COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF

SOCIAL WORKERS

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to explore the community's perceptions of the social work profession. The study explored five specific areas: 1) view of social work; 2) roles of social workers; 3) community preference's for seeking help; 4) social work's value to community; and 5) sources of perceptions of social work. A survey was administered to parents and guardians of students at a local elementary during a school function. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. In contrast to previous studies, findings suggest that the view of social work is generally positive. However, there is a lack of knowledge about the professional job roles and abilities of social workers. Further studies need to be done within ethnic and at-risk communities to determine how to best reach those communities in order to provide services.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The current research is an exploratory study measuring the public's perceptions of social workers. The study seeks to measure the perceptions of both the social work profession and social work professionals of parents and guardians of school aged children. The study will explore perceptions about the roles social workers perform and the appropriate roles for social workers to perform. The will also examine respondents' preference for seeking help from various kinds of professionals (psychologist, social worker, psychiatrist and clergy) for treatment of specific problem issues (abused child, domestic violence, disruptive or overactive child, etc.). Perceptions of social workers value to the community and the sources for the basis of their perceptions of social work will also be measured. Lecroy and Stinson (2004) state "it is important to examine what the public thinks of social work today so that we might influence social work's image and the public's opinion tomorrow" (165).

This research expands on previous research conducted on the public's perception of social work. Specifically, this research adapted the survey from Lecroy and Stinson's (2004) study to examine the perceptions of social workers of parents and guardians of school-aged children at Morton elementary in Arlington, Texas. The study is multi-faceted and measures several different areas important to the public perception of social work. If the publics' view of social work is limited and inaccurate, social workers must correct these misperceptions

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through advocacy. The public's professional preference for treatment of problem issues is important to understand. If the public does not see social work as a viable treatment option, social work's low public status will continue. The source of the public's perception is key when it comes to social workers being able to advocate for their profession. Understanding the public's perception can enable social workers to increase service delivery and more effectively delivery services to populations in need, as well as, increase in the recruitment of talented and diverse social workers for the future.

<div align="center">1.1 Importance of the Study</div>

The public's perception of social work influences and shapes the profession. The public's perception of social work has influenced and shaped social workers, clients and professional recruitment over a long period of time. A negative public perception of social work can lead to many harmful and serious consequences including damaging the credibility of the social work profession, negative stigma attached to those who seek services from social workers, declining recruitment of those entering the profession and a diminished number of services being provided to those in need (Zugazaga, Surette, Mendez & Otto, 2006).

The current literature on the public's perception of social work suggests that the public generally possesses a negative perception of the social work profession. Studies on the public's perception document this negative perception and point to multiple possibilities including stereotypes as misconceptions. Misleading and negative portrayal of social work is evident in the media. A lack of knowledge about the social work profession, the array of services it provides and its varied roles contributes to

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misunderstanding and often negative perceptions of the profession. Additionally, confusion of social work with other disciplines adds to the public's poor perception (Agresta, 2004; Gibelman, 2004; Lecroy & Stinson, 2004; Zugazaga et al., 2006). When people are unable to distinguish a social worker from the other professionals then the other professionals also shape the opinions of the clients and the general population.

Few studies on perceptions of social work have examined the general public's perception of the profession. It is important to more fully understand the public's perception of social work because the public is the main consumer of social work services. It is the public, current and future, who are the recipients of social work services. If people lack an understanding of the profession, images portrayed by outside sources will create their perceptions of social work (Zugazaga et al., 2006). Lecroy and Stinson (2004) contend that one of the most important tasks a social worker has is to enhance the public's knowledge and opinions about the profession.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review examines three areas related to perceptions of the social work profession: (1) publics' perceptions of social work; (2) sources of the publics' perceptions of social work (media, stereotypes and lack of knowledge); and 3) publics' perceptions of social work compared to other helping professions.

2.1 Public Perception of Social Work

Researchers have examined the perceptions of college students, social workers, and other helping professionals of social workers for decades, and studies continue to find that there is a general negative perception of the social work profession. There have been several reasons hypothesized to explain the negative perceptions by previous investigators including general stereotypes and misconceptions, poor presentation of social work in the media, its confusion with other disciplines, lack of self-advocacy by social workers, lack of exposure/public knowledge of social work, and the variation of services that social workers provide (Agresta, 2004; Condie, Hanson, Lang, Moss & Kane, 1978; Gibelman, 2004; Lecroy & Stinson, 2004; Zugazaga et al., 2006).

In the first study examining perceptions of the social work profession, Condie et al. (1978) surveyed 160 females and 90 males between the ages of 18 – 76. The respondents were mainly married high school graduates that classified their occupation as

nonprofessional (85%). The participants were surveyed about their perceptions on appropriate social work roles, stereotypes of social workers, and their preference for treatment from various helping professionals. The survey asked respondents to identify if the respondent had previously been acquainted with a social worker through friendship, employment or treatment. The survey asked respondents the educational requirements to become a social worker and average income of social workers.

The study found respondents were able to identify different roles that social workers perform. About 58 % of respondents identified the role of a social worker as "child protector", 49% "community organizer", 44% "agent of social change", and 44% "mental health therapist". Respondents incorrectly identified the roles of a social worker as a legal advisor (25%) and psychiatric intern (15.6%). The authors concluded that responses indicated, "that the public is only able to marginally identify the roles of professional social workers" (Condie et al., 1978, p. 49). Furthermore, 54% of people surveyed reported being acquainted with a social worker, but only 9% who were acquainted with a social worker said they would seek help from a social worker (Condie et al., 1978).

Condie et al. (1978) found that being acquainted with a social worker had little relationship to respondent's responses except that those who were acquainted with a social worker had more knowledge of where the settings in which social workers were employed. Respondents acquainted with a social worker were able to indentify that social workers were employed in hospitals and courts (Condie et al, 1978). Seventy-five percent of respondents were able to indentify the average pay for a social worker

correctly for the time as $8,000-$18,000 (Condie et al. 1978). Many respondents (43 %) believed a BA degree was needed to practice social work; 36% of respondents believed a master's degree was required (Condie et al., 1978). These findings suggest that perhaps the image of social work is not as bad as social workers might believe it to be. However, advocacy and clearer definitions of social work are necessary to clear up misconception and for people to understand what a social worker does. The authors suggest that further research related to the community's perception of social work is necessary to further our understanding of the areas of misconception (Condie et al., 1978).

Lecroy and Stinson (2004) conducted a study similar to Condie et al.'s (1978) study that measured the public's perception of social work. The researchers acquired a list of phone numbers that were nationally representative and then surveyed 386 participants by telephone to measure the participant's knowledge of social work, source of perceptions about social work, commonly held myths about social work and knowledge of social workers' educational requirements (Lecroy & Stinson, 2004). The study's participants were predominantly white married females with some level of college education who knew a social worker and had a history of direct experience with a social worker (Lecroy & Stinson, 2004). Sixty-seven percent of respondents surveyed personally knew a social worker, while 55% had a family member who had direct treatment contact with a social worker (Lecroy & Stinson, 2004).

Lecroy and Stinson (2004) found that the participants in their study held some of the same perceptions of social work identified by Condie et al. (1978) over 25 years earlier. Participants viewed social work being a female dominated profession whose role

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was to protect children. Almost all respondents (91 %) identified social work's role as a "child protector". Respondents were able to identify the social work roles of providing family therapy (78%), facilitating community change (65%), and practicing as private practitioners (49%). Respondents also incorrectly identified the role of legal advisor (33%) and psychological tests administrator (47%) as social work roles. Few believed that social workers could perform psychotherapy (22%) (Lecroy & Stinson, 2004). The findings of the study demonstrate the public is generally confused as to some of the roles and functions of social workers, they are able to identify the stereotypical role of social workers as child protector.

Lecroy and Stinson (2004) also found that a primary source for respondents' perception of social work comes from personal contact. Over one-third (35%) of respondents had received treatment from a social worker, 30% from knew a social worker outside of their job (e.g. neighbor or friend) and 32 % knew about social workers from various media outlets (e.g. television, movies, magazines, books and newspaper) (Lecroy & Stinson, 2004). Over 90% of respondents affirmed that "Social workers work with all classes of people" 95% affirmed that social workers can be a great source of comfort in times of need (Lecroy & Stinson, 2004). Half of the respondents indicated that a bachelor's degree was needed to be a social worker while one third believed a master's degree was necessary. The findings demonstrate a lack of knowledge about the training that social workers have. However respondents also reinforced some negative stereotypical job roles of social workers. Eighteen percent of people affirmed that social workers help people take advantage of the government. Lecroy and Stinson (2004) also

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compared social workers to other helping professions including psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses, counselor and clergy. The researchers asked respondents which professions had the most value to the community and respondents ranked the professions on a likert scale. Social workers ranked third among the listed professions. Respondents indentified nurses as being the most valuable to the community followed by clergy and then social worker. Social workers were viewed as having more value than counselors, psychologist, and psychiatrist. Additionally, the researchers asked respondents how they would you feel if their offspring chose social work as their profession? Social work received the lowest endorsement across all professions listed with nursing receiving the highest ranking (Lecroy & Stinson, 2004). These findings suggest that when parents talk with their children about possible career options parents would steer their child away from social work. The authors acknowledge that the studies finding may be limited due to its sample being comprised of a large percent of educated women who would be more likely to be knowledgeable about the social work profession and look more favorably upon helping professions in general (Lecroy & Stinson, 2004).

In the most recent study examining perceptions of the social work profession, Dennison, Poole, and Qaqish (2007) studied the perception and knowledge about the profession of social work by measuring the students knowledge of profession, knowledge of practice settings, areas of practice and interest in the social work profession (Dennison et al., 2007). The study surveyed 678 students, between ages of 18-25 in a liberal arts class with 100 or more students enrolled. Respondents were primarily female (77%), first and second year students (70%) and European American (64%), (Dennison et al.,

2007). Results indicated that seven percent of respondents had an immediate family member who was a social worker, 16% had an extended family member who was a social worker, 21% had a close friend who was a social worker, and 26% had worked or volunteered in a social services agency. Persons having worked or volunteered at a social service agency had more knowledge of settings in which social workers were employed. Students who were older were likely to be more knowledgeable about social work than students who were under the age of 21. Older students and those who were affiliated with a social worker, either through family connections or friendship, had a significantly higher interest in a career in social work. Furthermore, African American students reported that they were more interested in the field of social work than Caucasian respondents (Dennison et al., 2007). The study concluded that that only 15% of the respondents had a perceived high level of knowledge about social work and that interaction or exposure to a social worker increased the participant's perception of their knowledge about the profession of social work and their knowledge of the variety of jobs available to social workers (Dennison et al., 2007). However, the results of the study need to be considered in regard to the study's limitations. The study lacked comparisons to other helping professions and the instrument used to rank knowledge of social work had low reliability (Dennison et al., 2007).

In another recent study, Kirchofer, Telljohann, Price, Dake and Ritchie (2007) surveyed the knowledge of 369 elementary school parents and guardians about their knowledge of the job roles of school service personnel such as social workers, nurses, psychologists and counselors. The authors also examined respondents' perceptions about

the relative importance of these professional job roles. The study's respondents were predominately white, married females, with about half having completed an undergraduate or graduate degree (Kirchofer et al., 2007). The study found that 22.6 % of the people were able to identify their school as having a social worker, 44.9% were not sure when the social worker was working, 71.8% never used the social worker, and 57.7% have no interaction with the social worker (Kirchofer et al., 2007). The respondents were more easily able to identify their child's school as having a school nurse (77%) or a counselor (59%) (Kirchofer et al., 2007). Furthermore, 70% of respondents indicated they had met with the school nurse, 52% met the counselor and only 38% had met with the social worker (Kirchofer et al., 2007).

The researchers measured the respondents' perceived importance of the social workers different job roles within the school. The responses were ranked in order of the parents' and guardians' perceived importance of the task. The social worker's job roles were listed as: providing crisis services (death, fighting, etc.), advising faculty about abuse, conduct training on mental health issues, serving as a team member who helps treat learning problems, serving on a team that identifies learning problems, working with school staff and agencies, conducting parent training on mental health, assessing children in the school environment, and serving as a link between parents, students, community, and school needs (Kirchofer et al., 2007). Respondents perceived the most important role of social workers in the school was to provide crisis support for bullying, grieving or fighting (81%); this role was followed by advising teachers and staff about abuse and

neglect (80%); and to provide counseling to children in need (78%) (Kirchofer et al., 2007).

<div align="center">2.2 Sources of the Perception of Social Work</div>

It is critical to understand the sources of the negative perception of the social work profession if social workers and their allies are to influence those perceptions in the future. The literature suggests that the media's portrayal of social work, stereotypes about the profession and a general lack of knowledge of the social work profession contribute to the public's perception of social work. In this section, I explore how the media stereotypes, and a lack of knowledge about the profession have contributed to the construction and maintenance of the public's perception of social work.

2.2.1 Media

Images of social workers appear in newspapers and on the television screen. The images appear in both news and entertainment formats. Research on the media's portrayal of social workers suggests that news formats present the most realistic and more favorable image of social workers than entertainment formats (Freeman and Valentine, 2004; Gibelman, 2004; Reid and Meisner, 2001; Zugazaga et al., 2006).

Zugazaga et al. (2006) examined social workers perceptions of the media's portrayal of their profession. The researchers measured the perception of 665 masters' level social workers that were members of the Florida Chapter of the NASW. The respondents were primarily European American females with MSW degrees (Zugazaga et al, 2006). The social workers reported that they perceived that both the news and entertainment media presented a more negative than positive view of social work

(Zugazaga et al, 2006). Both male and female social workers surveyed perceived the only place where news and entertainment media presented a positive view of social work was in the category of caring (Zugazaga et al, 2006).

A study conducted by Reid and Meisner (2001) compared the representation of social work by 399 newspaper articles in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US). The study found that social work was presented positively 58% of the time in the US as opposed to 13% in the UK (Reid & Meisner, 2001). The authors also found that most of the articles about social work did not appear on the front page or in the front sections of the paper. Stories about social work and social workers appear to receive little attention compared to other stories.

The entertainment media treats social work much differently than news media. Social workers are often depicted in the entertainment media, television and movies, as being unethical, uneducated, sexualized and incompetent (Freeman & Valentine, 2004; Gibelman 2004; Tower, 2000; Zugazaga et al., 2006). Freeman and Valentine (2004) reviewed 44 movies portraying a social worker in film from 1938 to 1998. The study found that portrayal of social workers was generally uncharacteristic of the profession and social work professionals. A majority of movies portrayed white heterosexual female social workers who were incompetent, do-gooders, meddlers, crusaders, advocates, and investigators (Freeman & Valentine, 2004). The films failed to present content regarding the educational credentials of social workers, professional ethics, diversity of clientele, varied tasks performed by social workers, or their efforts toward macro level changes.

Gibelman (2004) examined the portrayal of social workers in three recent

television shows: "Kate Brasher", "The Norm Show" and "Judging Amy". "The Norm

Show" depicted a former professional hockey player that committed tax fraud and was

sentenced to either jail or involuntary civil servitude as a social worker (Gibelman, 2004).

The show depicted unethical social work practice and placed the profession of social

work on equivalent level punishment as going to jail. "Kate Brasher" was the most

recent show portraying a woman as a social worker. Kate did not complete high school.

The character showed up at a community center looking for help and proceeded to be

hired as a social worker (Gibelman, 2004). Once "Kate Brasher" began practicing social

work, it was portrayed that all she needed to be a social worker was the ability to listen

and to show up to the appropriate community center at the right time (Gibelman, 2004).

The image and portrayal of social workers in "Judging Amy" depicted a social

worker in a more realistic fashion but not necessarily more positively than the other

shows. The social work character takes her social work job seriously, displays realistic

burnout, and works on realistic cases with a realistic caseload (Gibelman, 2004).

However the show lacked the portrayal of the social workers' educational training and

the social worker character continually pushed the boundaries of ethical practice by

engaging in subordination of her supervisors and questionable tactics for client advocacy

(Gibelman, 2004).

2.2.2 Stereotypes

Two common stereotypes permeate the social work profession. Social work is viewed as a female profession and that social works' primary role is to protect children (Dennison et al, 2007; Lecroy & Stinson, 2004; Mcphail, 2004). Thus, those with little power dominate the ranks of the profession and the profession serves those with little power. The fact that women dominate the social work profession appears to contribute to its low pay and low status. In addition, the fact that social work is perceived as primarily serving children who have low status also contributes to its low status perception.

Schilling, Morrish and Liu (2008) examined the demographic trends in social work over the past 25 years by analyzing Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) annual reports from 1974, 1981, 1991, and 2000. The reports reveal that females graduate from all levels of social work programs at significantly higher rates than males (Schilling et al., 2008). Females accounted for 65% of MSW graduates in 1974 and grew to 85% in 2000; females accounted for 36% of doctoral program graduates in 1974 but grew to 73% in 2000 (Schilling et al., 2008).

Over the last 30 years, several studies have examined the demographic trends of social work and revealed gender inequities in pay and practice setting (Belon & Gould, 1977; Fortune & Hanks, 1988; Koeske & Krowinski, 2004; Schilling et al., 2008). In one of the first studies examining pay inequity in social work, Belon and Gould (1977) surveyed 122 NASW members, 98 full time and 24 part time workers, between 1974-1975. Results indicated that there was an inequity in the payment received by females as compared to male counterparts (Belon & Gould, 1977). Previous studies had

hypothesized that females received a lower pay because they took lower level positions, took more time off from work, and were more involved in the direct service setting than in administrative settings (Belon & Gould, 1977). Belon and Gould (1977) demonstrated that when these factors were controlled for, males earned more than females by more than $3,000.

A decade later, Fortune and Hanks (1988) surveyed 520 graduates between 1975-83 from a Virginia school of social work about postgraduate employment. The study found that the inequity in pay continued from 1974-1988 despite all other factors being controlled for by the researchers (Fortune & Hanks, 1988). Males received a higher rate of pay despite switching practice setting throughout the course of their career. Furthermore, the study indicated that both genders received greater pay increases when they remained in the same practice setting (Fortune & Hanks, 1988).

More recently Koeske and Krowinski (2004) conducted research on the mediators of the inequity of pay in social work. The researchers surveyed 359 Pennsylvania social workers on personal demographics and job settings (Koeske & Krowinski, 2004). The surveys found a continuation of pay inequity. From 1974-2004, females reported a mean income of $35,035 and males $38,700 (Koeske & Krowinski, 2004).

The public perceives that women run a majority of social work services and agencies (McPhail, 2004). This is, in fact, contrary to the reality of the situation. Social work is a predominantly female profession that is dominated by men, McPhail (2004) reports that while a majority of practitioners are female, the majority of the administration and policy makers are male. McPhail (2004) believes that social work

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should be looked as a majority of female professionals with males setting policy and procedure due to the overwhelming male presence in administrative positions more often and earlier in their careers.

There are other stereotypes that deal with the social work practitioners that reflect the public's view of social workers job role as a child protector. Condie et al. (1978) reported that 58% of respondents viewed social workers as "child protectors". The stereotype that social workers primary role is to protect children adds to its low status perception. Lecroy and Stinson (2004) reported that 91.3% of the respondents identified social work's role to protect children. The findings from these two studies suggest from 1978-2004 the stereotype of social workers as child protectors grew enormously (Condie et al., 1978; Lecroy & Stinson, 2004).

The public believing that social work is a female dominated profession whose primary role is to protect children pigeonholes social work as a low status occupation. If these stereotypes prevail, social work and social workers will continue to be viewed with less regard than their professional counterparts.

2.2.3 Lack of Knowledge about the Social Work Profession

Social workers practice in a variety of settings and in a variety of functions within each setting. Thus, it is often difficult to distinguish social workers from other helping professionals. Social workers interact with and work beside doctors, nurses, psychologists, teachers, activists, hospice workers, counselors, law enforcement personnel and many other professionals in the course of their work. In working with other professionals, social workers often lose the ability to be identified as a separate and

distinct profession (Agresta, 2004; Condie et al., 1978; Fall, Levitov, Jennings, & Eberts, 2000; Lecroy & Stinson, 2004; Ormrod & Ambrose, 1999).

Gibelman (1993) examined the roles of the three helping professions (social work, psychology and counseling) in schools. She examined on the closely related job functions of the three professions, issues of collaborations and common misconceptions among the professions. Gibelman (1993) found that although these three professionals work in an environment that places them in close proximity, they perform a wide array of disparate tasks and duties. Faculty, staff, administration, students and parents often had misconceptions about the roles of the various professions and became confused as to whom they should turn to for the services they needed. Gibelman (1993) states that when social workers are relegated to the specific tasks that the administration and faculty believe are appropriate for social workers, social workers are then not able to demonstrate the breadth of their skills and abilities. The rigid professional roles assigned by administrators and faculty may create competition rather than collaboration among the professional groups (Gibelman, 1993).

Gibelman (1993) advocated that professionals should collaborate more closely in order to better serve clients and contended that collaboration among professional will improve the public image of their respective professions and allow for the public to have a clear and accurate picture of the services each profession provides. "A planned public relations program to inform the relevant publics about the role and functions…help integrate pupil services into the mainstream of education and promote understanding"

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(Gibelman, 1993, p.4). Social workers need to advocate for their own job roles the same way they are trained to advocate for clients.

Agresta (2004) also studied professionals' perceptions of the role of school social workers, psychologist and counselors (Agresta, 2004). School social workers, psychologists and counselors answered questionnaires related to the amount of time they spent on professional activities, such as counseling, report writing and referrals. Respondents were also asked to indicate how appropriate each role was for those in the professional roles to perform. Social workers who responded to the survey indicated that they spent at least 10% of their time in individual counseling, group counseling or faculty/administrator consultation (Agresta, 2004). Social workers also indicated that they wished they could spend more time doing counseling activities (Agresta, 2004). Furthermore the psychologists and counselors surveyed found most jobs areas appropriate for social workers except for the areas of: academic advisement, vocational testing, college advisement, and psychometric testing (Agresta, 2004). The findings suggested that professionals that work around social workers are aware of the scope of skills and abilities that social workers possess and find that all job tasks suit them except for ones specific to other professions such as vocational counseling and psychometric testing.

<div align="center">2.3 Social work in Comparison to Other Helping Professions</div>

The profession of social work is broad and continues to expand into new areas and new functions. Social workers are employed in social service agencies, mental health facilities, schools, geriatric care centers, hospitals, non-profit organizations, and

many more areas (Condie et al, 1978; Dennison et al., 2007; Kirchofer et al., 2007).

Furthermore, the roles that a social worker actually performs in those jobs vary greatly

with the education and training they receive to the way the social workers perform their

tasks (Dennison et al, 2007; Hodge, 2004; Kirchofer et al, 2007). The tasks that social

workers perform are often similar and overlap with the tasks performed by those in other

professions. The variations in settings where social workers are employed and the

variation in service delivery mechanisms among social workers most likely adds to the

negative perception and confusion of social work with other helping professions

(McMillan, 2008).

2.3.1 Salary

The earning wages of social workers compared to other professionals groups

shows a discrepancy in its value. Ozawa and Law (1993) analyzed the salaries of social

workers, nurses, teachers, physicians and lawyers from 1953-1971. The authors collected

economic data for five different occupational groups from the 1982 New Beneficiary

Survey and annual taxable income statements. Ozawa and Law (1993) reported that

social workers ranked lowest among the female-dominated professions (nursing, teaching

and social work) for seven of the fourteen periods measured. However in the years,

1971-1979 social work was the highest paid of the three female-dominated professions.

The researchers suggested this trend may be linked to social workers' ability to work

longer, and in a variety of areas allowing for more income in the later years as opposed to

the other occupations which are have more rigid standards for employment (Ozawa &

Law, 1993). The researchers further suggested that the beginning of social work careers

may consist of low pay and job insecurity but over the lifetime of employment social workers may have the ability to supplement their income by performing after hours group counseling, etc. (Ozawa & Law, 1993). The low earnings of social workers during the early portion of the career may relate to variation in employment, job instability and family/child bearing responsibility (Ozawa & Law, 1993).

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has begun to track the salaries of social workers through the Practice Research Network (PRN). The PRN randomly administered a salary survey to 2,000 NASW members. The survey was administered in 1999 with 1,620 respondents and again 2001 with 1,560 respondents. The 1999 survey reported respondents salaries: under $30,000(24%), $30,000-$39,999 (22%), $40,000-$49,999 (17%), $50,000-$59,999 (13%), $60,000-$69,999 (14%), and $80,000 or more (6%) (NASW, 2003). The results for the survey administered in 2001 reflect relatively the same percentages with small percentages moving up in pay scale. NASW reported that largest percentage of respondents still made under $30,000(22%). However, the salaries for social workers varies: $30,000-$39,999 (20%), $40,000-$49,999 (18%), $50,000-$59,999 (16%), $60,000-$69,999 (14%), and $80,000 or more (9%) (NASW, 2003). The report found that a median income for social workers rose from $41,290 in 1999 to $44, 400 in 2001.

PRN also tracked the number of years that social workers had been in practice in relation to their salaries. Over the course of their careers, social worker's salaries increase with the number years in practice. In 2001, social workers with 2-4 years of experience reported made $35,600, 5-9 years $42,400, 10-14 years $48,300, 15-19 years

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$49,600, 20-24 years $54,700. Social workers with more than 25 years of experience

earned more than $60,000 (NASW, 2003). These findings reinforce the hypothesis set

forth by Ozawa and Law (1993) that over the course of their careers, social workers are

able to increase their earning potential.

2.3.2 Status

In addition to salary, when compared to other professions, the status of the

profession of social work is low. Fall, Levitov, Jennings, and Eberts (2000) studied 96

males and 94 females; about half were European American about their views of the

different helping professions. The respondents listened to five case history vignettes that

depicted: adjustment disorder, psychotic depression, marital problems, borderline

personality disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder. The respondents were asked to

rank order (with no ties in ranking) the professionals they would see for the issues

presented: psychologist, masters level licensed professional counselor, doctoral level

licensed professional counselor, psychiatrist and social worker.

One third of the respondents reported that they had received prior mental health

services from a social worker, that 20% had received services from psychiatrist, 18%

from psychologists, 12% from a master's level licensed counselor, 7% from doctoral-

level licensed professional counselors (Fall et al., 2000). Despite the highest number of

respondents indicating they had previously sought out the services of a social worker,

social workers were ranked lowest among all the profession for each of five different

vignettes (Fall et al, 2000). The low status of social work is demonstrated by the lack of

trust the public has in social work to intervene appropriately in the areas associated with mental health.

Ormrod and Ambrose (1999) examined the public's perception of mental health professionals, including the abilities of social workers, psychologists and clergy to guard the confidentiality of their clients. The study found that clergy members were the most trusted in the area of confidentiality. Almost all people felt what they told a clergy member should be held in confidence but 77% of respondents believed that what a person discussed with a clergy member was actually completely confidential. Fifty percent of respondents believed what they told a psychologist was confidential in comparison to the 85% of what respondents felt should be confidential (Ormrod & Ambrose, 1999). The researchers found that the largest difference that occurs is between the respondent's beliefs about what should be kept confidential and what the respondent believes is kept confidential by a professional happens with social workers. When it comes to social workers the authors found that 75% thought what they talked about with he social worker should be kept confidential and only16% believe what they talk about with a social worker is kept confidential (Ormrod & Ambrose, 1999). Findings of the study suggest that compared to other professionals, people lack faith that social workers will hold their conversations in confidence. Ormrod and Ambrose (1999) suggest that their findings might be reflective of the negative public image of the profession. The public clearly lacks accurate information about the guidelines, ethics and values of licensed social workers.

2.4 Social Work Advocacy Issues

The closely related professional job roles and confusion among other occupations may lead to social workers being defined by other professions. It is important that social workers self advocate and educate the public to the professional abilities and roles of social workers. Several articles point to a lack of self-advocacy as a reason for the often negative and confused perception of social work (Condie et al., 1978; Freeman & Valentine, 2004; Gibelman, 1993; Gibelman, 2004; Stinson & Lecroy, 2004; Tower, 2000; Zugazaga et al., 2006). Advocacy should be an important role for all social workers in order to combat the perceived negative stereotypes that are perpetuated by mainstream media shows portraying social workers as uneducated, immoral, and unethical albeit well meaning professionals. The negative perception of the profession may hinder or deter individuals from seeking out social workers for services. (Gibelman, 2004; Tower, 2000; Zugazaga, et al., 2006).

Once public perception is formed is not easily changed. The media portrayal of social work as a low status job that can be done by any person who walks through the right door can have long lasting damaging effects to personnel recruitment and client choice of service provider (Gibelman, 2004). The entertainment media has a large impact on the public perception, which social work cannot combat with its own public service announcements or publicity campaign. Gibelman (2004) states "No matter how many people take note of a public service announcement (PSA) or hear a radio broadcast in which a social worker is interviewed about an issue, the use of a media in this manner has far less impact and lasting value than do popular television shows" (p. 333).

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Tower (2000) suggests a model of education for social workers to allow them to understand how to use media to their advantage to get the proper message to the people and clients they serve. Social workers must learn to use present day media, namely television, to reach a worldwide audience in order to inform and educate people to the profession of social work. Tower (2000) states "television is a vehicle for advocacy, therapy, public information, peer support, recruitment…this medium is the most pervasive form of communication in the work, yet, social workers presence and influence is almost nonexistent"(Tower, 2000, p.585).

During 2004 the NASW conducted focus groups to determine the publics' perception of social work. The researchers found that the general public is aware of social work but lacks knowledge of the profession (NASW, 2004). The public views social work as caring and helpful professionals that work with those in poverty (NASW, 2004). The goal of study was to assess how the public's view of social work so that the 2005 NASW Public Image Campaign could target specific areas in which the public lacked knowledge about the profession.

The NASW is currently advocating for social workers through the Social Work Reinvestment Initiative. The Social Work Reinvestment Initiative is aimed at the problems facing families and communities nationwide (NASW, 2009). During the 110th Congress the Dorothy I Height and Whitney Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act was introduced with the goal of establishing a Social Work Reinvestment Commission. The commission will provide comprehensive analysis of ongoing trends within the profession of social work (NASW, 2009). The initiative has several goals: (1) ensure an

adequate supply of professionals through recruitment and retention; (2) reduce the educational debt of social workers; (3) enhance salaries; (4) assure workers safety; and (5) fund social work research (NASW, 2009). At the present time the National Institutes of Health give less than one percent of their research budget to social work research (NASW, 2009).

Providing the public with accurate information about the profession of social work is the responsibility of social workers. If social workers do not advocate and inform the public of their job roles and functions, the public will create social work's professional identity with inaccurate and damaging stereotypes (Lecroy & Stinson, 2004).

2.6 Conclusion of Literature

The public perception of social work is generally negative. The media is a major source of negative perception because many people who do not have contact with social worker get their information and perception from the media. The media's portrayal of social work becomes a source for their knowledge of the social work profession. The media portrays social work as a job for anyone capable of listening with an empathetic ear and a kind heart. The media portrayal of social work further reinforces stereotypes and misperceptions. Research has found that contact with a social worker was associated with more knowledge about the field of social work, not a more positive view of the profession. Stereotypes of the social work profession, including being viewed as a female-dominated occupation and its role of protecting children, have been associated with public's negative perception of social work. People are often not able to distinguish who is a social worker or the job roles that social workers perform. When compared to

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other professionals social workers rank among the lowest categories in clients' preference and professional salaries.

The public image of social work is in distress and needs to be addressed. Social workers must assume responsibility for educating others about their profession and the strengths and skills of its professionals. Social workers need to identify effective strategies for changing public perceptions and improve social work's identity in that community. The NASW Social Work Reinvestment Act is one step toward the stated goals, however, social workers and the NASW have many steps to take before the goals are completed.

The current research seeks to measure the perception of social workers in a community setting. It seeks to examine factors that influence peoples' perceptions of social work, professional preference for treatment and their knowledge of social work job roles. By studying one community in which social workers are employed, we can learn more about how to communicate more effectively with communities about the profession of social work and the many roles that its professionals assume.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The current research is an exploratory study addressing the following research

questions: 1) How do parents and guardians of elementary aged students view the

profession of social work?; 2) What do parents and guardians of elementary age students

see as the role of a social worker? 3) How likely are parent and guardians to seek help

from a social worker as compared to other helping professionals for issues they might

face?; 4) How valuable do parents and guardians find social workers to be as compared to

other helping professionals in the community?: and 5) To what extent have various

mediums and experiences influenced parents and guardians perceptions of social work?

3.1 Procedure

During fall 2009, a survey measuring the perception of the social work profession

and social workers was distributed to parents and guardians at an open house at Morton

Elementary School. The survey examined parents' and guardians' perceptions of social

workers, the social work profession and their willingness to seek help from social

workers. The study gained IRB approval (See Appendix C).

The survey was also been given to the principal of Morton Elementary School for

approval. The Arlington Independent School District approved the study (See Appendix

B). Two days prior to the open house evening, fliers were posted around the school to

inform parents about the survey and seek their participation (See Appendix D). The fliers

stated that a survey will be distributed, date, time, location, benefits, and raffle opportunity for a $25 Wal-Mart gift card for those who completed a survey.

On the night of survey collection, fliers were posted around the table at the front entrance of the open house so that parents and family members were aware of the study and survey distribution. The survey was only distributed to English speaking adults over the age of 18. When distributing the survey, the researcher was seated at the front table. A survey deposit box and raffle tickets were also placed at the table. The researcher informed the participants to deposit their surveys in the box next table and claim a raffle ticket when they had done so. While seated at the table, the researcher encouraged participants to complete to survey at that time. When a participant returned their survey to the box the researcher handed the participant half a ticket so they would be able to claim the prize.

Throughout the evening, the researcher or principal made announcements in order to encourage/remind parents and family members to turn in their survey to the designated and monitored box as they exited the building. The researcher made an announcement five minutes prior to the raffle drawing that all surveys needed to be returned to the box. The winner of the prize claimed their prize by presenting the other half of the winning ticket to the researcher. Once all parents and family members left the school, the researcher collected the surveys and secured them in a box while they were driven directly to the office. The surveys are secured in the researchers office under lock and key.

3.2 Instrument

Lecroy and Stinson (2004) developed a survey to measure the public's perception of social worker and gave permission to the researcher to use the instrument. The researcher adapted the survey to address the specific research questions regarding: the perceptions, stereotypes, community view of the profession and ranking among other helping professions of social workers (See Appendix A). The survey includes seven sections totaling 51 questions that seek to answer the five research questions. The survey includes an eighth section where participants' demographic information is captured with seven questions. The survey took about 10 minutes to complete. The instrument included true/false and multiple-choice questions. The instrument also included questions that were answered on a likert scale.

3.3 Sample

Approval to access the sample was gained from the principal of Morton Elementary Mr. John Peterson. The respondents were accessed through the fall 2009 "open house" night at the participating school.

The study took place at Morton Elementary in Arlington, Texas. Morton Elementary is a school of approximately 980 students in grades Pre-Kindergarten through 6th. Morton is a Title I school in area with a low to moderate socio economic status and requires their students to wear uniforms to school (khaki or blue pants with blue or white shirt). Morton has a small population of students serviced by the McKinney Vento grant for homeless families or school aged children. Morton is populated by a majority of

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Latino (70%) students, African American (20%), Asian (5%) and White (5%) students

comprise the remaining student population.

The respondents totaled 146 parents and guardians of school aged children (Table

1). The sample attained was 63.4 % female ranging in age from 18-78 with 39 % of

participants identifying themselves as married. Two-thirds of the sample indicates that

they had some type of contact with a social worker either through receiving services or

social contact, 74.7 % indicated they did not hold a college degree. The sample was

comprised of 25.9 % African Americans, 32.9 % Europeans Americans and 21.7 %

Latinos. The most commonly reported household income was $20,000 - $29,999 dollars

per year.

Table 1 Participants' Individual Demographics

Characteristic	n	%
Gender	142	
Male	52	36.6
Female	90	63.4
Age	139	
18-31	55	39.6
32-41	55	39.6
42 or Older	29	20.9
Marital Status	144	
Single	39	27.1
Married	35	24.3
Divorced	57	39.6
Widowed	3	2.1
Other	10	6.9

Table 1 Continued

Education	143	
College Degree	34	23.8
No College Degree	109	76.2
Previous Contact	143	
Contact	48	66.4
No Contact	95	33.6
Ethnicity	143	
African American	37	25.9
European American	47	32.9
Latino	31	21.7
Other	28	19.6
Household Income	142	
Less Than $19,999	28	19.7
$20,000-$29,999	36	25.4
$30,000-$39,999	33	23.2
$40,000-$49,999	29	20.4
$50,000 or More	16	11.3

3.4 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used on all research questions. Since this is an exploratory study, the data analysis is limited to describing participant's responses.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 How do Parents and Guardians of School Aged Children View Social Work?

Ten questions rated on a 5-point likert scale were used to establish respondent's

views of social work. Frequencies were calculated for each view and reported in Table 2.

Table 2 Parent's and Guardian's View of the Social Work Profession

		Response Category				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
View	n	%	%	%	%	%
Social workers make good counselors	146	16.4	33.6	32.9	13.7	3.4
Social workers are do-gooders	145	9.7	30.3	42.1	14.5	3.4
More social workers are needed in this country	146	33.6	30.1	28.1	5.5	2.7
Social workers have emotional problems	146	4.8	8.2	28.8	37.7	20.5
Most social workers are women	146	39.0	24.7	19.2	10.3	6.8
Social workers are people who could not get another job	145	2.8	11.0	24.1	25.5	36.6

Table 2 Continued

Social work is a science	141	9.9	24.8	31.2	25.5	8.5
Social work plays an important role in solving issues	143	21.7	39.9	28.0	4.9	5.6
Social work has a positive impact on communities	143	24.5	42.7	22.4	3.5	7.0
I view social as a legitimate helping profession	143	26.6	43.4	19.6	5.6	4.9

Note. The variation in sample size is due to respondents not answering the question. Adapted from "The Public's Perception of Social Work: Is It What We Think It Is?" By C.W. Lecroy and E.L. Stinson, 2004, *Social Work, 49*. Copyright 2004 by the National Association of Social Workers.

A majority of respondents affirmed that social workers have a positive impact on communities and that more social workers are needed in the community. Respondents also affirmed that social workers have a positive impact on communities and that social workers play an important role in solving issues. Furthermore a majority of respondents view social work as a legitimate helping profession comprised mostly of women. However those surveyed were unsure if social work should be viewed as a science. Respondents rejected the views that social workers are people who could not get another job with 62.1 % of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement.

<u>4.2 What do parents and guardians of elementary age students see as the role of a social worker?</u>

The perceived roles of social workers by parents and guardians was determined by responses to 21 true/false questions about job roles of social workers. Respondents identified each question or statement as true or false. Table 3 displays the frequencies for each job role.

Table 3 Parent's and Guardian's Perceived Roles of Social Workers

	Response Category	
	T	F
	%	%
Role	(n=146)	(n=146)
Agent of social change	71.2	28.1
Legal Advisor	43.8	54.8
Group Therapist	60.3	39.7
Administrator	45.2	54.1
Mental Health Therapist	47.9	52.1
Community Organizer	58.2	41.1
Child Protector	91.1	8.9
Psychiatric Intern	34.2	65.5
Social workers work with people of all classes	76.0	20.5

Table 3 Continued

Social workers can be a great source of comfort in times of need	77.4	22.6
Most social workers are women.	64.4	35.6
The primary responsibility of social workers is to take care of people on welfare.	25.3	74.0
Social workers conduct psychological tests.	41.1	58.9
Social workers help people take advantage of the government.	21.9	77.4
Social workers have the right to take children away from their parents.	54.1	45.2
A social worker's main job is to give people their welfare checks.	15.8	84.2
Social workers serve troubled children.	84.9	15.1
Group therapy is a major service provided by social workers.	50.0	49.3
Social workers provide family therapy.	65.8	34.2
Social workers facilitate community change.	71.9	28.1
Social workers can practice individual therapy	51.4	48.6

Note. Adapted from "The Public's Perception of Social Work: Is It What We Think It Is?" By C.W. Lecroy and E.L. Stinson, 2004, *Social Work*, *49*. Copyright 2004 by the National Association of Social Workers.

Respondents indicated a marginal level of knowledge of social work roles.

Respondents appeared to understand that social work roles include being agents of social

change, group therapists, and community organizers. Almost all respondents (91.1%)

viewed social workers are child protectors but they were uncertain if social workers have

the right to take children away from their parents. Respondents indicated that they were

unsure of social workers ability to perform roles related to being mental health

professionals, such as social workers being able to perform individual therapy or be

mental health therapists. A large majority of participants identified that social works

work with people of all classes and that social workers facilitate community change.

Respondents rejected roles applying to social workers being responsible for the

administration and care of welfare and welfare recipients

4.3 How likely are parent and guardians to seek help from a social worker as compared to
other helping professionals for issues they face?

Respondents rated their preference for seeking help from various professionals

(psychologist, social worker, psychiatrist, and clergy) for six different service issues

(abused child, domestic violence, disruptive or overactive child, homeless child, teenage

drug abuser, and gang member). Mean preference scores for seeking help from various

professionals are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4 Parent's and Guardian's Preference of Seeking Help for Services Mean Scores

		Response Category						
		Psychologist		Social Worker		Psychiatrist		Clergy	
Service Issue	n	M	(SD)	M	(SD)	M	SD	M	SD
Abused Child	146	2.88	(1.05)	3.51	(0.82)	2.68	(0.98)	1.84	(1.08)
Domestic Violence	146	2.87	(1.05)	3.27	(0.92)	2.71	(1.06)	2.17	(1.17)
Disruptive or Overactive Child	146	3.29	(0.84)	2.51	(0.92)	3.38	(0.84)	1.48	(0.87)
Homeless Child	146	2.35	(1.19)	3.51	(0.78)	2.41	(1.10)	2.75	(1.25)
Teenage Drug Abuser	146	3.12	(0.92)	2.89	(0.97)	3.21	(0.95)	1.87	(1.11)
Gang Member	146	2.75	(1.16)	3.05	(0.96)	2.64	(1.13)	2.27	(1.28)

Note. M=mean score SD=standard deviation, maximum score of 4, the higher the score the more likely respondents were seen as seeking out that professional. Adapted from "The Public's Perception of Social Work: Is It What We Think It Is?" By C.W. Lecroy and E.L. Stinson, 2004, *Social Work*, *49*. Copyright 2004 by the National Association of Social Workers.

Social workers were seen as the most likely professional that respondents would seek out for four of the six service issues. Social workers were seen as the most likely professional to be used for services when intervening with the issues of an abused child. Respondents' indicated that social work was the most likely profession they would seek for issues surrounding domestic violence and homeless children. When the issues of a disruptive or overactive child and a teenage drug abuser were presented participants

indicated that a psychiatrist was the professional they would seek out for help. Social

work was indicated as the profession to be most likely sought out for a gang member.

<u>4.4 How valuable do parents and guardians find social workers to be as compared to other helping professionals in the community?</u>

The community value of various professionals (psychologists, psychiatrists, social

workers, counselors, nurses, and clergy) was examined. Mean scores for each profession

were calculated and rank ordered in Table 5. Frequencies of responses were also

reported in Table 6.

Table 5 Parent's and Guardian's Mean Scores for the Reported Value to Community of Various Professionals

Profession	n	M (SD)
Nurses	143	1.21 (.446)
Social Workers	143	1.78 (.770)
Psychologist	143	1.86 (.746)
Psychiatrist	143	1.92 (.831)
Clergy	143	1.93 (.861)
Counselors	143	2.03 (.945)

Note. M=mean score SD=standard deviation, maximum score of 4, the lower the score the higher the value to the community. Adapted from "The Public's Perception of Social Work: Is It What We Think It Is?" By C.W. Lecroy and E.L. Stinson, 2004, *Social Work, 49*. Copyright 2004 by the National Association of Social Workers.

Table 6 Parent's and Guardian's Frequencies for the Community Value of Various
Professionals

	Response Category			
	Must Have	Very Valuable	Not Very Valuable	No Value
Profession	% (n=143)	% (n=143)	% (n=143)	% (n=143)
Psychologists	32.9	51.0	13.3	2.8
Psychiatrists	35.7	39.2	22.4	2.8
Social Workers	41.3	40.6	16.8	1.4
Counselors	32.9	33.6	25.9	7.7
Nurses	79.7	18.9	1.4	0.0
Clergy	35.0	42.7	16.8	5.6

Note. Adapted from "The Public's Perception of Social Work: Is It What We Think It
Is?" By C.W. Lecroy and E.L. Stinson, 2004, *Social Work*, *49*. Copyright 2004 by the
National Association of Social Workers.

Nurses were seen as having the most value to community with a mean of 1.21 and
were rated as a profession the community must have by 79.7 % of respondents. Social
work was ranked, as the second must have profession by respondents. Psychologists then
psychiatrists followed the profession of social work. Clergy members were ranked fifth
with 35 % of respondents rating clergy, as a profession the community "must have".

Counselors ranked last in community value of the profession with 7.7 % of respondents rating counselors as having "no value".

4.5 To what extent have various mediums and experiences influence parents and guardians perception of social work?

Respondents rated how much value different sources of perception had when it came to shaping their view of social work. Mean scores determined the amount of influence each source has and rank ordered in Table 7, frequencies of responses were also calculated and reported in Table 8.

Table 7 Reported Means Scores for the Sources of Perception by Parent's and Guardian's

Source	M (SD)
Experience of a Family/Friend/Neighbor	3.39 (1.34)
TV	3.02 (1.43)
Knew a Social Worker	2.93 (1.43)
Recipient of Social Work Services	2.68 (1.56)
Movies	2.28 (1.36)
Newspaper	2.10 (1.17)
Books	1.83 (1.21)
Magazine	1.58 (0.99)

Note. M=mean score SD=standard deviation, maximum score of 5, the higher the score the more influential the source. Adapted from "The Public's Perception of Social Work: Is It What We Think It Is?" By C.W. Lecroy and E.L. Stinson, 2004, *Social Work, 49*. Copyright 2004 by the National Association of Social Workers.

Table 8 Parent's and Guardians Frequencies for the Sources of Perception of Social Work

		Response Category				
		No Influence	Little Influence	Some Influence	More Influence	Most Influence
Source	n	%	%	%	%	%
Magazines	144	68.8	11.8	13.9	3.5	2.1
Books	145	59.3	15.9	13.1	5.5	6.2
TV	145	24.1	9.7	25.5	21.4	19.3
Movies	144	41.0	21.5	15.3	12.5	9.7
Knew a Social Worker	144	24.3	13.2	27.1	15.3	20.1
Newspaper	142	40.1	27.5	19.0	8.5	4.9
Recipient of Social Work Services	145	37.9	9.7	17.2	16.6	18.6
Experience of a Family/Friend/ Neighbor	146	11.0	17.8	19.2	25.3	26.7

Note. The variation in sample size is due to respondents not answering the question. Adapted from "The Public's Perception of Social Work: Is It What We Think It Is?" By C.W. Lecroy and E.L. Stinson, 2004, *Social Work, 49*. Copyright 2004 by the National Association of Social Workers.

The experience of a family member, friend or neighbor was rated as having the

most influence by 26.7 % of respondents and determined to be the most influential source

of perception. Television ranked second and knowing a social worker was indicated to be the third most influential source of perception. Being a recipient of social work services was determined to fourth most influential source of perception. Respondents' ratings ranked movies the fifth most influential source of perception followed by the newspaper. Books were determined to be the seventh most influential source with 59.3 % of respondents rating books as having no influence. The least influential source of perception was determined to magazines with 68.8 % of respondents indicating that magazines have no influence as the source of perception for the profession of social work.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Discussion

Among the sample surveyed in this study, the community's view of social work is generally positive. Many respondents in this study rejected the negative stereotypes of social work. The results of the study indicate that community members felt that social work has a positive impact on the community and is able to help solve social issues within the community. Furthermore, social workers were seen as being needed in the United States. Thus, findings from this study present a generally more favorable view of the social work profession than found in previous studies (Condie et al., 1978, Lecroy & Stinson, 2004)

Findings suggest that there is much ambiguity about what social workers do within the community. People appear confused about the roles social workers perform. These findings support studies (NASW,2004; Condie et al.,1978; McMillan,2008) that there is confusion among the public about what social work is. Participants in the study heavily supported the role of a social worker being an agent of social change and a group therapist. The stereotypical role of social worker a being child protector was supported by 91 % of respondents is identical to Lecroy and Stinson (2004). This finding indicates that the general public believes that social works main job role is to protect children. These findings also indicate that the public's perception is that a social workers main job role is child protection, which supports Lecroy and Stinson (2004) findings that the role

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of a child protector has grown and the public believes that it is the main job function of social workers

Respondents rejected social work roles such as social workers take care of people on welfare and hand out welfare checks. Most participants rejected the notion that social workers help people take advantage of the government. However, more than half of the participants affirmed the belief that social work has the right to take children away from their parents. In reality, social workers have responsibility for overseeing removals, while the courts and legal system have the right to separate children from their parents. Furthermore, participants affirmed the belief that social workers protect children and that most social workers are women. These findings indicate that while some stereotypical views of social work might be dissolving and others continue to persist.

Social work is seen as a profession that is able to provide comfort to people of all social classes. Social work was further viewed as having a positive impact on community. Social work was also viewed as a profession that is able to facilitate change within the community. However, many people did not understand that social workers often engage in activities related group therapy and family therapy, and have the ability to provide individual therapeutic services. Respondents were almost evenly split in their knowledge and understanding about social workers performing the roles in group and individual therapy. More respondents affirmed that family therapy was a social work role, however, one-third of respondents rejected this role. These findings indicate that there is only marginal knowledge about the services provided by social workers and supports the previous studies or Condie et al. (1978), Lecroy and Stinson (2004),

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McMillan (2008) and NASW (2004) that suggest that the public knows little about the role of social workers.

When questioned about which professionals an individual would seek for services, social workers were indicated to be the most likely professionals in four of the six categories listed. People are likely to choose social workers for issues related to child abuse, domestic violence, homeless child and gangs. The issues social workers were likely to be sought after for revolve around children or the community. These findings support the work of Lecroy and Stinson (2004) that social workers are sought out professionally for issues of abused children, domestic violence, homeless children and gangs. The researcher speculates from these findings that social workers are more likely to be sought after for community or societal problems related to children and families.

Respondents viewed social workers as having a high value in the community; only second to the value that nurses bring to the community. This finding supports Lecroy and Stinson (2004) findings. A majority of white married females in that study viewed nurses as the most valuable profession to the community. However, respondents in this study appeared to value social workers more than in previous studies. Previously, social workers ranked lower than nurses and clergy. However, among these respondents, clergy ranked fourth out of the five professions listed. This finding demonstrates that in the community surveyed, social workers are regarded with a higher value and seen as being able to provide the community with a service that is necessary.

When examining the sources of perceptions it was clear that some type of contact with a social worker (ranked first, third and fourth) is the most influential source of

perception. However, the television (ranked second) is also highly influential on perceptions. Television images of social work are generally inaccurate and somewhat negative towards the profession. With television appearing to have such a large influence on peoples' perception of the social work profession, it is critical that positive images are portrayed. The current negative portrayal of social work in many television shows is damaging for the profession and may deter clients and cause declines in recruitment of future professionals (Gibelman, 2004; Tower, 2000; Zugazaga et al., 2006).

Strides toward community grassroots advocacy must be taken by social workers through education and public image campaigns. Agencies that wish to improve efficacy and build a stronger client base will need to engage clients in dialogue about their apprehensions of being a client of social work. The NASW Social work Reinvestment Initiative will further future research, advocacy, and policy making procedures for the future of the social work profession.

5.2 Limitations

The study had some several limitations. The sample size was small and nonrandom which limits its generalizability to other communities. The sample was restricted due to various factors including a rainstorm, which decreased attendance of the schools open house night. The table distributing the surveys had limited visibility due to its location on one side of the cafeteria and many possible respondents did not become aware of it. Furthermore, attendants coming in and going to rooms that were on the other side of the school were unaware of where the table was located. Although the survey only took 15 minutes to complete, some people were dissuaded to complete the survey

due to its length. Additionally, one section of the survey appeared unclear. Many participants asked for clarification. The survey was only offered in English, limiting the ability to collect information from of non-English speakers.

The sample in the study is also not representative of the school population in which it was attainted. Approximately 70 % of the students in the school are Latino. However, only about 20 % of survey respondents were Latino. Thus, the results of the study do not accurately represent Latinos in the school population. The researcher speculates that the lack of participation by Latino parents may be related to family/work obligations and traditionally low attendance at school related functions. Latinos may also have experiences with research that appear to primarily focus on the needs of the European American community and fails to focus on the Latino community.

<u>5.3 Implications for Policy and Procedure</u>

Increased advocacy among the social work profession and social work organizations is necessary to improve the general public's knowledge of the social work profession. The depictions of the social work profession by the entertainment media need to be monitored. If inaccurate and damaging portrayals are depicted social workers should advocate for portrayals to be corrected. Social work should advocate for the use of technical consultants when social workers are portrayed in the entertainment media. Social workers must further self-advocate and educate in the communities that they serve, in order to eradicate false impressions about social work.

5.3 Implications for Research

Social work researchers must do more research in the area of general public's view of the social work profession. Research in the area of the public's view of social work should be extensive. Longitudinal studies will enable us to better understand how views of the profession change over time. Furthermore, research on the social work profession within ethnic and at-risk communities is especially needed. This will enable social workers to be understand how they are viewed among populations they serve and enable them to better create the bridges necessary to service these populations in an effective manner. These areas of research are imperative to the functioning of professionals in all fields of social work. The continued use of focus groups will also offer much more in depth understanding of people's views of the social work profession. Research of this nature could help with social work recruitment and potential burnout due to low morale and an assumed negative perception among communities.

APPENDIX A

PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS SURVEY

Dear Parent or Guardian:

The attached consent form requests your participation in a survey about your perceptions of the role of social workers in the community. As a graduate student in the School of Social Work at the University of Texas at Arlington, I am very interested in understanding how people perceive the social work profession. I am conducting this research as part of a thesis toward my MSSW degree.

The Arlington Independent School District and Principal John Peterson have given the researcher permission to administer this survey. The research is being completed under the supervision of faculty member Dr. Beverly Black. Dr. Black is the Director of the MSSW Program in the School of Social Work at University of Texas at Arlington.

I ask that you complete the 51-item survey, which should take about 10 minutes. All information and surveys will be kept confidential and secured in a locked filing cabinet and will be destroyed after the study is completed. Any information collected will not be shared with any entities outside the designated research. Participant's who agree to be in the study are eligible for a chance to win a $25 Wal-mart gift card. Please sign a consent form and keep a copy for yourself.

I hope that you will participate in this survey. We need to know more about how the public perceives the social work profession and your views on the topic is important for us to hear. Thank you very much for your participation.

Sincerely,

Robert Veigel
MSSW Student
The University of Texas at Arlington

Perception of Social Workers Survey

I. Roles of a Social Worker:

Circle **T** for TRUE or **F** for FALSE.

1. The following roles apply to a social worker:

a. Agent of social change   **T** **F**

b. Legal Advisor   **T** **F**

c. Group Therapist   **T** **F**

d. Administrator   **T** **F**

e. Mental Health Therapist   **T** **F**

f. Community Organizer   **T** **F**

g. Child Protector   **T** **F**

h. Psychiatric Intern   **T** **F**

II. Roles of a Social Worker Continued:

The following are statements about social workers rate them as **T** for TRUE or **F** for FALSE:

2. Social workers work with people of all classes.   **T** **F**

3. Social workers can be a great source of comfort in times of need.   **T** **F**

4. Most social workers are women.   **T** **F**

5. The primary responsibility of social workers is to take care of people on welfare.   **T** **F**

6. Social workers conduct psychological tests.   **T** **F**

7. Social workers help people take advantage of the government.   **T** **F**

8. Social workers have the right to take children away from their parents.   **T** **F**

9. A social worker's main job is to give people their welfare checks.   **T** **F**

10. Social workers serve troubled children.   **T** **F**

11. Group therapy is a major service provided by social workers.   **T** **F**

12. Social workers provide family therapy.   **T** **F**

13. Social workers facilitate community change.   **T** **F**

14. Social workers can practice individual therapy.   **T** **F**

Perception of Social Workers Survey

III. Seeking Help:

Rate each profession based on each issue and choose whom would you most likely seek help from for each issue? **1** being the **LEAST** likely profession and **4** being the **MOST** likely profession to seek help from.

A. **Abused Child**	**Least Likely**			**Most Likely**
• Psychologist	1	2	3	4
• Social Worker	1	2	3	4
• Psychiatrist	1	2	3	4
• Clergy	1	2	3	4

B. **Domestic Violence**	**Least Likely**			**Most Likely**
• Psychologist	1	2	3	4
• Social Worker	1	2	3	4
• Psychiatrist	1	2	3	4
• Clergy	1	2	3	4

C. **Disruptive or Overactive Child**	**Least Likely**			**Most Likely**
• Psychologist	1	2	3	4
• Social Worker	1	2	3	4
• Psychiatrist	1	2	3	4
• Clergy	1	2	3	4

D. **Teenage Drug Abuser**	**Least Likely**			**Most Likely**
• Psychologist	1	2	3	4
• Social Worker	1	2	3	4
• Psychiatrist	1	2	3	4
• Clergy	1	2	3	4

Perception of Social Workers Survey

E.   Homeless Child   <u>**Least Likely**</u>   <u>**Most Likely**</u>

- Psychologist   1   2   3   4
- Social Worker   1   2   3   4
- Psychiatrist   1   2   3   4
- Clergy   1   2   3   4

F.   Gang Member   <u>**Least Likely**</u>   <u>**Most Likely**</u>

- Psychologist   1   2   3   4
- Social Worker   1   2   3   4
- Psychiatrist   1   2   3   4
- Clergy   1   2   3   4

IV. <u>Perceptions of Social Workers:</u>

In Your Opinion
Please answer by choosing one.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Social workers make good counselors.	1	2	3	4	5
Social workers are do-gooders.	1	2	3	4	5
More social workers are needed in this country.	1	2	3	4	5
Social workers have emotional problems.	1	2	3	4	5
Most social workers are women.	1	2	3	4	5
Social workers are people who could not get another job.	1	2	3	4	5

Perception of Social Workers Survey

V. **Where do Perceptions of Social Workers come from:**
People have certain ideas about social workers. Where do you think you have gotten most of your ideas about them and what they do? Rate how much each category influenced your opinions by **CIRCLING** from **1(no influence)** to **5 (most influence)**.

	No Influence				Most Influence
Magazines	1	2	3	4	5
Books	1	2	3	4	5
TV	1	2	3	4	5
Movies	1	2	3	4	5
Knew a Social Worker	1	2	3	4	5
Newspaper	1	2	3	4	5
Recipient of social work services	1	2	3	4	5
Experience of a Family/Friend/Neighbor	1	2	3	4	5

VI. **View of Social Work:**
Please choose one answer for each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Social work is a science	1	2	3	4	5
Social Work plays an important role in solving social issues	1	2	3	4	5
Social work has a positive impact on communities	1	2	3	4	5
I view social work as a legitimate helping profession	1	2	3	4	5

Perception of Social Workers Survey

VII. <u>**Social Workers Value to Community:**</u>

How valuable do you perceive the following professionals are to your community as a positive influence?

		Must have	**Very Valuable**	**Not very valuable**	**No value**
a.	Psychologist	1	2	3	4
b.	Psychiatrist	1	2	3	4
c.	Social Workers	1	2	3	4
d.	Counselors	1	2	3	4
e.	Nurses	1	2	3	4
f.	Clergy	1	2	3	4

Perception of Social Workers Survey

VII. Participant Demographics:

Fill in all information as it applies to <u>YOU</u> the participant.   You may leave any blank that you do not feel comfortable answering.

1. Sex: [ ] Male   [ ]Female

2. Age: _____

3. Marital Status:
       [ ] Single
       [ ] Divorced
       [ ] Married
       [ ] Widowed
       [ ] Other

4. Education:
       [ ] Some high school
       [ ] High school graduate or   GED
       [ ] High school graduate with some college education
       [ ] College graduate
       [ ] Graduate work

5. Previous contact with a social worker:
       [ ] No contact
       [ ] Have a friend , neighbor or social contact that is a social worker
       [ ] Have been a client of a social worker at an agency
       [ ] Worked at a place that employed a social worker

6. Ethnicity
       [ ] African American
       [ ] European American
       [ ] Latino
       [ ] Asian American
       [ ] Other

7. Household Income
       [ ] Less than $9,999
       [ ] $10,000 - $19,999
       [ ] $20,000 - $29,999
       [ ] $30,000 – $39,999
       [ ] $40,000 - $49,999
       [ ] $50,000 - $59,999
       [ ]$60,000 or more

APPENDIX B

AISD COLLABORATION LETTER

Mr. Veigel,

Your request to conduct research at Morton Elementary School is approved. Please send me the results of your survey on completion of your study.

Thank you.

Wally

Dr. Wallace Carter
Director, Accountability & Testing
Arlington Independent School District
1333 W. Pioneer Pkwy
Arlington, TX 76013
Wcarter@aisd.net
682-867-7423

AISD

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL

Robert Veigel
Dr. Beverly Black
School of Social Work
The University of Texas at Arlington
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Expertise at UT. Arlington

http://www.uta.edu/expertise

IRB No.:	**2009-1609**
RE:	Minor Modification Approval Letter
Title:	*Perceptions of Social Workers*

The UT Arlington Institutional Review Board (UTA IRB) Chair (or designee) reviewed and approved the modification(s) to this protocol on **September 9, 2009** in accordance with Title 45 CFR 46. 110(b)(2). Therefore, you are authorized to conduct your research. The modification(s), indicated below, was deemed minor and appropriate for expedited review.

- **UPDATE survey to include additional education background information**

Pursuant to Title 45 CFR 46.103(b)(4)(iii), investigators are required to, "promptly report to the IRB *any* proposed changes in the research activity, and ensure that such changes in approved research, during the period for which IRB approval has already been given, **are not initiated without IRB review and approval** except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject."

The modification approval will additionally be presented to the convened board on October 13, 2009 for full IRB acknowledgment [45 CFR 46.110(c)]. All investigators and key personnel identified in the protocol must have documented *Human Subjects Training* or *CITI* Training on file with the UT Arlington Office of Research Administration Regulatory Services.

The UT Arlington Office of Research Administration appreciates your continuing commitment to the protection of human research subjects. Should you have questions or require further assistance, please contact Robin Dickey by calling (817) 272-9329.

Sincerely,

Be A Maverick »

Patricia Turpin, Ph.D., RN, NEA, BC
Associate Clinical Professor
UT Arlington IRB Chair

APPENDIX D

STUDY FLIER

Want a chance to voice your opinion? Want a chance to win a $25 Wal-Mart gift card?

Your Opinion Matters!

Let us know what you think by filling out a survey at Morton's open house on 9/10/2009

Benefits

- **Lasting impact on community and school**

- **Share your views and opinions**

The University of Texas
ARLINGTON™

Study Information:

The goal of the research is to determine the commonly held beliefs of social workers in the community. You participation is most appreciated.

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    psychologists, and counselors. *Children & Schools, 26(3)*, 151-163.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Robert Veigel received his B.A. in psychology from the California State University Long Beach in May of 2007. Upon completing his thesis defense, he will receive his M.S.S.W from the University of Texas at Arlington. Robert hopes to pursue a doctorate in social work, while gaining field experience, after completion of his degree. Robert is interested in research about the profession of social work and its perception among the general public. Among his other areas of interest are research surrounding fathering and family intervention techniques.