**Editorial**

**Fall 2020: Advancing Social Work Innovations**

**Margaret E. Adamek**

In early March 2020, I was on a flight headed back from a sabbatical trip to Ethiopia arriving in O’Hare International Airport in Chicago. I was perplexed by the sight of some travelers wearing masks and others who were not. I managed to arrive home soon before international travel was all but shut down by Covid-19. Little did I know we were headed into a global pandemic that would take the lives of over 350,000 Americans by the end of 2020. In a year where social distancing, mask-wearing, and quarantining have become daily practices, so much has changed in our society, including social work education and social work practice. As Covid-19 catapulted social work education to online platforms, inequities in access to digital resources have been exposed. In a brief commentary following this editorial, ***Pentaris, Hanna, and North*** from the University of Greenwich in London address the issue of digital poverty in social work education.

In the Fall 2020 issue of ***Advances in Social Work,*** we are pleased to present 15 full-length papers (14 empirical, 1 conceptual) written by 40 authors representing different regions of the country, Sweden, and two African nations—Ethiopia and Ghana. The first four papers constitute a special section on gender bias in employment and are introduced by Dr. Marquita Walker, an Associate Professor of Labor Studies at Indiana University. Following the section on gender bias in employment, we present papers on a wide range of social work relevant topics including employability of individuals on probation, conducting research in mental health settings, and expanding mental health services by partnering with clergy. Each paper is briefly introduced below, followed by our annual recognition of our reviewers.

**Regular Issue**

Recognizing that stable employment decreases recidivism of formerly incarcerated individuals, ***Capece*** examined the effects of probation stipulations on perceptions of employability among 170 people on probation in Rhode Island. Capece asserts that despite their intentions, stipulations such as mandated meetings with probation officers, court appointments, and drug or mental health counseling may serve as a barrier to employment. Based on the findings, Capece calls for social work practitioners who work with people on probation to increase their clients’ perceptions of employability.

To address stress, burnout, and the need for self-care among social workers, ***Mack*** developed a Resiliency-Focused Supervision Model (RSFM). Mack’s model aims to proactively address various types of stress experienced by practitioners before they get to the stage of burnout where client care may be compromised. A defining feature of the RSFM is prioritizing self-care during the supervisory process in order to build resiliency among social workers.

In Sweden, ***Ryding*** used focus groups with Family Support workers to better understand how they integrated evidence-based practices and reflection into their work with families involved in the Family Check-Up (FCU) program. FCU is an evidence-based model that aims to enhance family functioning and well-being. Practitioners reported that the reflective approach of FCU not only empowered families but also contributed to professional learning and development of practitioners.

Using data gathered from 80 participants in two mental health courts, ***Kondrat, Sullivan, Canada, and Jaggers*** explored how various aspects of social networks were associated with participants’ quality of life. An unexpected finding about the number of family members in one’s network suggests that mental health court participants need supportive others in their social networks in addition to family. While the importance of social networks in recovery from mental health is well-documented, this study indicates that practitioners must pay attention to important nuances of social networks.

Based on their experiences conducting social work research in mental health settings, ***Sapiro and Matthews*** analyzed the advantages and challenges of conducting research in a clinical setting. Among the issues identified were power dynamics in the research process, the risks of Othering, and the challenges of straddling insider and outsider identities as scholar-practitioners in clinic settings. The authors offer a number of practical suggestions for navigating the dual identities of researcher and clinician.

***Savino, Bowen, Irish, and Johnson*** examined health care utilization data for 133 adults who participated in a Housing First program offering in-home behavioral health services. Use of acute health care was low overall, perhaps reflecting a stabilizing effect of housing. While empirically-supported assessment tools are needed to evaluate consumers’ unique needs, the results suggest that offering in-home behavioral health services may reduce racial health disparities in health care utilization.

Using an online survey, ***Teater and Chonody*** surveyed adults age 55 and older (n=417) to consider their definitions of successful aging. Themes were considered separately for older adults who identified as aging successfully and those who identified as not aging successfully. For both groups, health and ability were important aspects of aging successfully. Teater & Chonody advocate for replacing the term “successful aging,” with the term “actively aging,” which focuses on aging adults actively choosing to define what aging means to them and challenging societal expectations of a “right” or “wrong” aging process.

***Apgar*** questions whether increasing the proportion of social work students in macro specializations is an “impossible dream.” Based on survey data from 474 Master of Social Work students and graduates, this study identified both structural and attitudinal barriers to students choosing macro practice. Interestingly, African American respondents were more likely to concentrate in macro practice, perhaps reflecting a recognition of the need for systems change to promote equal opportunities and rights for those who have historically been marginalized. To help rectify entrenched social inequities, Apgar advocates for social work programs to reconsider offering macro content as a specialization rather than being integral to the overall curriculum.

***Linton, Stemegna, Zepeda, Watson, Diaz, Duncan, and van Sant*** evaluated the impact of a 90-day, family-focused, care transition intervention on people with brain injuries (n=22) and their caregivers (n=20). Both patients experiencing a brain injury and their caregivers benefited from home visits and coaching focused on hospital-to-home transitions, with fewer hospital readmissions than a usual care control group. Based on the study’s findings, Linton et al. strongly recommend that social work hospital discharge planning include extended home visitation to ensure patient and caregiver needs are met.

Using a national dataset, ***Adzima*** tested the association of advanced math course-taking by American youth (n= 3,384) on subsequent receipt of public assistance. Adzima suggests that a work-first policy has made it harder for some students to attend college while meeting the work requirements for aid. A probit analysis revealed that taking advanced math courses in high school is associated with a lower probability of receiving public assistance among recent graduates. These findings can inform the work of school social workers who collaborate with teachers and guidance counselors to help students achieve future financial independence.

***Amenuke-Edusei and Birore*** conducted a study to examine the influence of various factors on women’s breast cancer screening in Ghana. A cross-sectional survey of 194 Ghanaian women revealed that only 14% of respondents had undergone mammogram screening. Breast cancer awareness raising is needed in Ghana to counteract negative personal and cultural beliefs relating to breast cancer and screening. Amenuke-Edusei & Birore also recommend that social work programs in Ghana offer oncology social work so that social workers in Ghana can be trained to address challenges relating to breast cancer.

Analyzing national data on mental health use, ***Hooley, Wang, and Hodge*** found that 25% of those who seek mental health care turn to clergy. Most respondents who went to clergy (94%) reported satisfaction with their care. Hooley and colleagues suggest incorporating clergy in mental health scale-up plans may be a viable option, particularly for addressing the mental health needs of underserved racial and ethnic minorities, as well as older adults.

With this issue we would also like to thank the many reviewers worldwide who completed reviews for *Advances in Social Work* this past year. In 2020, 97 individuals from 9 countries and 44 states and territories representing 170 colleges/universities and agencies served as AISW reviewers. We truly appreciate the voluntary efforts of our reviewers in enhancing the scholarly contributions of the journal. We are very proud of both the broad participation of authors and reviewers and of our legacy as an open access journal since 2008.

**Reviewer Appreciation**

With this issue we would also like to thank the many reviewers worldwide who completed reviews for *Advances in Social Work* this past year. In 2020, 297 individuals from 9 countries and 44 states and territories representing 170 colleges/universities and agencies served as AISW reviewers. We truly appreciate the voluntary efforts of our reviewers in enhancing the scholarly contributions of the journal. We are very proud of both the broad participation of authors and reviewers and of our legacy as an open access journal since 2008.

***Advances in Social Work***

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