# Editorial: The March of Scientific Knowledge in Social Work

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In the Fall 2017 issue of *Advances in Social Work* we are pleased to present 15 manuscripts--12 empirical, three conceptual--written by authors hailing from 15 states, the District of Columbia, and four countries. Seven papers address various aspects of social work education, including three on research issues, two on child welfare curriculum, one on macro social work, and one on combined public health/social work programs. The remaining papers include three conceptual offerings and five empirical studies conducted in the field.

*Mirick, Davis and Wladkowski* surveyed over 200 graduates of PhD programs in social work about their experiences with recruiting and sampling participants for their dissertation research. Since many social work dissertations focus on hard-to-reach, vulnerable, or marginalized populations, the input of dissertation committee members and connections to community contacts proved pivotal to the sampling process. *Davis and Mirick* partnered again in a second study comparing the outcomes for MSW students taking statistics as a non-credit option and those who took a regular for-credit statistics course. This exploratory study offers preliminary support for replacing the stats requirement with a brief, non-credit class as a less costly and time-consuming approach. *Deck, Connor, and Cambro* explored the perceptions of 70 Masters-level social work students enrolled in an advanced research course that included a significant service learning component, i.e., a pro bono program evaluation of a shelter serving homeless men. In addition to reinforcing the importance and relevance of research to social work practice, as a bonus outcome, students also changed their thinking about homelessness in positive ways.

Using mixed methods, *Greeno, Fedina, Rushovich, Burry, Linsenmeyer and Wirt* evaluated the impact of Title IV-E training on the skills of 224 MSW students. Improvements were found across all practice content areas with the largest gains in working with the courts and conducting assessments. Multiple focus groups assessed students' perceptions of competency to practice in child welfare. A second study of child welfare students by *Pierce and Park* involved three cohorts of BSW and MSW students who were educated using a competency-based curriculum and field placements in child welfare. Based on pre and post field placement surveys, statistically significant change was demonstrated for most competencies. Key strategies recommended to support BSW and MSW graduates in child welfare agencies include transition-to-work initiatives in schools and mentoring programs in agencies.

Two studies illustrate how alumni surveys may provide helpful insights for enhancing educational programs. Using electronic surveys, *Salm Ward and Reeves* examined the perceptions and experiences of alumni and field instructors from an MSW/MPH program. Alumni reported satisfaction with their dual degree program and with the application of both social work and public health skills in the workplace. Field instructors underscored the complementary skill sets of dually-trained students and noted the added value of MSW/MPH professionals in their agencies. Based on an online survey, *Hill, Erickson,*

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*Ferguson, Fogel, and Donaldson* examined perceptions of macro social work educators and practitioners nationally about macro education and the influence of larger societal forces such as licensure regulations. While there remains a consistent level of support for macro social work within MSW programs, macro practitioners recalled negative perceptions of macro social work during their MSW education. The authors recommend that social work programs seek out opportunities to integrate macro practice content and field experiences into their curriculum so that students can be better equipped to respond to the complex systemic challenges they will encounter while in professional practice.

Moving on to the conceptual papers in this issue, *Scanlon and Sanders* promote financial capability and asset building (FCAB) as an important professional activity for social work. The authors propose a person-environment-centered process model for use in FCAB. The authors assert that attention to behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and policy feedback processes may help provide the missing link between individual financial behavior and the institutional opportunities offered by FCAB programs. In an epistemological analysis, *Iacono* argues that the nature of marginalization experienced by bisexual individuals is unique among LGBTQ individuals. Seeing an opportunity for social work, Iacono calls for research that is inclusive of sub-populations within sexual minority groups. *Boys and Walsh* point out that social work literature on working with families affected by infertility has not kept up with medical technology that frequently results in excess embryos. Persons receiving care through assisted reproductive technology (ART) need to be prepared for the difficult moral questions raised when IVF procedures result in more embryos than intended. Boys and Walsh outline the pros and cons of each disposition option that social workers need to explore with IVF clients.

Moving on to studies conducted in the field, *Bruno, Brown and Holloway* used a mixed methods approach to examine outcomes of a worksite wellness program. The contingency-based program bases individual employee health insurance discounts on each participant achieving bio-metric goals. While over half of the nearly 400 employees met their health goals, focus groups revealed that employees were stressed by contingency approaches that tie financial incentives to achieving specified benchmarks. As worksite wellness programs proliferate, social workers in healthcare and administration need to advocate for programs that promote human dignity and avoid discriminating based on employee health status.

The availability of evidence-based practices does not necessarily equate to their implementation in the field. Thus, *Edmond and Voth Schrag* examined the attitudes of 76 rape crisis counselors toward evidence-based practices for addressing trauma in rape survivors. In particular, they examined counselors' perceptions of Prolonged Exposure (PE), Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), and EMDR Therapy. Results from a statewide survey in Texas suggest that efforts are needed within rape crisis centers to advance the uptake of empirically-supported treatments (EST). Recognizing that combat veterans may have some attributes of differentness that may cause others to create stigmatized perceptions and devalue their skills, *Kranke, Gin, Saia, Schmitz, and Dobalian* conducted qualitative interviews with combat veterans who work side-by-side with civilians in disaster relief projects. Modified Labeling Theory (MLT) was proposed to help understand the stigma and labeling experience of combat veterans volunteering in disasters settings. The interviews with combat veterans produced some hopeful results.

*Molin, Sorbring, and Löfgren-Mårtenson* interviewed 27 young people with intellectual disabilities (ID) in Sweden about their internet use. A thematic analysis revealed that study participants were well aware of both the risks and opportunities in using the Internet and Social Networking Sites. Nevertheless, the more they interacted with non-disabled peers online, the more they experienced negative consequences of Internet use. The authors recommend that social workers reflect upon ways that young people with ID can be empowered to participate positively on the Internet.

Concerned with the socio-cultural and historical context where African Americans are seen as a strong people, able to deal with anything, and not affected by depression, *Campbell* conducted qualitative interviews with African American adults experiencing depression. Her analysis revealed that African Americans may go through a process of reconciling being depressed with certain aspects of their cultural identity as they strive to better understand themselves, their illness, and options to help alleviate their symptoms. Campbell's results raise questions about whether racial identity and cultural expectations may interfere with help-seeking among African Americans.

We are delighted to present this eclectic mix of empirical and conceptual papers as a contribution to the forward march of scientific knowledge in social work.