



## **“I Need More Training”: Insights on Education and Training Available for Sport Social Workers**

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*As a new arena in the field, there exists limited knowledge about the available education and training opportunities within the sport social work field. The current study was designed to better understand the learning opportunities utilized by sport social workers to practice competently within the field. A 22-item online questionnaire was administered to the Alliance of Social Workers in Sport (ASWIS) email listserv. A total of 84 participants completed the survey. Results highlight the gaps in the existing opportunities for sport social workers and the format, delivery, topics, and content of trainings that would be most helpful in the future. Identifying existing gaps and opportunities for improvements in the future allows for an expanded field and increased opportunities for competent social work practice.*

*Keywords: social work education, social work practice, sport social work, athletics, youth sport*

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW; 2021) cites *competence*—the notion that social workers are responsible for practicing within their areas of expertise and accessing continuing education to enhance their knowledge—as one of the core values of the profession. Specific learning experiences within social work education provide critical learning opportunities for social workers who wish to develop competence within specialized practice areas. For example, within the classroom, groupwork practice experiences are associated with greater levels of practice competence among social work students (Lee, 2018). Similarly, applied practice and learning agreements within field education are recognized as an integral component of developing and demonstrating readiness for practice (Davis & Reber, 2016). Experiential didactic training also is related to improvements in communication, values, and attitudes related to both linguistic and cultural knowledge (Neely-Barnes et al., 2020). Additionally, simulation-based learning is recognized as a powerful tool for developing holistic competence (Kourgiantakis et al., 2019) and preparing students to practice in integrated healthcare settings (Craig et al., 2017). Moreover, specialized certificate programs are associated with promoting cultural competence among specific populations. For instance, a program’s extrinsic support of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQIA+) people is predictive of students who feel more competent to work with LGBTQIA+ populations (McCarty-Caplan, 2018).

One emerging area of social work practice is within sport settings and systems (i.e., sport social work; Newman et al., 2021). From youth involved in community-based programming to professional athletics, athletes have been recognized as “a population group with unique vulnerabilities whose social work-related needs are often not met” (Dean & Rowan, 2014, p. 219). Confounding this lack of support is that social work practice within sport has yet to officially be recognized by the profession or within formal social work education (McHenry et al., 2021). As a result, social workers are often left to seek out supplemental educational opportunities to enhance their competence for providing services within sport (Magier et al., 2022). The purpose of the current study is to explore how social work professionals develop the requisite competence to service the needs of athletes and other stakeholders involved in sport.

## **Defining a Profession**

The three key components that define a profession are: (a) specific standards of training and education, (2) an ethical code, and (3) a theoretical foundation and applied knowledge base (Broman, 1995). For health and human service professions, governing bodies offer registration, certification, and licensure based on education from accredited programs, as well as professional experiences (Adams, 2017). Thus, accrediting and governing bodies help to ensure that the three components that define a profession are met and upheld. For social workers within the United States, the NASW sets the profession’s code of ethics, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) oversees undergraduate- and graduate-level educational standards, and state licensing bodies are responsible for confirming that individuals maintain their continuing education requirements (Dyeson, 2004). The culmination of these efforts helps to ensure that social

workers continuously develop and refine their competence for working with and providing services to diverse populations.

At the heart of any health and human service profession is education and training. Within social work education, the CSWE (2015) defines field placements as social work's signature pedagogy. Field placements at both the bachelors and master's levels have been found to prepare students to enter the work force with a more established professional identity by having the educational opportunity to link theory to practice (Bogo, 2015) and practicing critical social work skills (Fortune et al., 2007). Upon graduating from an accredited program, professional development for social workers comes from professional supervision, guided self-reflection, and reflexivity regarding previous and ongoing practice experience, and continuing education units (CEUs; Kurzman, 2016; Magier et al., 2022).

The importance of adequate educational training and continued professional development relies on the use of evidence-based practices (EBP) when working with and providing services to individuals, groups, and populations. Out of the medical professional, EBP is defined as "the integration of best researched evidence and clinical expertise with patient values" (The Institute of Medicine, 2001, p. 147). Within social work, EBP is conceptualized as the intersection of three components: (a) research, (b) practice experience, and (c) client experience. EBP is especially important because the ability to identify, assess, implement, and evaluate effective interventions is a key social work skill (Morago, 2006). Therefore, internships at field placements provide aspiring social work students opportunities to experientially connect evidence-informed coursework with applied, hands-on practice. After graduation, social work professionals often continue to engage in professional development experiences (e.g., supervision, CEUs), which aid practitioners in staying up to date on current research related to their expertise and specific areas of practice. Ultimately, these types of specialized educational training experiences increase the confidence and competence of social work professionals and adequately prepare them for providing holistic and culturally competent services (Davis & Reber, 2016; Nedegaard & Zwilling, 2017; Neely-Barnes et al., 2020).

### **Specialized Practice Areas**

Within the social work profession, unique subspecialties of social work practice have emerged. Commonly recognized specialized practice areas include child welfare, school social work, gerontological social work, military social work, and international social work. Specialized practice areas have a growing base of uniquely designed educational training and professional development opportunities. As underscored by NASW (2020), the purpose of specialty certifications is...

...in response to growing workforce trends and societal needs requiring specialization and to help NASW members attain enhanced professional and public recognition; increase visibility as specialized social workers; and association with a select group of specialized social workers who have attained national recognition. (para. 1)

Clearly, the social work profession has prioritized education and training within specialized practice areas. Social workers need both a generalist education and opportunities to learn the

skills, practices, and modalities specific to their professional practice. However, NASW and CSWE do not yet recognize sport as a social work specialty; thus, social work in sport may be termed a ‘nontraditional’ and an emerging area of social work practice.

Nontraditional social work practice has been defined as any setting where a social worker is not surrounded by other social work or social welfare professionals (Jasper et al., 2013; Hughes, 2009) and the organization has a core business not related to social work or social welfare services (McLaughlin et al., 2015). To gain competence to work in nontraditional settings, scholarship has pointed to the importance of both focused learning opportunities during social work education (e.g., coursework, field placements), as well as ongoing professional development opportunities post-graduation (Jasper et al., 2013; Lowe & Bohon, 2018; Scholar et al., 2012).

Despite the importance of specialized training, there remain challenges to meaningfully integrate these types of specialized training opportunities into social work education and post-graduation professional development. First and foremost, within social work education, there is a lack of courses related to specialized practice areas (Bosma et al., 2010). Research has also found inconsistency amongst course syllabi for specialized practice areas (Brezin & O’Connor, 2010; Cummings & DeCoster, 2011). Moreover, research has pointed to the difficulties faced by social work field departments with establishing and maintaining new partnerships with organizations, agencies, and programs (CSWE, 2015). This is especially problematic when host organizations do not employ a social worker as part of their staff (Cleak & Zuchowski, 2018; Zuchowski, 2016). Underscoring these issues are barriers to accessing supplemental educational opportunities. For instance, social work literature has identified barriers such as lack of time, access to training, and inadequate funding (Carnahan et al., 2016; Jivanjee et al., 2015).

### **Current Study and Purpose Statement**

Research has demonstrated that social workers provide a wide range of services to diverse populations involved in sport (Newman et al., 2021). For instance, social workers are known to work within youth sports as coaches, collegiate athletics as mental health specialists, and professional sport leagues as community relationship liaisons (Newman et al., 2019). However, social workers interested in working in sport are confronted with a lack of educational learning and training opportunities. For example, social work professionals noted a gap in available courses related to using sport as a social intervention and/or providing mental and behavioral health services within sport systems (Magier et al., 2022). Research also has highlighted issues regarding the lack of field placement opportunities in sport settings (Beasley et al., 2021; Beasley et al., 2022; Beasley, 2022). Consequently, social work students and continuously developing professionals who are interested in working at the intersection of social work and sport are left to advocate for their own educational needs. And although the Alliance of Social Workers in Sports (ASWIS) hosts the annual *Social Workers in Sports Symposium* and a *Sport Social Work Certificate*, only one CSWE-accredited social work program (i.e., University of Michigan School of Social Work) has yet to offer anything more than a single elective course specifically designated to social work in sport. As a result, questions remain regarding how social workers who are currently providing services within sport develop the requisite competence. To begin to answer this question, the purpose of the current study was to investigate

the education, training, and learning opportunities that social workers utilized to prepare them to work competently within sport.

## Method

### Research Team's Positionality

In accordance with the pragmatic philosophy of the study (Giacobbi et al., 2005), the research team acknowledges that knowledge is constructed in nature yet influenced by historical and contemporary sociopolitical culture. Further, pragmatics hold that agreement about knowledge is gleaned through discourse and ongoing dialog, which allows for practical-level truths to exist (James, 1907). Pragmatists then often use one or more research methods deemed appropriate to advance an inquiry while simultaneously considering the consequences of both the methods used and inquire posed.

The research team acknowledges their position as actively engaged instruments throughout all phases of the study, particularly during data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). At the time of the study, the first author was a doctoral candidate in social work with a focus on program and practice implementation in education and child-serving spaces. In addition to holding a social work license, she previously worked with youth from economically disadvantaged communities through after-school and community-based programming. The second author—and lead researcher—was a professor of social work and education, studying the intersectionality of social justice, social work services, and sport systems. Additionally, he has over a decade of experience serving as a competitive youth sport coach, from middle and high school athletics to collegiate sport clubs. Several other student researchers, as well as a senior researcher, were engaged in the research process (e.g., project development, crafting of the manuscript); however, the first and second authors were charged with facilitating the data collection and analysis processes. Collectively, the team of researchers come from a diversity of personal backgrounds and upbringings, yet share lived experiences related to their social work education and training.

### Procedures

All study procedures were approved by the Principal Investigator's (second author) Institutional Review Board. Data was collected via online Qualtrics surveys with the aim of exploring the perspectives and experiences of social workers who provide services to stakeholders involved in sport (i.e., sport social workers). Participants were recruited through the ASWIS email listserv and—in addition to providing consent—they were required to meet three inclusion criteria: (1) at least a bachelor-level social worker; (2) provide professional services within sport (e.g., therapist, coach, administrator, etc.); and (3) apply their social work education/training in sport. At the time of recruitment, ASWIS had approximately 150 individuals registered on their listserv.

## Participants

A total of 84 social workers provided consent to participate in the study (56% response rate), with 48 individuals completing the full battery of questions. The decision was made to utilize the partial data from the 36 participants who did not complete the entirety of the survey. All participants—even those who did not provide responses to each question—hold valued insights within the context of the study. Further, from a pragmatic perspective (Giacobbi et al., 2005), reducing the data does not provide enhanced “validity” or trustworthiness.

Please note that all data were kept, but demographic questions were asked at the end of the survey. Additionally, participants had the ability to identify with multiple demographic characteristics and types of experiences. Taken together, most participants earned a masters-level degree ( $n = 37$ ) and were professionally licensed ( $n = 39$ ; see Table 1).

*Table 1. Demographics*

	n	%
<i>Gender (n=22)</i>		
Female	15	68
Male	7	32
<i>Race/Ethnicity (n=22)</i>		
Black/African-American	4	18
Caucasian	13	59
Other (e.g., Hispanic, Indian)	5	23
<i>Level of Education (n=50)</i>		
Bachelor's Degree	3	6
Master's Degree	37	74
Doctoral Degree	10	20
<i>Age (in years)</i>	M = 37.68	sd = 13.01
<i>Total years' experience</i>	M = 11.78	sd = 11.27

These social workers provided services in a variety of sport systems, including collegiate athletics ( $n = 38$ ), after-school programming ( $n = 30$ ), and high school sports ( $n = 30$ ; see Table 2). Most participants were officially employed as a social worker ( $n = 41$ ) providing clinical and/or mental health services ( $n = 24$ ) and/or worked as youth ( $n = 45$ ) and/or high school ( $n = 26$ ) coaches. We also asked participants about the extent to which they, as participants and stakeholders, had engaged in sport (see Table 2).

## Data Collection Tool

Participants were asked to complete a 22-item online Qualtrics survey, comprised of both close- (i.e., multiple choice) and open-ended questions. Braun et al. (2020) recently forwarded that “qualitative surveys offer one thing that is fairly unique within qualitative data collection methods – a ‘wide-angle lens’ on the topic of interest that provides the potential to capture a diversity of perspectives, experiences, or sense-making” (p. 3). This ability to collect data using diverse methods was viewed as being critical given the pragmatic posing of the study and the relatively novel area of study. In the end, data from the survey had the ability to yield two

distinct studies. One study sought to investigate *where and how social work professionals provided services to sport stakeholders*; whereas the current study sought to better understand *how social workers developed their professional competence to work within sport*.

Questions from the survey related to the current study—designed to identify the education, training, and learning opportunities utilized by social workers—included: “Have you received any formal academic education/training related to professionally working in or with a sport setting?” and “If yes, at what level of school did you receive this training/education?” Other questions included, “Do you believe social work education should offer specific educational experiences (e.g., courses, internships, research opportunities) for social work students who are interested in professionally working in or with a sport setting? Please explain.” And “Have you received specific training (other than formal education) related to your work in sport? If yes, where and from whom did you receive this training? What was the content and length of training? How satisfied were you with the training that you have received, and why?”

Table 2. Previous experiences and training in sport\*

	Athlete	Coach	Administrator	Yes	No
<i>Previous Playing Experience</i>					
Youth	63	45	6		
High School	65	26	3		
Collegiate	50	15	8		
Professional	12	1	5		
<i>Using Sport Within Social Work Practice:</i>					
Formal Academic				51	20
Other				32	37
<i>Professional Working in Or with A Sport Setting</i>					
Formal Academic				49	13
Other				32	29

\*10 individuals responded “Other” when reflecting on their previous sport experiences

## Data Analysis

Reflecting the pragmatic positioning of the current study (Giacobbi et al., 2005) and in alignment with Braun et al. (2020), a content analysis was used to analyze the data. This analytic approach is recognized as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts...to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). Following the four-step process as outlined by Bengtsson (2016), the first author (i.e., the researcher) first familiarized herself with the data by reading through survey transcripts. In this step, the researcher identified meaning units—the smallest unit of meaning from the data—and labeled these units with codes. Next, the researcher reviewed and finalized meaning units to ensure that all relevant data are included in the identified codes. Third, through an iterative process, categories and subcategories were created to group together related codes. Fourth, the first author engaged in a manifest content analysis using techniques to describe the visible text presented originally. Ultimately, the aim of a content analysis is to reduce the total amount of text collected by grouping together related text so that categories can be identified (Bengtsson, 2016).

## Results

The study resulted in three major themes. First, participants provided insight into their formal learning experiences, including during their academic education and additional professional training opportunities. Participants also identified particularly meaningful experiences that helped enhance their competency for working within sport. Finally, participants shared their thoughts regarding the future of this unique area of practice. Due to the nature of the data, participants have been assigned de-identified labels (e.g., SW1) for presenting unique descriptive quotes as applicable.

### Formal Educational Training

We asked participants to identify previous and currently accessed opportunities for education and training in the field. In general, among participants who provided responses to the survey, the majority of participants did not receive any formal academic or other training related to using sport within their social work practice or working professionally in or with a sport setting (see Table 2).

Of those who did receive formal education about sport and social work, several individuals ( $n = 6$ ) stated that it was the primary focus on their Masters/Doctoral education, or it was a part of a Masters/Doctoral course ( $n = 5$ ). A couple of other participants stated that it was an entire course in their Masters/Doctoral education, or it was their undergraduate major ( $n = 2$ , respectively). Many participants ( $n = 37$ ) did receive such training outside of an academic program.

**Existing Learning Opportunities.** Participants named a variety of available education opportunities. For example, some participants ( $n = 5$ ) identified certificate/certification programs, such as coaching, health and fitness, and the ASWIS certifications. Several participants ( $n = 14$ ) found specific conferences particularly helpful in forming their professional training, while others sought membership from organizations ( $n = 8$ ). Others ( $n = 13$ ) sought continuing education units (CEUs) and professional development opportunities to both uphold their licensure and further develop their professional skills.

**Supervision.** In the field of social work, supervision and mentorship is a critical way of learning, both within our formal academic institutions and in “real-world” practice. While some participants did not receive supervision ( $n = 13$ ), others did receive supervision through either their current employment ( $n = 26$ ) or outside of their employment ( $n = 11$ ). Of those who received supervision at their current employment, the majority ( $n = 20$ ) of their supervisors were not trained to use social work and sport practices. Conversely, most participants ( $n = 7$ ) who sought supervision outside of employment, sought supervision from individuals trained within the specialty.

**Specialized Trainings.** To better understand the preferences of attendees and inform them about the development of future training related to the field of social work and sport, participants were asked to reflect on the features of the training. These questions allowed

participants to provide a more detailed description of their experiences with the intention of improving training in this unique area of social work practice in the future.

***Current Format of Education and Training.*** Several ( $n = 12$ ) participants attended trainings intermittently, including workshops, key speakers, two-day mini courses, and different webinars and presentations. Such training and workshops were completed in under one day. Other participants ( $n = 10$ ) attended conferences that required slightly more commitment, traditionally anywhere from one day to one week. Nonetheless, many others ( $n = 9$ ) attended training courses that required longer-term commitment, lasting anywhere from one week to one year.

***Current Training Content.*** Some participants ( $n = 10$ ) also shared the topic areas of the training courses they attended. Half of these participants ( $n = 5$ ) shared they learned techniques for integrating social work and sport including therapeutic approaches for working with athletes and sports-based positive youth development. Other participants attended trainings on social-justice related topics include race, gender, and discrimination, sexual assault, and working in trauma environments. Lastly, a couple of other participants ( $n = 2$ ) attended training to learn specific skills in working with the student athlete population. For example, one participant stated that:

Over 5 years there have been a lot of lectures, presentations, and interactive sessions I have attended. Those included using different therapeutic approaches when working with athletes, evidence base approaches to incorporating sports and social work, theory, race and gender discrimination, and many more. (SW1)

Another participant described their training experience by stating, “the content has included education on sport and mental health policy, individual treatment of athletes, including assessment, evaluation and diagnosis, as well as training on transformational leadership. Length is roughly one year.” (SW2).

## **Perceptions of Existing Learning Experiences**

We asked participants to reflect on their previous education and training experiences. Most participants had positive feedback about their previous learning experiences and noted previous opportunities that were particularly impactful in their learning within the sport social work arena.

***Training Satisfaction.*** Nearly all respondents ( $n = 32$ ) had positive feedback about the training they attended. For example, one participant noted that they “enjoyed what [they] received” (SW3) while another noted that they were “able to apply interventions while related to [their] own experience [in sport]” (SW4). There were participants who had critiques for the training they attended. For example, SW1 stated, that the trainings included “many speakers [who were] not social workers and some did not even know what social workers do or our approaches. This lack of peers and mentors training fellow social workers has negative impacts on growing social workers in sports/athletics”. Only one participant was completely dissatisfied with the training they attended.

**Meaningful Experiences.** We asked participants to reflect on particularly meaningful experiences thus far in their career. Several participants mentioned multiple experiences that informed their past and current practice as social workers in sport. Primarily, participants ( $n = 23$ ) identified field practicums/internships and specific workshops/courses ( $n = 20$ ) as particularly meaningful. Others ( $n = 7$ ) discussed the importance of collaboration and learning from their peers who work in the arena and who were former athletes. Some participants ( $n = 5$ , respectively) identified specific degree programs (e.g., BSW and MSW programs) and different research opportunities as experiences that helped shape their professional knowledge and skillset. Lastly, various participants ( $n = 4$ , respectively) identified conferences, certificate programs, and teaching/coaching opportunities as beneficial opportunities. These meaningful experiences in combination with the aforementioned education, training, and learning opportunities were utilized to inform participants of suggestions for the future of education and training for social workers working with and using sport.

### **Future Sport Social Work Education and Training**

Next, we asked participants to reflect on how they would like to see education and training in the field move forward. Most participants ( $n = 63$ ) suggested that they would attend future training if offered, while only 3 participants stated that they would not attend. Additionally, most participants ( $n = 64$ ) indicated that they believed social work education should offer specific educational experiences for social work students who are interested in using sport within social work practice (e.g., coursework, internships, research opportunities).

### ***Suggestions for Education and Training Format***

To further explore this area, we asked participants to identify and then describe the structure of future education and training opportunities. Participants comparably wanted in-person ( $n = 14$ ) and online ( $n = 13$ ) training, and/or had no preference ( $n = 13$ ) on the delivery method. Numerous participants ( $n = 17$ ) wanted workshops and/or courses that were offered over the course of a few hours, or at the most, one day. Others sought longer-term commitments, including conferences ( $n = 8$ ) and multiple weeklong courses ( $n = 5$ ).

Participants also reflected on the purveyors of such training. Several participants ( $n = 10$ ) identified possible higher education institutions and/or professors, while others identified specific organizations ( $n = 7$ ) who may be able to host and convene such trainings. The vast majority ( $n = 23$ ) of respondents wanted subject matter experts to lead these training courses, including leaders in the field and those with practice experience. Broadly, SW3 defined subject matter experts as “people who are experienced and knowledgeable in these areas”. Others identified specific subject matter experts such as “someone knowledgeable in sport social work and has field experience in this area” (SW5) and “some of the best, most experienced thinkers in the field, even in other areas such as sport psychologists, athletic directors, [and] athletic trainers” (SW6).

### ***Training Topics***

Similarly, we asked participants to identify and describe education and training topics that would be of most use in advancing education and training opportunities within the field of social work and sport. Participants shared specific areas and topics that were of particular importance in advancing the training and education within sport social work. For example, many participants ( $n = 25$ ) desired additional training on different forms of mental health support and interventions with athletes. Examples included crisis and case management, assessment, intervention and treatment with various athlete populations, forms of clinical intervention (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy, positive psychology, mindfulness, and hypnosis) and intervention approaches with specific athlete challenges (e.g., eating disorders, substance use, concussions, and injuries). Others noted a desire to learn more about how to work with specific sport populations ( $n = 7$ ) and in building expertise in specific skills and areas within the field of social work in sport. Examples include working with athletes transitioning between sports-levels and/or out of sport (i.e., retirement;  $n = 4$ ) and how to incorporate social work core values and ethics into the sport arena ( $n = 6$ ).

Beyond learning more about practicing within the traditional contexts of social work in sport, participants also noted a desire to learn more about how to broaden the field. Participants ( $n = 9$ ) also had a desire to learn more about how to implement sport as an intervention outside of traditional sport arenas. For example, one participant noted a desire to learn more about how to “advance lives through sport, break down barriers through sport, and build social capacity through sport” (SW7) while another participant was interested in “utilizing sports within the treatment setting” (SW8). Participants ( $n = 8$ ) also noted a desire to advocate at the policy level and among other professionals (e.g., coaches and athletic directors) and programs.

### **Discussion and Implications**

As part of a larger study that sought to understand the perspectives and experiences of social work professionals who use and/or engage in sport (i.e., sport social work), the present study sought to identify especially pertinent education, training, and learning opportunities among social workers in sport. By identifying existing opportunities, we can identify gaps in the specific education and training that is available for social workers in sport and further advance the field. Results suggest social workers who use and/or engage in sport lack academic and professional education and training opportunities. Additionally, participants emphasized that field practicums, internships, workshops, and courses were both meaningful and crucial experiences that contributed to their careers and professional development. Survey responses also indicated that social workers who use and/or engage in sport are open to future training and educational opportunities that are specifically tailored to current and future social work professionals or interested in using sport within social work practice.

### **Existing Opportunities**

Participants overwhelmingly shared that they did not receive any formal training or education related to sport and social work practice. We suspect this to be a result of the growing social work and sport field with ever developing opportunities in the profession and in

educational settings (Magier et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2019). Among higher education institutions, the University of Michigan (UM), The Ohio State University (OSU), and the University of New Hampshire (UNH) are key innovators at the intersection of social work and sport (i.e., sport social work). For example, beginning in the summer of 2022, UM's School of Social Work offers an Online Sport Social Work Certificate. Their innovative certificate program is a blended and interactive online learning experience, in which participants engage in 12-hours of live online, instructor-led learning sessions and 18-hours of self-paced learning modules. Additionally, as a component of the LiFEsports Initiative, OSU's College of Social Work has offered an undergraduate course titled "Prevention & Youth Development through Sport, Recreation, and Play" for over a decade. This one-of-a-kind course integrates traditional lectures, seminar-style discussions, guest speakers from the field, and sport- and play-based learning that occurs in a gymnasium. Similarly, UNH's Department of Social Work recently offered an undergraduate and cross-listed (undergraduate and graduate) course titled "Positive Youth Development through Social Work & Sport." In alignment with their Dual Degree Masters Program (Social Work, Kinesiology) in Outdoor Education, the course is designed to maximize experiential learning opportunities guided by a trained facilitator, engage students in immersive self-reflection and critical reflexivity, and capitalize on new telecommunication abilities to learn from researchers, social workers, and coaches from around the world. However, educational training, such as these listed, may need to develop a wider reach and following so social work students can have similar opportunities, training, and exposure as well as to further evidence-based practice related to this area of study.

Within the professional sector, participants also expressed few opportunities for specific social work and sport training. To address the lack of professional development opportunities, future research should identify potential barriers to accessing these experiences such as funding or location. Furthermore, increasing opportunities for professionals in the field of social work and sport to learn best practices and collaborate is crucial (Beasley et al., 2022; Beasley et al., 2021; Magier et al., 2022). Such opportunities may come in the form of training, workshops, or conferences led by current professionals within sport and social work. Professional development opportunities allow social workers to network, share knowledge and experiences, and further develop the field. The social work and sport field is collaborative by nature so the training should be reflective (D'Angelo et al., 2020; Newman et al., 2019)

Despite the lack of training and educational opportunities for individuals in social work and sport, findings that include existing training and education opportunities in this field are worth noting. For instance, participants identified certificate and certification programs, specific membership programs, and continuing education units (CEUs) with an emphasis on the intersection of sport and social work particularly useful. Engagement in these training and education activities are supported by existing literature as CEUs in the social work profession are rapidly growing (Kurzman, 2016).

### **Future Opportunities**

Although there are existing opportunities, greater emphasis and development in educational opportunities are needed to meet the professional needs and ethical duties of social workers using and/or working in sport. Participants, as supported by existing literature, identified several gaps in existing training (Beasley et al., 2021). As reflected by the diverse participant

background and experiences, social workers in sport previously and currently work across settings and populations (Newman et al., 2021). Thus, their training, professional development, and education needs are unique and diverse. One possibility includes expanding training topics to include mental health, clinical intervention in sport such as crisis management and assessment, an emphasis and connection to social work core values, how to implement sport interventions, and how to better advocate for the sport social work field. Moreover, as interprofessional care between social workers and various sport professionals is becoming more common in athletic organizations (Beasley et al., 2021; McHenry et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2019), it is important that there is a shared knowledge base among our social work and sport professionals as an outcome of these specialized training opportunities. Interprofessional and dual-degree programs that highlight the intersection of athletics and social work could help to fill this gap in the future. Collaboration between and amongst the programs would allow social work students interested in sport to further specialize in the field and gain valuable knowledge needed for the field.

Not only is the subject matter relevant, the method of training delivery should also be considered. For example, both in person and online training methods should be offered to social work and sport professionals. Further, social workers in sport need training that is facilitated by experts in the field. Facilitators may be individual experts in the field (e.g., research/expert faculty) or organizations who specialize in the intersection of social work and sport, such as ASWIS. By providing intentional training, participants should be able to gain and attribute greater meaning and value to training and education efforts.

### **Limitations**

While findings demonstrate insights into the training and education experiences of social workers in sport, several limitations exist. For instance, due to the sampling strategy, only those who are a member of ASWIS received the recruitment materials. The survey specifically included individuals who provide services and apply their social work education/training within sport. The survey did not include individuals who may work more peripherally in the sport social work field or perspectives of social work professionals who do not work in sport. Similarly, due to the moderate response rate and low rate of completion, findings from this study should not be generalized. Although the overall response rate was larger than the average response rate of online surveys in published research (Wu et al., 2022), approximately 43% of responses were incomplete. Future studies should consider systematically recruiting a larger, representative sample of participants through more expansive social work organizations, such as NASW and/or CSWE. Further, because of the nature research design, participants were not able to expand on their responses or be probed by interviewers when completing the written survey. As such, some responses may have lacked significant detail pertinent to data analysis. Future studies should consider conducting interviews with sport social workers to better understand their experiences with available and future training and education opportunities.

### **Conclusion**

Sport social work is an ever-growing area of social work practice, with professionals who need learning opportunities to enhance competence when providing services in this unique system. To remain compliant with our social work ethical standards, social workers in sport

currently have access to a limited number and variety of educational and training opportunities, leaving room for future development in this space. As a growing and needed arena within the broader social work field, tailored, diverse, and purposeful training can help to advance the field of social work in sport.

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