



SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT

Student Research Brief

Spirituality and Social Work

By: Angela Betts (BSW Class of 2008)

Fall 2007

Introduction

It is a well accepted idea that spirituality is an important aspect of many people's lives. However, many people have different views on how integrating spiritual aspects into social work methods affects the client. This paper considers three studies that were undergone to explain differences and similarities between the social worker and client perspective on the use of spiritual interventions in a therapeutic setting.

Summary of Primary Findings

Canda, Nakashima, and Furman describe the social worker as an advocate of making the client feel comfortable by bringing the topic of spirituality into the session carefully so as to not offend or push the client in a direction religiously they do not wish to go (2004).

However, one study focusing more on the client's perspective points out that usually there is too much caution when it comes to using spiritual interventions because individuals who base their lives on religion find the careful social worker not understanding the client's world view and therefore misreading the problems and solutions that the client sees as the beneficial outcome (Gotterer, 2001) The misunderstanding really begins because the overall spiritual perspective of clients and social workers are extremely different as demonstrated by Hodge's comparison of religious beliefs and practices of social workers and the general public (2002). The research done involved a survey given to social workers as well as the general public to assess their religious involvement. His findings indicated that although religious practices may be similar, religious beliefs are quite different between the majority of social workers and clients as indicated by the chart that follows (Hodge, 2002).

Implications for Social Work Practice

The field of social work needs to carefully implement spiritual aspects into assessment and interventions for clients whose "innermost thoughts and feelings are rooted in spiritual beliefs which.. serve as the foundation for the seemingly mundane activities of everyday life" (Gotterer, 2001, p.187). But at the same time keep in mind that for those clients who have no interest in exploring their spirituality in therapy, it is the right of the client to help guide the type of intervention they see as beneficial to their situation.

Recommendations for Practice with Systems of All Sizes¹

1. Client comfort is a difficult thing to assess, but it is necessary for an agency to consider what type of approach to spirituality is best accepted by those they serve.

2. Social workers need to view their clients as spiritual beings and be less afraid to approach that subject with clients since the research shows that most clients consider themselves to be spiritual beings (Hodge, 2002).

3. Spirituality needs to be viewed by agencies and social workers alike as an asset, not a problem when working with clients.

4. More research needs to be done with regards to how social worker's value systems influence the way they relate to their clients

5. The client's comfort with spiritual topics seems to be an afterthought in research right now because so much focus is on how the social workers feel. More emphasis should be given the client's feelings in current research.

6. Including a more extensive education concerning religion in diversity education would help give a knowledge base to produce more competent social workers when they enter the field.

7. Keep in mind when making referrals that some clients may have a preference about whether they are helped by a church-based or secular agency based on their level of comfort with the subject.

Conclusion

Spirituality is a difficult subject for anyone to discuss because even if those involved are of the same faith, belief systems differ for each person. Within the Social worker/ client relationship beliefs and spirituality should be open for discussion on whatever level of comfort is right for the client. It is the job of helping agencies to provide the best care to their clients through a holistic approach to assessment; therefore spirituality, whatever the form it takes in the client's life, should be a part of their assessment and interventions if possible.

References

Canda, E.R., Nakashima, M., Furman, L.D. (2004). Ethical considerations about spirituality in social work: insights from a national qualitative survey. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 85(1), 27-35.

Gotterer, R. (2001). The spiritual dimension on clinical social work practice: A client perspective. *Families in society: The journal of contemporary human services*, 82(2), 187-193.

Hodge, D.R. (2002). Equally devout, but do they speak the same language? comparing the religious beliefs and practices of social workers and the general public. *Families in society: The journal of contemporary human services*, 83(5/6), 573-584.

About the Author

Angela Betts is a senior social work student at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. I am doing my internship at a Christian non-profit agency in Cleveland, Tennessee called The Caring Place. e-mail: Angela-betts@utc.edu

ANGELA: This was a little short. The summary of primary findings and implications for practice lacked some depth which made that section and the whole brief short.
SCORE: 26/30

Table 4. Views Regarding Life After Death, Prayer in Public Schools, Organized Religion, and the Bible

	Grad-level social workers % (n)	BA social workers % (n)	Lower class population %	Working class population %	Middle-class population %
Life after death***					
Yes	54 (21)	66 (42)	67	72	72
No	28 (11)	19 (12)	24	19	18
Don't know	18 (7)	16 (10)	10	9	9
Prayer in schools***					
Approve	56 (22)	61 (26)	32	35	42
Disapprove	39 (15)	35 (15)	65	61	55
Don't know	3 (1)	5 (2)	4	4	3
Confidence in org religion***					
A great deal	8 (3)	14 (10)	28	28	30
Only some	64 (25)	68 (49)	44	48	49
Hardly any	23 (9)	17 (12)	23	20	18
Don't know	5 (2)	1 (1)	6	4	3
View of Bible***					
Word of God	10 (3)	16 (6)	51	38	27
Inspired	53 (16)	45 (17)	32	47	53
Book of fables	38 (11)	40 (15)	14	13	18

Note. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
***Cramer's V < .001.

DATA AT A GLANCE

SPIRITUALITY NEEDS TO BE VIEWED BY AGENCIES AND SOCIAL WORKERS ALIKE AS AN ASSET, NOT A PROBLEM WHEN WORKING WITH CLIENTS.

