) but the exact percentages of agreement were not available, therefore the mean agreements for these statements in 1972 and 2003 could not be compared. These tactics were: 1) serving as expert advisor, 2) voluntarily speaking to a lay group, 3) serving as advisor and resource person with an indigenous group, 4) contacting local politicians; and 5) and sharing their knowledge of the issues with the general public and with the policy makers in the form of expert advisor.

Discussion

The objectives of this research were to: 1) describe the demographic changes in NASW membership in one state between 1972 and 2003; and 2) determine whether there were any changes in attitudes toward social action between 1972 and 2003. The response rate for this survey was 42 percent.

According to 1995 figures on national NASW membership demographics, 28.1 percent of members were over the age of 50 years (Gibelman & Schervish, 1997) compared to more than 50 percent over the age of 50 years in the current study.

Table 6: Comparisons of Means for Agreement With Statements for 1972 and 2003 Respondents

Statements	1972 Means (n=155)	2003 Means (n=213-219)	t	Sig.
1. Actions for improving social conditions should be a primary responsibility for all social workers.	4.20	4.06	1.347	.179
2. Social reform ideals should be a high priority of the social work profession.	4.17	4.21	-.453	.651
3. Action undertaken by social workers for improving social conditions should be carried out through professional organizations.	3.58	3.86	-2.96	.003 b
4. Action for improving social conditions should be a function of every social work agency regardless of the method of specialization.	3.83	3.92	-.825	.410
Tactics				
1. Public demonstrations are appropriate tools for all social workers to use in promoting public issues pertinent to their clients' needs.	2.75	3.19	-3.701	.000 a
2. Writing letters to editors of newspapers	4.12	4.32	-2.374	.018 b
3. Encouraging clients to organize to be more powerful in obtaining their ends	3.55	4.06	-4.802	.000 a
4. Taking up a sign and picketing or sitting down in sympathy with a client group	2.76	3.21	-3.818	.000 a
5. Striking for better services for clients	2.56	2.95	-3.237	.001 a
6. Striking for better conditions for SWs	2.81	3.05	-1.861	.064

a Sig <.001   b Sig <.05

Nationally 16.2 percent of members are under 30 years of age compared to 8.6 percent in the current study. It appears that younger BSW graduates and younger, more recent MSW graduates in this state are less likely to join NASW. Since BSWs are now part of the NASW membership, and the membership of this state's NASW chapter has quadrupled, one would think there would be a much greater proportion of members under the age of 30.

An encouraging finding was that the extent of volunteer participation had improved for the 2003 respondents at three points in time, before, during, and after graduate school. These increases at all three time periods were statistically significant. However, in the current study, 27.7 percent indicated that they are currently active while 37 percent of the 1972 respondents indicated that they were active at the time of the survey. The percentage of respondents in 2003 who indicated their social action was limited by such policies as the Hatch Act was 50 percent of the 1972 respondents.

Significantly, fewer respondents in the current study felt their first obligation was to their employer. A few respondents volunteered the information that their clients came first because they were in private practice and had no employer. However, it appears that the primary obligation may have shifted to the profession, since the percentage of respondents indicating primary obligation to clients was very similar in 1972 and 2003. Some of this change may be due to a feeling of job instability and the fact that many social workers may have worked for a greater number of employers during their careers than for the 1972 respondents. The increase in obligation to the profession may be a bias or reflection of the fact that only NASW members were surveyed. One might ask whether an obligation to clients can be separated from an obligation to the profession.

Regardless of the NASW Code of Ethics, only 83 percent of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed, with the statement "Actions for improving social conditions should be a primary responsibility for all social workers," and 89 percent strongly agreed or agreed "Social reform ideals should be a high priority of the social work profession." There were no significant differences in the responses to these two statements between 1972 and 2003. The 2003 rate appears to be a slightly higher rate than found by Reeser and Epstein (1990).

In response to the statement that "Action undertaken by social workers for improving social conditions should be carried out through professional organizations," the 2003 respondents were in slightly, but significantly, greater agreement. This seems like an area that needs to have much more emphasis in undergraduate and graduate social work programs.

This macro content was strengthened in the 2001 EPAS which stated that graduates should be able to "demonstrate policy practice skills in regard to economic, political, and organizational systems, and use them to influence, formulate, and advocate for policy consistent with social work values; and identify financial, organizational, administrative, and planning processes required to deliver social services." (CSWE, 2001)

All of the tactics for social action, for which 1972 response figures were available, except "striking for better conditions for social workers," had significantly greater support in 2003 than in 1972. The campaign strategies of serving as an expert advisor to public groups and policymakers, writing letters to editors, speaking to a lay group about a social issue, serving as an advisor and resource person to an indigenous group, and personally lobbying a politician had the most support. The contest tactics of picketing, demonstrating, and striking continued to have the least support but had significantly more than in 1972. "Encouraging clients to organize and use social action to obtain services from policymakers" had significantly greater support than in 1972. Since this last tactic has significantly more support than the other contest tactics, social work educators should either emphasize the need for all of these tactics at various times, or they should teach and have students practice skills with which they tend to be more comfortable. However, there are times when a greater range of tactics is needed so, hopefully, social work educators will see the need to teach both.

The findings in this 2003 survey that fewer than 40 percent of the respondents supported "striking for better conditions for clients" and "demonstrating in support of client groups," are slightly lower rates than those found in 1968 and 1984 found by Reeser and Epstein (1990). See Table 1. This difference may reflect the culture of the southeastern U.S. where unions have not been supported. The findings in this study that the support for "contacting local politicians in an effort to influence pending legislation" and "serving as 'expert advisor' to policy makers," is over 90 percent is comparable to the 1968 and 1984 findings of Reeser and Epstein (1990).

It is difficult to compare these findings with Ezell's findings. Ezell's survey was based on the

respondents actually having done specific advocacy activities. Also, in comparing the responses in Table 5 from Ezell's 1994 article and Table 2 from his 1993 article, it is not clear how many respondents had actually engaged in the specific advocacy activities.

The Hamilton and Fauri (2001) survey was also based on what respondents had actually done. However, it is interesting to note that the current survey found that 39 percent of respondents approved of demonstrating with clients, and Hamilton and Fauri found that 25 percent had actually demonstrated during the previous two years. Also, while 98 percent in the current survey approved of contacting local politicians, 60 percent of the Hamilton and Fauri population had actually done this. Considering the likelihood that a higher percentage will approve of a specific advocacy activity than the percentage who actually engages in the activity, the findings of the two surveys seem to support each other.

Caveats and Implications for Future Research

One shortcoming of this study was that a number of respondents indicated that they were in private practice so do not have an employer to whom they might feel obligated. However, this question about private practice was not specifically asked on the survey, and one could complete the survey without ever indicating that. Such information would be useful in future research.

The finding that there were fewer respondents under the age of 30 compared to the 1995 national NASW survey may reflect a response bias that older members are more likely to respond to surveys. However, if that were the case, one would think that it would also be true with the 1995 national survey. Another caveat of this research is that these findings may reflect some influence from the particular state and culture that was chosen. Comparisons with similar surveys in other states would add credence to these findings.

Implications for Social Work Continuing Education

The findings of this survey support the extensive implications for academic and continuing education stated in an earlier article by the author, based on the same survey, which focused on the 2003 sample and the relationship of various respondent demographic variables to attitudes regarding

social action (Dickinson, 2004). Some of those implications for continuing education will be restated here but the author does refer the reader to the 2004 article for more detail.

Continuing education for social workers is necessary to teach and reinforce skills of political advocacy. Unfortunately, a review of websites of resources for social work continuing education reveals few resources specifically for social action skills.

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 only 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. (Dickinson, 2004)

Conclusions

In conclusion, the profile of NASW members in this one southeastern state did not change drastically between 1972 and 2003. Based on the findings that 17 percent of 2003 respondents did not agree that social reform should be a major priority of professional social workers, the NASW Code of Ethics, which is supposed to guide the profession, might need more emphasis in social work education.

While there was significantly greater support for many of the tactics of social change, the general level of support is still low. This is discouraging. One would hope that with the efforts made by NASW, ACOSA, and CSWE to instill a greater sense of responsibility in social workers for influencing social welfare policy, we would find this greater sense of responsibility in our respondents. However, if we, as social workers, are expected to and hope to create a more responsive and just society, then social work education and continuing education for practicing social workers must prepare professional social workers to do so.

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