# Increasing Social Work Students' Participation in Macro Specializations: The Impossible Dream?

## Dawn Apgar

***Abstract:*** *Much effort has been made to increase the number of social work students in macro practice specializations in graduate school. Despite the development of pedagogical techniques which have shown to increase interest in and appreciation for macro practice, the proportion of macro students has stayed low and stable over time. Using survey data collected from 474 Master of Social Work students and graduates, this exploratory study identified both structural and attitudinal barriers which impede specialization in macro practice. Data reveals that despite exposure to these methods, those whose original motivation to enter the profession was based on a desire to do clinical work are unlikely to concentrate on macro practice. Structural barriers such as the lack of availability of macro programs also prevented increased specialization in macro practice. Social workers who are Black/African American are more likely to concentrate in macro practice, perhaps due to a recognition of the need for systems change in the United States to promote equal opportunities and rights for those who have historically been marginalized. Findings indicate that current efforts to increase the number of graduates with macro specializations may not be effective. Treatment of macro methods as a specialization, rather than integral to social work education, should be revisited if the profession wants to ensure enough graduates are able to make system-level changes to rectify current societal inequities.*

*Keywords: Macro practice, social work education, pedagogy, specialization*

There has long been a concern that social work has strayed from its mission of working with those who are poor or marginalized and working towards societal changes which are rooted in social and economic justice (Rubin & Johnson, 1984; Specht & Courtney, 1994). The proportion of social workers practicing psychotherapy, primarily with middle-class, professional, White clientele, has significantly increased over the last three decades (Holden & Barker, 2018). While many working in the profession are helping individuals and families deal with the impact of serious social problems such as substance misuse, homelessness, and child abuse, there is long-standing criticism that far fewer in the profession are addressing the underlying policies and conditions which are root causes of these issues (Abell & McDonell, 1990; Kayser et al., 1997; Mattocks, 2018).

Undergraduate social work education has become a direct pipeline into Masters in Social Work (MSW) programs with 79% of those with Bachelor's degrees in Social Work (BSWs) enrolling in MSW programs or planning to enroll within two years of graduation (George Washington University, Health Workforce Institute [GWU], 2019). Another 16% hope to enroll in the future, leaving only 5% planning on practicing social work at the bachelor's level. According to the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2015), the main difference between undergraduate and graduate social work education is the ability of the latter to prepare students for specialized practice. CSWE has granted discretion to graduate programs to choose their areas of specializations or concentrations, allowing them

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to focus on specific populations, problem areas, methods of intervention, perspectives, or approaches to practice.

Given this latitude, half of existing programs have chosen to offer specializations in direct or clinical practice, with only 29% and 21% focused on advanced generalist or mezzo/macro work, respectively (CSWE, 2019). The segregation between practice methods by most MSW programs has essentially bifurcated the profession, relegating macro practice to "a marginalized subfield in social work" (Fisher & Corciullo, 2011, p. 359) despite its importance in the profession's history and recognition as a professional strength (Johnson, 1999; Reisch, 2016). While there have been efforts to increase interest in macro methods among social workers, their success has been limited (Hill et al., 2017), leaving some to question whether community practice and other indirect methods, which were integral to social work throughout its first century (1917–2020), will continue without significant changes occurring in social work education (Gutiérrez & Gant, 2018).

This study examined the extent to which one's original motivation to enter the social work profession is related to specialization. The study also provides critical information on the availability of macro specializations and coursework for those pursuing graduate social work degrees. Using empirical data, this study identifies both structural and attitudinal barriers which may impede social work students from focusing on macro practice methods. Enhancing the focus on macro practice has long been viewed as essential to the profession due to its linkage to social justice and advocacy (NASW, 2017, 2019). Accomplishing the goal of having more students specialize in macro methods requires further inquiry to better understand the barriers that inhibit social work's ability to realize this professional dream.

## Literature Review

The need for social reform and advocacy aimed at ensuring the rights of those who have historically been oppressed, marginalized, and discriminated against has never been greater. In 2020, the United States held "one of the most consequential presidential elections in decades" with significant implications for the social work profession and those it serves (NASW, 2020a). There have also been widespread public calls to action to end violence against people of color after killings of unarmed Black/African American citizens by police officers and others. These deaths have spurred massive protests across the nation and renewed public outcry to end racism. Given these tragedies and the need for social action, social workers have been reminded of their professional responsibilities to help bring about system-level social changes including creating and advocating for policies and practices that produce equitable power, and that promote opportunities, treatment, and improved outcomes for all (NASW, 2020b).

Macro social work has an impact that interventions at the individual and family levels cannot, through the creation of policies and programs that are equitable and just (Mizrahi & Morrison, 2013). Through macro methods, social workers can create professionally-guided interventions designed to bring about planned change in both organizations and communities (Netting et al., 2016). While "macro practice" is a fairly recent term, the work done by social workers to help construct the nation's welfare system, organize labor unions, pass laws aimed at equal protections and rights, and create social service organizations is

rooted in the profession's history (Reisch, 2016). Macro social work focuses on structural solutions to eradicate systematic inequalities and prevent social problems – not merely to ameliorate them.

The current crises in the United States require dramatic reform and a renewed commitment by social workers to making political and systemic changes that are consistent with the value base of the profession. If social work is going to play a leadership role in needed reforms, the profession must embrace the call that "macro matters" (Reisch, 2016). A Hebrew teaching can be modified to best describe the imperative of the social work profession to embrace its macro roots, *If not social workers, who have made professional commitments to challenge social injustice, then who? If not now, then when?* (Sefaria, n.d., Pirkei Avot 1:14). In order to prepare those entering the profession with the skills needed to be effective change agents, schools of social work must revisit curricula that create a macro-micro divide, or the offering of specializations which focus on one of these practice methods often leading to the exclusion of the other (Reisch, 2016; Rothman, 2012).

Since its inception in the early 20th century, graduate social work education has conformed to a typical structure of coursework spanning two years in length, with the first year devoted to foundation curriculum and the second to advanced curriculum in an area of specialization. While innovations to this structure have been proposed (Colby, 2013), most programs adhere to the 2-year, full-time model, which was originally developed in response to policy statements generated in the 1930s by the American Association of Schools of Social Work (AASSW) and perpetuated from the 1950s through the 1990s by CSWE's Curriculum Policy Statement (CPS).

Current accreditation standards for graduate social work education focus on standards which require programs to articulate the ways in which they prepare students for specialized practice (CSWE, 2015). Specialized practice builds on generalist practice as it identifies the knowledge, values, skills, cognitive and affective processes, and professional behaviors that extend and enhance the nine social work competencies that are required in an area of specialization (CSWE, 2015). Specializations can be a focus on practice with a specific population, problem area, method of intervention, perspective, or approach to practice (CSWE, 2018a).

Workforce data, gathered from a national sample of 1,405 recent MSW graduates, indicate the focus of more than eight out of 10 of new social workers (81.5%) is on direct or clinical practice which aims at making change on an individual level (GWU, 2019). This micro method of practice differs from its macro counterpart with the former focused on work with individuals/families to support them through personal challenges and the latter aimed at understanding how problems originate, develop, and persist in large systems to intervene through policy or program creation/reform.

The strong interest in micro practice may be attributable to several factors. Historically, students have "stumbled upon" social work after considering other fields of study. Abell and McDonell (1990) found that over half of the social work students (54%) in their study reported considering another field of graduate study, most commonly psychology, before selecting social work. As psychology focuses on the scientific study of the human mind and its functions, social work students may begin their pursuit of social work with a

predisposition toward working with individuals. In addition, research has shown that people choose social work as a profession due to their own personal experiences with trauma, early family dysfunction, or demands to provide caregiving at an early age (Black et al., 1993; Thomas, 2016). Lastly, interest in micro methods has been attributed to licensure eligibility and student concerns about employability (Hill et al., 2017).

Although social work practice addresses human behavior in relation to the social environment through a multilevel ecological model, MSW programs have generally chosen to specialize professional training at a single level of practice, micro or macro, as allowed by accreditation standards (McBeath, 2016). Social work students in MSW programs have traditionally gravitated toward micro specializations and courses, resulting in few or no macro course offerings in some MSW programs due to a decreased demand (CSWE, 2018a).

To enhance interest in macro instruction, several national initiatives have been undertaken (Hill et al., 2010), including conducting research aimed at developing pedagogical techniques to increase interest (Mehrotra et al., 2018). Based on a survey of CSWE-accredited MSW programs with macro specializations, Rothman (2012) identified frequently noted problems which prevented increasing student interest in macro specializations, including lack of faculty support or interest; little or no hiring of macro faculty; and curriculum structures that are primarily clinical. Rothman also cited licensure requirements in some states that require taking certain micro courses; the neglect of macro courses; a lack of encouragement for students to choose macro specializations; and inadequate resources as occasional barriers. Rothman's work implied that targeted action aimed at specifically addressing these challenges could help increase the proportion of students in macro specializations.

To help implement Rothman's (2012) recommendations, the Association for Community Organization and Social Administration (ACOSA) created the Special Commission to Advance Macro Practice in Social Work ("the Special Commission") (ACOSA, 2020). The Special Commission, comprised of prominent social work educators and leaders, has been working to ensure that 20% of all graduate-level social work students choose macro practice as a specialization by 2020 and that graduate programs offer comparable amounts of micro and macro content in both the classroom and field education (CSWE, 2018a). While the work of the Special Commission to date has resulted in greater incorporation of the term "macro" into the 2015 EPAS and the development of a guide aimed at helping MSW programs when conceptualizing and delivering curricula specialized for macro practice (CSWE, 2018a), the feasibility of increasing the proportion of students in macro specializations is questionable given the barriers identified in the Rothman report.

This exploratory study aimed to evaluate whether ACOSA targets are realistic in the current academic climate by identifying structural and attitudinal barriers which impact students' desire to pursue macro specializations. Studying the views or attitudes of students is important as they can serve to promote or inhibit motivation to focus on macro practice. The study also provides critical information on the availability of macro specializations

and coursework to those pursuing graduate social work degrees and examined relationships between student demographic data and interest in macro specializations.

## Method

Data for this study were collected between November 2019 and March 2020. Social workers attending 19 different professional development classes sponsored by five chapters of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), one university, and one public child welfare agency were asked to voluntarily complete an online survey administered via Qualtrics before the programs began. A total of 706 social work attendees were eligible to participate with 474 fully completing the questionnaire (67% response rate). The anonymous survey consisted of close-ended questions assessing respondents' original interests in entering the social work profession, their specializations in graduate school, and the availability of and participation in macro courses. To assess initial motivation for pursuing a social work degree, respondents were asked to self-report their desire for engaging in four types of practice, reflecting micro (working directly with individuals and/or families) and non-micro work (managing or administering social service organizations, formulating public policy, and/or engaging with communities and large groups on advocacy or other global issues). If none of these options fit, respondents were able to write in their own reasons for entering the field. All narrative responses were "back coded" to represent either micro or mezzo/macro interests that drove their initial motivation.

Social workers' responses about their specializations in graduate school were also measured dichotomously. Specializations in research, political advocacy, policy, or management/administration were considered macro-focused while those that involved case management, counseling, and direct work with individuals and/or families were coded as micro specializations.

These research methods were not without limitations. Data on initial motivation for entering graduate school were collected at the time of or after graduation. Retrospective information can be prone to issues with reliability and validity. Data was limited to that of MSW graduates with no information obtained from graduate school administrators and faculty. Such information may have been helpful in identifying impediments to offering macro practice specializations. Despite these methodological shortcomings, this exploratory study provides insight into the structural and attitudinal factors which influence choice of graduate school specialization, a topic which has been understudied.

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### Sample

Within the sample, there was much variability in the length of time since MSW graduation. About 6% (n=22) were current MSW students who were in the last semester prior to graduation. Another 25% (n=119) graduated within the prior 12 months. Half of the remaining respondents (n=233) had less than 10 years of experience with 21% of the sample (n=100) practicing for more than a decade. The average length of time since

graduation was 5.3 years (SD=7.3).

Most respondents identified as female (88%) and were from diverse racial backgrounds – White (45%), Black/African American (25%), Hispanic/Latinx (16%), Asian/Pacific Islander (6%), and Other (4%). Thirty percent had their BSWs. The majority (69%) of the sample completed their MSW coursework face-to-face, while 25% had taken both in-person and online courses. Six percent earned their MSWs completely online. While respondents had graduated from MSW programs in 22 different states, as well as Puerto Rico, Canada, and India, two-thirds (67%) were alumni of 30 accredited programs in two specific Northeastern states. This distribution is not surprising as the study relied on a convenience sample, with 14 of the 19 trainings sponsored by NASW chapters in these two states.

## Results

Data were used to gain an understanding of the extent to which social workers had the opportunity to or concentrated in macro practice. Figure 1 illustrates that almost a third (31%) of social workers attended graduate programs that did not have macro practice specializations. Of those who did have access to these specializations, about three-quarters (73%) chose to focus on micro or clinical methods, regardless of whether they specialized in working with a specific population or problem areas. Thus, 88 out of 474 (19%) social workers in the total sample focused on macro practice (such as administration, policy, or community development) in graduate school.

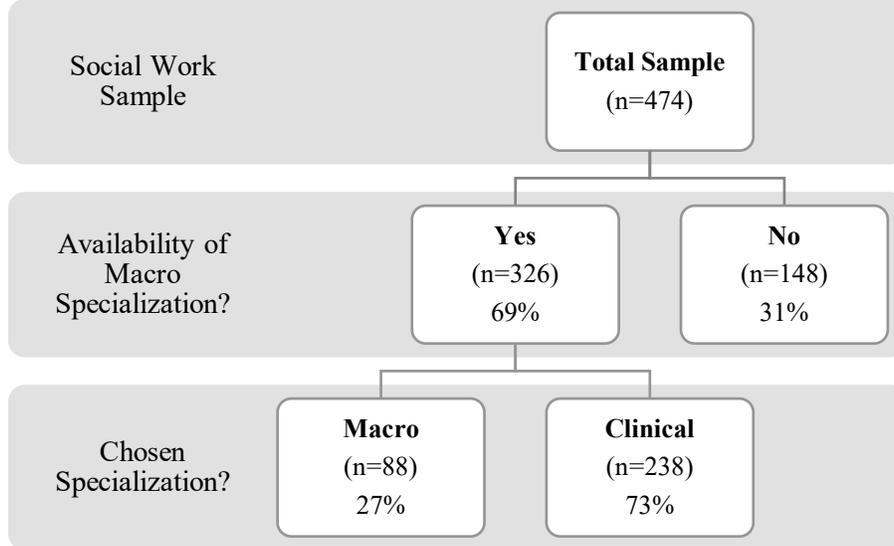Figure 1. *Breakdown of Macro Specialization Selection Based on Availability*



Figure 2 provides a breakdown of macro course availability, requirements, and enrollment of those who did not have the ability to concentrate in macro methods in graduate school (148 social workers; 31% of original sample). Approximately two-thirds

(68%) of those in graduate programs without macro practice specializations stated that they had access to macro practice courses, while about a third (32%) did not. Over half (57%) of those who had access to macro courses stated that they were required for graduation. A third of social workers (33%) who did not have macro practice courses required for graduation elected to take them.

Figure 2. *Breakdown of Macro Coursework Taken by Social Workers Without Macro Specialization Availability*
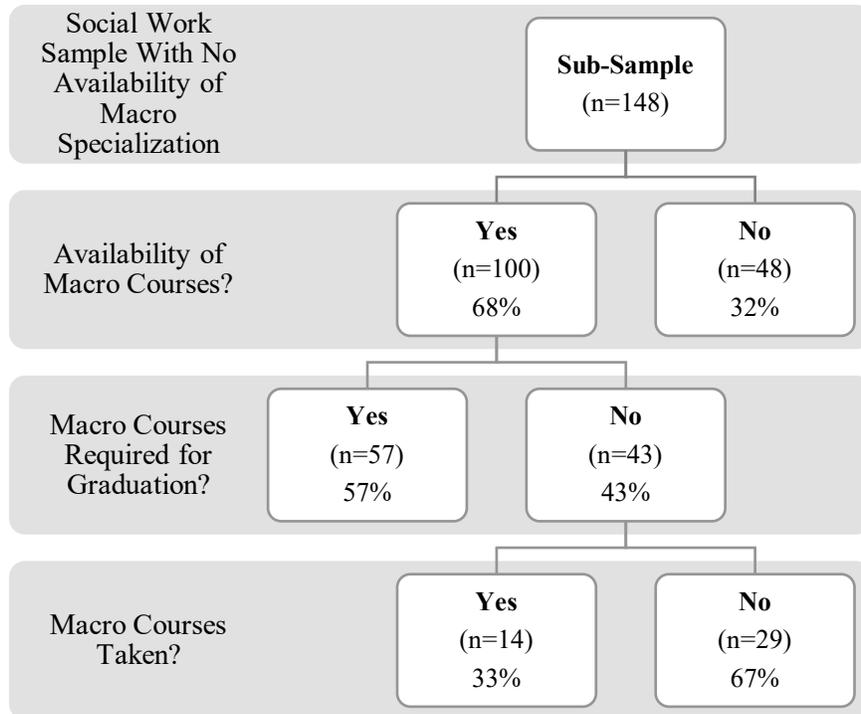


Bivariate testing was used to examine the association between social workers' initial interests in pursuing social work graduate degrees and their chosen specializations. Table 1 includes the 88 social workers who concentrated in macro practice and the 386 social workers who concentrated in clinical methods (consisting of the 238 social workers who chose to do so despite having the availability of macro specializations and the 148 social workers who did not have a choice as they attended programs without macro specializations). Results indicate that the specialization of students was strongly influenced by the initial motivation that drove their decision to pursue their graduate degrees, $X^2$ (1, n=461) = 44.4, p<.0001, though different patterns emerged.

Table 1. *Comparison of Initial Motivation to Pursue Master of Social Work Degree by Specialization*

| Which of following types of work drove your initial decision to pursue your MSW? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Specialization | | |
| Working… | Macro | Clinical | Total |
| Directly with individuals and/or families (children or adults) | 51 (13%) Cell A | 331 (87%) Cell B | 382 (100%) |
| In management/ administration, to formulate policy, or with communities/large groups | 36 (46%) Cell C | 43 (54%) Cell D | 79 (100%) |
| Totals | 87 (19%) | 374 (81%) | 461[1] (100%) |

$X^2$ (1, n=461) = 44.4, p<.0001

[1]Thirteen social workers (12 with clinical specializations and one with a macro practice specialization) were not included in this analysis due to missing data on the reason that they decided to pursue a MSW degree.

Not surprisingly, the vast majority (87%) of those who wanted to work directly with individuals and/or families chose to concentrate on clinical practice (Cell B). Only 13% who originally wanted to do micro practice work decided to pursue macro practice specializations (Cell A). However, the reverse was found among those whose initial intentions were to work in management and administration, or with policy or large groups. The majority (54%) of those who chose to pursue social work due to macro interests ultimately pursued clinical specializations (Cell D), while 46% stayed true to their initial motivation to study macro methods (Cell C). Interestingly, further analysis of those in Cell D indicated that 47% (n=20) chose MSW programs without macro specializations, even though they were driven to the profession due to its focus on management, policy, or changes in larger systems.

Table 2 confirms the expectation that interests at the time of graduate school admittance are strong predictors of specialization. Those who had a strong desire to engage in macro practice when entering MSW programs were more likely to concentrate in macro methods, while those who had no interest were not, $X^2$ (2, n=474) = 91.0, p<.0001. While a small minority of social workers who were not interested at all in macro practice upon entrance into their graduate programs ended up in macro practice specializations (6%), a larger percentage of those very interested in macro practice (47%) ultimately chose to focus on clinical work. Consistent with earlier analyses, 48% (n=20) of the 42 social workers who were very interested in macro practice when entering their MSW programs attended programs without such specializations.

Table 2. *Comparison of Initial Interest in Macro Practice by Specialization*

To what extent were you interested in focusing on macro practice when you entered your MSW program?

| Interest | Specialization | | Total |
| | Macro | Clinical | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Very | 48 (53%) | 42 (47%) | 90 (100%) |
| Somewhat | 32 (12%) | 224 (88%) | 256 (100%) |
| Not at all | 8 (6%) | 120 (94%) | 128 (100%) |
| Total | 88 (19%) | 386 (81%) | 474 (100%) |
| $X^2$ (2, n=474) = 91.0, p<.0001 | | | |

Bivariate testing was done using all demographic data collected to identify any associations with those who concentrated in macro practice versus those who did not. No significant differences were discovered, with one important exception. Thirty-nine percent of those who concentrated on macro methods were Black or African American, while only 21% of those with clinical specializations identified as members of this racial/ethnic group, $X^2$ (1, n=474) = 11.3, p<.001.

## Discussion

Results indicate that there are both structural and attitudinal barriers which impede the proportion of social work student in macro specializations. Structural barriers include the lack of availability of macro specializations with 31% of social workers attending graduate programs that did not have macro practice specializations. Accreditation standards that mandate the need for a minimum of six full-time MSW faculty are also structural barriers (CSWE, 2015). Graduate programs will be sensitive to market demands to attract sufficient numbers of candidates for ongoing sustainability. With only 13% of students interested in macro methods at the time of admission, programs with macro specializations are challenged in attracting enough students to cover costs associated with faculty salaries and ongoing operations.

Attitudinal barriers also exist with the majority of clinical students (67%) not interested in even taking courses in macro methods if they are not required for graduation. More than half of those who wanted to work in management/administration or do policy/community work upon admission graduated with clinical specializations. Views which may have motivated them to focus on micro versus macro methods need to be better understood as they serve as attitudinal impediments for increasing the proportion of students in macro specializations.

It is likely that existing structural and attitudinal barriers are related to one another as students may be more interested in clinical work due to recruitment materials which emphasize its importance. As there are more graduate programs with micro specializations and students interested in micro methods, open houses to prospective students may be prone to highlight teaching and research with individuals and families. The prominence of micro-focused programs, as compared to those with macro concentrations, may reinforce existing attitudes about the value of direct service over policy practice, administration, advocacy, and management.

In this study, the proportion of graduates who concentrated in macro practice methods (19%) was comparable to a recent workforce survey that found that 18.5% of social workers were doing community organizing, advocacy, or indirect practice (GWU, 2019). Both of these proportions were slightly higher than those reported in previous studies (Hill et al., 2017; Mattocks, 2018). The 19% approaches the goal established by the Special Commission of ACOSA to increase the enrollment of MSW students in macro specializations to 20% by the year 2020 (ACOSA, 2020). While this study did not employ a probability sampling strategy aimed at generating a nationally representative sample, these findings are encouraging.

However, this study's findings indicate that it may be difficult to further increase the proportion of social workers specializing in macro practice for several reasons. The first is a structural barrier created by the principles of supply and demand in a competitive social work graduate school market. Despite long-standing complaints by some that there are too many social work programs (Lieberman & Severson, 1998), the accreditation of new programs continues. Between 2005 and 2015, the number of annual MSWs awarded grew from 16,956 to 26,329, an increase of 55.3% (CSWE, 2018b). Data collected in this study indicates that 83% of all MSW applicants wanted to work directly with individuals or families. Thus, for programs that are chasing the market, it is unlikely they are going to cater their recruitment and curricula to macro interests. Current accreditation standards allow graduate programs to choose their areas of specialization or foci (CSWE, 2015). Thus, few, if any, new programs with macro specializations will likely be developed as MSW programs may be reluctant to devote valuable resources to attracting only 17% of the applicant pool. This research indicates that about a third of social work students (31%) attend programs which do not even offer macro specializations. The lack of availability of macro specializations in social work programs is a structural barrier which impedes growth in the number of social workers focusing on these methods.

This study's findings also point to concerns about the continued viability of existing macro specializations. While the majority (69%) of social workers were in graduate programs with concentrations on macro methods, only about a quarter (27%) of those with the opportunity to choose macro specializations did so. As universities become increasingly competitive (Musselin, 2018) and need to make resource allocation decisions consistent with their ability to gain market share (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016), they will be tested in their continued commitment to fund macro specializations that are substantially under-enrolled when compared with their clinical counterparts in the same graduate programs. The relatively small size of macro-focused programs, in comparison to those with clinical specializations, makes them vulnerable for elimination and under-resourcing, jeopardizing their ongoing sustainability.

Social work education is in a predicament regarding its commitment to ensuring availability of programs specializing in macro methods. If macro specializations are not available, it is impossible to graduate more social workers trained with macro expertise. However, unless more students are interested in these specializations, new or small graduate programs will not be attracted to offering them as they need sufficient enrollment to sustain the six full-time graduate faculty currently required for accreditation (CSWE, 2015). Decisions to develop or continue offering macro specializations might need to be

driven by a philosophical commitment by the administration of schools of social work to the importance of these methods, rather than in response to bolster program enrollments or meet market demand.

Achieving the modest goal of ACOSA to increase the number of social work students taking macro courses may also be difficult as data indicate only about half (48%) of those without the option to pursue macro specializations (n=148) even took courses in these practice methods (n=71; 57 required for graduation; 14 not required, but took). Without the requirement to take macro courses, students are more likely to avoid these offerings. Appealing to graduate programs without macro specializations to develop courses in these practice methods and requiring all clinical students to take these courses may help further the goal of helping clinical social workers understand why competency in macro methods are essential in today's complex systems.

This study found racial differences with Black/African American social workers more likely to choose macro specializations than their counterparts. As people who are Black/African American have experienced discrimination for centuries, they may be more likely to see the need for systemic change and advocacy for economic and social justice – leading them to concentrate on methods that will help bring about societal changes.

Bivariate analyses indicate that social workers select their specializations based on their initial motivation to pursue social work. Attitudes favoring clinical work that serve as motivators for entering graduate school are barriers to enhancing the proportion of social workers ultimately specializing in macro methods. Ensuring that the importance of macro practice is stressed in BSW programs may help with increasing the number of MSW applicants choosing macro specializations, as most undergraduate social work students continue onto graduate study.

This study found that there are some who do not end up in specializations consistent with their original interests in social work. The experiences of these social workers warrant further investigation. A minority (13%) of social workers who wanted to work with individuals and/or families upon admission ended up concentrating in macro methods. However, the majority (54%) of those who wanted to work in management/administration or do policy/community work upon admission graduated with clinical specializations. Data revealed that about half of these students did so as they attended programs without macro specializations, suggesting that other factors, such as cost and proximity, may be more salient than specialization availability when making program decisions. If there is a desire to increase the number of students in macro specializations, additional research would help to identify the factors associated with choosing social work programs. A review of the literature indicates a dearth of data that can significantly explain why applicants choose to attend one social work program over another. Additional research could provide insight into the reasons that more than half of those who initially entered social work education with interests in macro methods ultimately graduated with clinical foci. It may also be useful to further study the 13% of those who originally wanted to do micro practice but decided to pursue macro specializations. Identifying tangible methods for enhancing interest in policy practice, management, and administration would be useful to social work programs who want to increase the number of students who choose macro specializations.

Donaldson et al. (2014) have posited that licensure regulations and enhanced employment opportunities steer students away from macro options. The degree to which these factors impacted the decisions of this target group needs to be better understood. While a small proportion of those who wanted to initially work with individuals and families chose to concentrate on macro methods (13%), the actual number of students is significant given the overall size of the cohort. Understanding what drove them to switch to macro specializations despite their original clinical aspirations may be helpful to improving the proportion of students focusing on macro methods.

A "build it and they will come" approach is not supported by this study. Analyses demonstrate that student choice is largely driven by attitudes that motivate those to enter the profession, which disproportionately favor micro work. If there is a desire to increase the numbers in macro specializations, efforts should be made to recruit those with interests in public administration/health, policy, and law who enter social work education with an existing passion for work in larger systems. Current efforts to convince those with a passion for clinical work of the importance of focusing on mezzo or macro methods will likely not be effective in a substantive way.

The finding that those who are Black/African American are more likely to specialize in macro methods is also important. Students who have experienced marginalization and oppression while growing up may enter social work education understanding the importance of systems change to eradicate fundamental inequities in opportunities and treatment. Less than half (45%) of the study sample was White, but data indicates that 70% of social workers overall and 85% of those who are licensed are White (Klufts, 2020). Thus, those in the profession function "in a system of white supremacy" and, "largely and collectively, benefit from white privilege" (Corley & Young, 2018; Klufts, 2020, para. 5). Thus, the majority of those entering the profession benefit from existing systems and structures. They may not be driven to specialize in methods which focus on promoting reforms to enhance opportunities for those who are marginalized or oppressed. Clearly, social work education must elicit strategies to help those who have not experienced systematic discrimination based on race or skin color to understand the importance of dedicating their professional training to learning how to make systems-level, structural change. This challenge is one that exists globally and has been a challenge for social work as a profession (Mindrup et al., 2011; Wahler, 2012). Until such discrepancies are addressed, it may be difficult to attract a mostly White social work student body to macro specializations.

While not impossible, the goal of increasing the proportion of students in macro specializations requires the profession to tackle some of its long-standing problems such as competition with and delineation from other disciplines. This study clearly demonstrates that raising the proportion of social workers in macro practice specializations will require more than pedagogical techniques aimed at increasing interest in these methods. As often seen in social work practice, real change requires structural and systems-level interventions.

Reducing the number of full-time faculty required by accreditation standards for MSW programs is needed to foster the growth of new macro-focused specializations at

universities and colleges which have been reluctant to develop them based on market analyses (CSWE, 2015). Greater availability of macro specializations would help as nearly a third of social workers did not have the chance to focus on policy practice, advocacy, administration, or management. Licensure requirements that often include the need to take psychopathology or other clinical coursework must be changed as they serve as impediments to obtaining licensure eligibility for those with macro specializations.

This study clearly indicates that specialization in micro or macro methods is driven by attitudes that exist at admission. Increasing the proportion of students in macro specializations will require enhanced recruitment of those who already understand the merits of system change and are committed to focusing their work in this area. Enhancing the importance placed on macro content in undergraduate social work programs is a start as it may result in greater numbers of BSW graduates entering MSW programs wanting to focus on macro methods.

It is ironic that the fate of macro practice specializations rests with the very competencies that make these methods so vital to the social work profession. In the current climate of exposing racial injustice and discrimination, it is more important than ever to address the root causes of social problems which have existed for centuries, as well as reaffirm the profession's commitment to social justice through systemic change. Social workers must not affirm the status quo regarding structural inequities in society and social work education cannot be satisfied with the number of social workers specializing in macro practice. Now is the time for action based on futurist thinking or dreaming big. The profession must remedy the divide which has caused social workers to have to choose between specializations in micro or macro methods. If the profession is to realize its mission of social activism and be comprised of those who are prepared to make needed system changes, we must embrace that "macro matters" for *all* social workers.

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