MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON MINDFULNESS MEDITATION IN CURRICULA

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A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

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by

Deyssi Partida

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ABSTRACT

Mindfulness meditation (MM) has been used as an intervention tool for mental health diagnosis in the field of social work for some time and there are numerous empirical literature and research about the benefits of MM in practice. Despite the evidence and the use of MM in the field, there is very limited incorporation or MM programs and courses in the Master of Social Work (MSW) education and curricula. This study aimed to explore MSW students' perspectives on mindfulness meditation and whether they would find it beneficial in their curricula. The study collected qualitative data through interviews MSW graduates at a Southern California University. The data collected was analyzed through ATLAS software. The findings of the study give way for future research to help note the interest of MM within MSW students and how it can help benefit MSW students personally and professionally by providing education and practice in the MSW education field. Participants expressed desire to learn more about MM, as they did not feel equipped to confidently practice it in the field. Including MM practice and education could help fortify the field of social work by creating better MSW professionals due to its benefits.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

ASSESSMENT

Introduction

This chapter covers the research focus, identifies the paradigm for the study, and the rationale for the paradigm. A literature review and theoretical orientation utilized in the study is discussed. Lastly, the chapter discusses potential contribution of the study to field of Social Work.

Research Statement/Focus

The focus of the study is to explore Master of Social Work (MSW) students' perception of mindfulness meditation (MM), their experience with stress as a graduate student, and whether they would find MM beneficial in a course or part of their MSW curricula. In this study, MM is described as a form of being in the present moment observing the self by being aware of thoughts, feelings, sensations (Birnbaum, 2008) and allowing them to flow freely from one another without judgement (Tarrasch, 2015). Graduate students' stress symptoms have been linked with poor academic performance and adverse mental health outcomes (i.e. anxiety, depression) (Shearer, Hunt, Chowdhury, & Nicol, 2016), which is why it is important to explore how students feel about MM in their MSW Curricula. Bonifas & Napoli (2014) discuss how MSW students report higher stress levels, undergo mental exhaustion (i.e. exposure to human suffering, sleep deprivation), and are emotionally drained due to the demands of school, family

life, and internship. Implementing MM in the MSW curricula could be beneficial for universities to add programs and courses that help alleviate stress (Elder et al., 2011).

Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

Morris (2013) explains that post positivism assumes there is no separation of observed/researcher, the subject is observed in a naturalistic setting, and the researcher can influence what is observed. The study adopted a post positivism paradigm because it aimed to collect qualitative data through interviews. Data was gathered in form of words and the study took place in a naturalistic setting (Morris,2013). The researcher aimed to collect a combination of social work college students' points of view on MM, explore students' stress, and gather their thoughts on adding MM to their curricula. Post positivism is an appropriate paradigm because the researcher assumes that it is almost impossible to step out of the human experience to study the observed. There is a strive for objectivity and awareness of biases. The study assumed both the need to look at the science behind research methodology and allow the researcher to step back from the data and "take on the art of being independently creative" (Morris, 2013, p. 41).

Two research journals, a narrative account and reflective journal, were set up to stay on track with the post positivism paradigm and capture the researcher's experiences and reflections throughout the development of the problem focus (Morris, 2013). The journals captured the researchers record of

interaction, thoughts/reflections, and rationale on how qualitative data can be interpreted. Additionally, the researcher had an advisor to supervise the study.

Literature Review

This section looks at MM history, benefits, and suggestions as to why MM should be incorporated in social work curricula. This information will help explore why a MM program/course would be beneficial to MSW students.

History and Definition

Meditation has been around for centuries in the Western world. Meditation has been seen primarily as a religious focus throughout history (i.e. Buddhism) but has developed popularity during recent years outside of the religious realm. MM is described as a form of observing the self by being aware of thoughts, feelings, sensation and this being utilized as a significant clinical application (Birnbaum, 2008). In the 1960's, meditative practice produced therapeutic value through enhancement of physical and psychological well-being (Kostanski & Hassed, 2008). In the 1970's, meditation began its early stages of being seeing as a stress reduction tool (transcendental meditation [TM]) that could be applied to all and not just seen as a form of religion (Harrington & Dunne, 2015). It was not until the 1980's that mindfulness/meditation grew in popularity as a legitimate research approach towards modern health care because of Jon Kabat-Zinn's successful development of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MSBR), In MBSR, mindfulness training is applied to patients with chronic health conditions and it resulted in a decrease of pain (Christopher & Maris, 2010). After several

published empirical research studies demonstrating the positive benefits of MM, mindfulness training was finally considered a clinical intervention in 2003 (Tarrasch, 2015).

Knight (2009) pointed out the most basic forms of MM such as observing the breath and simply observing (not participate in thoughts, emotions, sensations), acknowledging (observe and accept what is happening without judgement), and returning (repeating, exercise choice of present moment awareness).

Many people see meditation as a method of relaxation or spiritual growth and are still considered relatively new in the field of psychological literature and research (Mars & Oliver 2016). However, meditation has been more than just relaxation or a stress reduction tool but rather a way to create mindfulness, self-awareness, self-care, and help regulate some medical conditions (Crowley & Munk, 2017).

Benefits of Meditation

MM is defined as a form of being in the present moment observing the self by being aware of thoughts, feelings, sensations (Birnbaum, 2008) and allowing them to flow freely from one another without judgement (Tarrasch, 2015). Research has shown that meditation can be viewed as a form of "mental training" aimed at improving an individual's neuroscience capacities (i.e. attention, emotional self-regulation) and fostering empathy, compassion, and cognitive flexibility (Gockel, 2015). Further research discusses the evidence that MM might

cause "neuroplastic changes" in the structure and function of brain regions involved in regulation of neuroscience capacities (Tang, Hölzel, & Posner, 2015).

MM has been used as a tool to reduce negative symptoms and increase positive symptoms. For example, studies have demonstrated MM can reduce emotional distress, anxiety/depression, maladaptive behaviors, and reduce chronic pain; as well as improve social competence, cognitive abilities, and attention (i.e. focus) (Tarrasch, 2015). MM in general can help people manage behavioral problems by increasing awareness of thoughts, focusing on breadth, increase sensory/somatic awareness, and disengagement (i.e. negative thoughts like self-criticism or judgement) (Househam & Solanto, 2016). For example, recent literature points out that meditation has been considered an effective treatment for people with ADHD who do not want to take medication as it increases emotional regulation, empathy, social functioning, and satisfaction of quality of life (Singh & Singh, 2015), (Smalley et al, 2009).

In the therapeutic perspective, the most evidence-based interventions of MM are Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). These interventions have been used as treatment for intractable physical pain (i.e. MBSR therapy), borderline personality disorder (i.e. DBT), and major depression (i.e. MBCT) (Morales Knight, 2009).

<u>Importance of Incorporating Mindfulness Meditation in Social Work Curricula &</u>

<u>Student Stress</u>

Despite the many studies demonstrating the benefits of MM as an intervention, there is limited research on the use of MM for professional training (i.e. MSW students) and is seen as unusual in the social work education (Birnbaum, 2008). Gockel (2015) mentions that while many educators and clinicians acknowledge the benefits of MM (i.e. nurturing important therapeutic qualities like attention, empathy, compassion, cognitive flexibility, self-awareness, and responsiveness to clients' needs), there is a lack of MM in curricula and its benefits can be imperative in reducing burnout during and after school through longevity and effectiveness in the field. Furthermore, Bonifas & Napoli (2014) discuss how mindfulness can help MSW students improve self-care skills and quality of life.

Social work training programs expose students to relatively high levels of stress during their studies due to their academic and field responsibilities (Birnbaum, 2008). Research studies have demonstrated that college students undergo emotional/mental exhaustion, burnout, and sleep deprivation; In fact, social worker graduate students report higher stress levels due to their curricula and exposure to human suffering/vicarious trauma (Bonifas & Napoli, 2014). The benefits of MM could help outweigh some of the negative experiences that social work students experience and help create more resilient social workers that would be able to better manage the challenges of the social work field.

It is imperative that we look at preventative tools like MM to help social work students become more resilient and better practitioners, as this can help improve their quality of life. Graduate students are expected to help their peers/clients deal with stress and frustration; however, few professional development programs specifically address this issue in their curricula (Tarrasch, 2015). It is important that social work professionals are able to practice what they teach, as this can also help foster the client-social-work relationship in multiple settings. Research has already been conducted that indicate that mindfulness (i.e. MSBR) interventions have been proven to effectively help social work graduate students better cope with stress (Botta, Cadet, & Maramaldi, 2015).

Integrating MM as part of the pedagogy in the MSW curricula can help students reduce stress by increasing self-care skills and increase clinical education (Gockel, 2015). Furthermore, MM is a cost-effective strategy that does not require equipment or cost and the fundamental principal is that the teacher of MM also adopts the practice (Kostanski & Hassed, 2008). A possible drawback of adding MM to an MSW curricula is that students are already overwhelmed with stress and adding one more course can add more stress to an already heavy course load. A drawback of practicing MM could be that some students could experience negative feelings while practicing, such as struggling with meditation and feeling frustrated (McCollum & Gehart, 2010).

MM has been around for a long time and its benefits can reduce pain, stress, increase empathy, increase mental flexibility, and reduce stress. In order

to incorporate MM in the MSW curriculums there needs to be additional studies that look at MM benefits in the education and professional field to create awareness and movement for such implementation, which is why this study is important.

<div align="center">Theoretical Orientation</div>

The theoretical orientation of the study is meditation theory. Mindfulness practice has been shown to provide strategies/interventions in the social work field towards building mental flexibility (internal focus), emotional regulation, and increasing awareness with nonjudgmental acceptance (Coffey & Hartman, 2008). As previously mentioned, mindfulness was first introduced by John Kabat-Zinn in a research study as a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program that helped reduced patients' chronic pain (Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, & Burney, 1985). MBSR is an intervention that can be practiced through silent sitting meditation, walking meditation, purposefully engaging in daily activities like mindful eating (Tarrasch, 2015), guided body awareness (body scan), yoga, to reduce stress and pain (Morales Knight, 2009). Further research studies have indicated that meditation strategies have led study participants to exhibited reduction in pain, depression, and anxiety in follow-ups of up to 3 to 4 years (Shearer, Hunt, Chowdhury, & Nicol, 2016). Thus, incorporating a program or course in MM within MSW curricula could positively impact MSW students towards their academic performance by reducing stress, improving self-care skills, and increasing overall benefits (i.e. quality of life, decrease in stress,

increase in empathy) that can last past their education and into their MSW profession to become better clinicians.

Potential Contribution of Study to Micro and Macro Social Work Practice

The intention of the study was to capture MSW students' perspective towards meditation/mindfulness and understanding whether they would find it beneficial to have it added to their MSW curricula. While there are countless positive studies on meditation/mindfulness as successful empirical interventions in the field of social work (Gerdes, Segal, Jackson, & Mullins, 2011), there is a lack of MM research in social work curricula or education settings (Birnbaum, 2008; Ching, Koo, Tsai, & Chen, 2015). Furthermore, while meditation has been shown to decrease stress levels as a strategy, it continues to be underutilized (Lederer & Middlestadt, 2014). Meaning that while social workers believe in the positive outcomes of using MM as interventions, the field lacks to provide it in their curricula, leaving students to explore the practice on their own.

This study provides potential contribution to the field of social work by making it known that college social work students would want to learn about MM in their curricula. The implication is that by incorporating MM in the curricula it would help students become better social workers (i.e. increase in empathy) as they would also find the practice beneficial (i.e. increase quality of life, reduces stress, and increase of emotional regulation) towards their educational success, skills, and professional career (Bonifas & Napoli, 2014). It can also be assumed that perhaps their increased knowledge of the benefits of MM and their

9

comfortableness through courses would make MSW's more prone to recommend the practice to their clients. Ultimately, on a larger scale this study can help initiate a movement of incorporating MM as a mandatory part of social work curricula since it would benefit both the social worker as a student/professional, the social work field (reducing burnout, increasing clinician skills, and longevity) and the perspective client.

Summary

Chapter one covered the proposed research focus to explore MSW students' perception of MM and their desire to see MM as part of MSW curricula. The chapter identified the post positivism paradigm and discussed the rationale, addressed the MM literature review, and the studies theoretical orientation. Lastly, chapter one also discussed the potential contribution of the study to social work practice both in micro and macro perspectives.

CHAPTER TWO

ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

Chapter two discusses the study's research site, engagement strategies, and self-preparation for the researcher. Lastly, the chapter covers setbacks that the study might encounter such as diversity issues, ethical issues, and political issues.

Research Site

The study site is a four-year state university in Southern California that offers graduate programs. The Southern California University has a population of about 20,461 students, composed of 61 percent female and 39 percent male students, and serves a region primarily with a less than one percent out of state students (Fact and Stats, 2017). The ethnicity demographics of the site are 63% Hispanics, 13% White, 7% Non-Resident Foreign, 5% African-American, and 5% Asian (Office of Institutional Research, 2018). The study included MSW graduate students and their demographics were very similar, with the majority being Hispanic. The MSW students invited to participate were on/off campus, part-time, full-time, and online students. The site has a high diversity population both ethnically (i.e. Hispanic, White, African American, and Asian) and in age. Participants age was not collected but it also varied.

Engagement Strategies for Gatekeepers at Research Site

The gatekeeper of the study was the Director of the School of Social Work. The gatekeeper was introduced to the purpose and intent of the study through a letter via email. The intention of the study was to capture MSW students' perspectives towards MM, personal practice, confidence in utilizing MM as an intervention, and explore whether they would find MM program/course beneficial as part of their MSW curricula.

The email included the potential contribution of the study to the field of social work in terms of exploring MSW student thoughts on MM incorporation in their curricula and how this could positively impact MSW students both academically and professionally (Bonifas & Napoli, 2014) in the long run.

The email requested permission to be able to invite MSW students as study participants. The aim was that the gatekeeper could see the benefit from the study, as the results would be from their MSW students and they could apply it towards their own MSW curricula in the future. The results of the study would be of interest to the gatekeeper. For example, if the gatekeeper sees that there is a strong interest from MSW students learning about MM in their curricula perhaps they might be willing to consider doing a pilot MM program or course within their curricula and the university might be pioneer MSW educator.

Self-Preparation

The researcher prepared for data gathering by engaging in extensive literature review to identify common MSW student perspectives towards MM so

that patterns and themes could be more easily identified. The researcher also self-disclosed to participants that she was an MSW student at the university to build trust in the relationship by having something in common with the participant, while limiting self-disclosure. The researcher did their best at being aware of their own biases and presumptions of MM by staying in close contact with their graduate research mentor and asking for guidance when needed. The researcher also made sure to use research journals to gather their narrative and reflective thoughts throughout the study in keeping with a post positivism paradigm.

The researcher prepared by engaging in Human Subjects Ethics Training to ensure participants are highly valued and safe. The researcher ensured to be culturally competent to the different ethnic participants by being equal and fair to all participants regardless of sex, age, and ethnicity. Lastly, in preparation for data-gathering (interviews) the researcher maintained a positive perspective to keep an understanding that last minute cancelations can occur, as many MSW graduate students have busy schedules, and there could be technology issues.

Diversity Issues

The researcher was aware that there could be some diversity issues when data-gathering, as there could be a difference in cultural diversity and knowledge of MM, depending on MSW students' level (1st year, 2nd year, and 3rd year students). The researcher anticipated that there could be participants that felt some discomfort if they did not know much about MM. The researcher made sure

to make the participants feel at ease by stating that this is an exploratory study not a test and there is no wrong answer.

California has the largest minority population (22.3 million) state in the United States with an increase in Hispanic population due to high levels of immigration (Humes, Jones & Ramirez, 2011). As mentioned above, the study site has a 61% Hispanic population and 61% female ration. Therefore, it was anticipated that the study participants would reflect these statistics and they did. The researcher addressed the diversity by treating all participants equally and with respect. The researcher was willing to provide bilingual interpretation if needed or requested if there was Spanish speaking participants, but it was not needed.

Another diversity issue that was anticipated was participant's technology knowledge and comfort. Participants that choose the option to do a virtual interview could find themselves not understanding the process of having connection to the internet issues. If participants encountered this, the researcher offered an alternative time and date to meet in person.

Ethical Issues

The study first underwent approval by the Human Subjects Review Board, Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure no human participants were harmed in the study and that ethical issues were considered. Participants that agreed to the informed consent would be advised that their information would be confidential by not collecting names and having their reply under numerical coding. The

researcher had all notes under an email account that had a two-password setting that only the researcher could access and on an external drive that had participant identification (just numeral coding). This helped protect the participant's confidentiality. The external drive was used to audio record the interview, as the researcher transcribed it for coding purposes. The informed consent acknowledged that the participants could decide to terminate their interview at any point, as the participation was voluntary and not a school requirement.

Another ethical issue that the researcher anticipated running into was interviewing classmates with whom the researcher had a relationship. The researcher combatted this by ensuring to treat all participant the same during the interview to avoid any biases and keep the conversation only about the study. The researcher asked all the participants the same questions on the questionnaire and repeated the same opening statement and closing remarks. The researcher had an open communication with their research advisor in case any issues arose.

Political Issues

Political issues that might have been present in the study were that participants might not have wanted to state whether they received adequate MM knowledge from their current MSW curricula due to knowing that the information would be seen by the Social Work Department and perhaps make them look "unfavorable". The researcher mentioned at the beginning that there was no right

or wrong answer so that participants did not feel like this was a test or felt uncomfortable with their responses. The researcher also reminded participants at the beginning of the interview that while their responses were noted, their identity remained confidential so they can feel comfortable being transparent with their responses.

The Role of Technology in Engagement

Technology played a pivotal role in the study due to the researcher being an online student and using online tools during the data gathering process. The researcher utilized email to notify and invite MSW student to participate in the study, meaning students needed to have internet access. If the student decided to participate, they were able to a click on a link that will have a scheduling slot (i. e. Acuity Scheduling).

Depending on the student engagement method, the interview took place virtually via a video online tool (i.e. Skype, Zoom, Facetime) or in person. Additionally, the interview was audio recorded on an electronic device whether the interview happened virtually or in person. The recording was reviewed by a software program that attempted to transcribe the interview. Technology facilitated the data-gathering throughout the process of the study.

Summary

The chapter discussed engagement methods by identifying the study site (state college) in southern California and discussed engagement strategies for

16

gatekeeper. The chapter addressed the researcher's self-preparation by engaging in extensive literature review, engaging in Human Subjects Ethics Training, and keeping a positive mindset during participant cancellations. Diversity, ethical, and political issues were discussed. Lastly, the chapter addressed the importance the role of technology was in the study.

CHAPTER THREE

IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

This chapter addresses questions related to participants and how they were selected. Data gathering, phases, recording, and analysis is discussed. Findings of the study are also addressed.

Study Participants

The participants in the study were MSW students who attended a Southern California University. All the participants were females, as in the U.S. the social work field is a female dominated profession (Schilling, Morrish, & Liu, 2008). The participants were students who graduated with an MSW degree. The participants were a combination of full-time students, part-time students, on-campus students, and online students.

Selection of Participants

The sampling strategy the researcher used was purposive sampling since the study aimed to look at MSW students enrolled in a university and was targeted (Morris, 2006). Purposeful sampling was implemented through the university's email alert system to all MSW students enrolled or recently graduated. The researcher utilized a variety of purposive sampling in the study: Homogeneous sampling, purposeful random sampling, and convenience

sampling. The rational for choosing these approaches for sampling is due the type of explorative research focus and the limitation of resources available. Homogeneous sampling was important because the study aimed to gather a comprehensive examination of a sub group, MSW students enrolled or graduated at a Southern California University. Purposeful random sampling was gathered as the participants search and size was stopped once data became redundant and reached a saturation point (Morris, 2006). Convenience sampling was also applied due to resource limitations and participant availability. The researcher emailed MSW students who are in their cohort to obtain participants as necessary. The same information on the initial email was also included. The initial goal was to obtain 6-15 participants to take part in the study, but repetition patters were observed by the 4th participant.

Possible participants were emailed a small brief about the purpose of the study, length of participation in study (15-30mins), and the approved informed consent by the IRB. If they decided to participate, they clicked on a link that directed them to acknowledge they read an informed consent, chose a time and date that works best for them, and a method of participation (i.e. in person, video conference). The informed consent mentioned the purpose of the study, description, confidentiality, duration, risk, benefits, and contact information of the researcher and research advisor (See Appendix A). The link directed them to input their contact information to be contacted by the researcher. Participants were advised that the study had formal Human Subjects approval and that the

interview would be recorded to ensure all the information is captured without utilization of their name. Once a date/time were set, the researcher gave a courtesy reminder a week and a day before scheduled time via email or text (depending on their preference). The researcher either met with the interviewee to conduct the interview or met with them online via video conference.

<div align="center">Data Gathering</div>

Qualitative data gathering was used since the paradigm for the study was post positivism and exploratory. Data gathering took place in interview form in a naturalistic setting wherever the participant chose (i.e. in-person on campus or via online video conference). Qualitative data gathering in interviews was utilized to explore MSW student's knowledge, perspective towards mindfulness meditation, and if they would like to see mindfulness meditation as part of their curriculum.

Participants were asked basic demographics questions at the beginning of the interview such as sex, ethnicity, and current MSW level (e.g. first-year, full-time, online student, or graduate). The researcher also disclosed their status as an MSW student to build some rapport and engagement. The questions that participants were asked in the interview were aimed at identifying patterns and regularities (Morris, 2006). The questions that were asked were both descriptive and structural. See Appendix C for full questionnaire. It is important to note that the interview varied based on the participants response and if they answered questions out of sequence.

<u>Descriptive Questions Samples</u>

Researcher: What has been your experience with mindfulness meditation?

Student X3: (Answers)

Researcher: According to empirical literature, mindfulness meditation is used in clinical settings as an intervention for several mental health diagnoses. For example, treatment for Borderline Personality Disorder has included mindfulness meditation interventions as part of Dialectic Behavior Therapy. Would you feel confident implementing mindfulness meditation as an intervention once you graduate?

Student X3: (Answers)

Researcher: Tell me a little more… (Prompt participant to further discuss)

<u>Structure Question Samples</u>

Researcher: In what way do you think mindfulness meditation in the MSW curriculum might benefit you?

Student X3: (Answers)

Researcher: (if participant answers that they would) Sounds like you would find it beneficial. What would be the best way mindfulness meditation would be included in the curricula? (1st year orientation, micro courses, seminar).

Phases of Data Collection

Data was collected through a premade questionnaire and was administered to all participants to ensure consistency. Some questions were

slightly altered depending on how the participant answered, mentioned earlier. For example, if the participant stated that they would not find mindfulness mediation beneficial in their curriculum, they were not asked where in their curricula would they find it beneficial. The interview was divided into stages of engagement, development of focus, maintenance of focus, and termination (Morris, 2006). Engagement was created at the beginning with throw away questions like how their day was going and asking if they had any questions before beginning the interview. In the development of focus, essential questions were asked addressing mindfulness meditation (i.e. Do you have experience with MM?). In the maintaining focus phase, extra questions (i.e. Do you feel that the MSW curricula equipped you to practice MM?) and probing questions (i.e. can you elaborate?) were utilized.

Debriefing

Termination of the interview was signaled by informing the participant that there were no more questions and thanking them for their participation. Any feedback was taken to address any possible concerns like length of time or connection issues if doing online video conference. The participant was emailed a debriefing statement (See Appendix B) or handed one as soon as the interview was over. The statement informed the participant of the purpose of the study. Participants were informed of where they could look for the study once it is completed (August 2019) and provided with the researcher's advisor's contact information.

Data Recording

The data was gathered through a recording handheld device and questionnaire notes. The handheld device was stored under key and did not contain any participant identifying information beside name code. The researcher utilized a narrative and reflective journal to note thoughts, feelings, reflection on the interview, and evaluation of the interview. The researcher noted best practices and things to avoid. The researcher documented any biases that they encountered throughout the interviews in the reflective journal and shared with the research advisor to make sure they are being worked through.

Questionnaire notes were shredded after the study ended and did not have any identifying information but were given a number coding to ensure confidentiality. The data on the digital voice recorder was interpreted into a script and saved on the researcher's personal laptop under password lock.

Data Analysis Procedures

A qualitative analysis was conducted in form of words and using qualitative analysis procedures, such as a "bottom up" approach as the study applied various stages and was looking for emergent themes. The stages used looked for patterns by utilizing open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Morris, 2006).

Open coding was utilized to help categorize some of the narrative and look at microanalysis at the beginning of the data to see what themes emerged. This was mainly used at the beginning and sporadically. The researcher scanned

the transcribed data and grouped categories. The first words that stood out were students stress while in school. The researcher would look at a paragraph that the participant shared and divided it up to see if their words could be developed into concepts or linked with other theoretical comparison. The researcher did this by looking at categories and utilizing a "flip flop technique" (Morris, p. 259, 2013) to see any assumptions and interpretations could be challenged. Some of the questions the researcher considered were, are there graduate students who experience less stress than MSW students? Is the MSW curricula more difficult than others? One of the first codes created was participants experiencing student stress, coded as Experienced Student Stress. The second code that was created from a recurrent theme was MM viewed positively, coded MM as Positive. The third open code was initially coded as Interest in MM. The researcher's journals made note of how participants all mentioned the high stress they underwent as graduate students and wanting to learn more about MM.

Axial coding was utilized to analyze and link categories/themes to patterns or statements. An example of an emergent statement and linkage was that participants that had knowledge/practice of MM were more likely to feel confident practicing it. Furthermore, participants that stated they experienced stress saw MM as positive and stated they would like to see MM as part of MSW curricula. The participants all shared 4 codes in common and unison. Additionally, some participants mentioned that while they felt confident practicing MM personally,

professionally they felt the MSW curriculum did not equip them to feel confident

practicing it professionally.

Finally, selective coding analysis was implemented to help the study

develop a theory based on the emerging core categories, themes, and patterns.

The researcher analyzed the data to see what core theme emerges from the

data. For example, patterns that could arise were participants having a positive

view of MM but would not find it beneficial to be added to the MSW curricula

because they felt it would add more stress to their education. The researcher

used diagrams like the one above to reach an analysis and reviewed their two

journals to see if there was any story/pattern captured during the interviews.

Some of the codes emerged with the use of the researcher's journals. Some of

the wording changed as the data was collected as well.

The software ATLAS.ti 8 was utilized to code the narrative of the interview

in an effort to capture reoccurring patterns. For example, some participants

indicated that they had no experience with MM but they thought of it as positive

and are would like to see if in their curriculum; this was be coded as "Positive

MM" and "MM in MSW Curricula".

Summary

The chapter addressed that the study participants would be students form

the Southern California University and addressed that participants would be

selected through purposeful sampling. Data gathering stages and analysis were

explained.

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION

Introduction

This chapter discusses how the qualitative data was analyzed, mentions participant demographics, and what tools were utilized in the study. There will also be mention on how the data was interpreted. This chapter will also discuss the studies implication of the findings in the micro/macro social work practice.

Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded using a voice recorder and were then transcribed by the researcher. Once transcribed, it was entered into ATLAS.ti 8 software for analysis. The ethnic demographics of the participants were as follows: 66% (n=4) were Hispanic, 17% (n=1) was Black/Hispanic, and 17% (n=1) was White. All the participants (n=6) in the study were MSW graduates. There were originally seven participants but only six participants' data were included, as there was a technology issue with the seventh participant (voice recorder did not record the interview). 50% of the participants did their MSW program online and the other 50% did their program on campus. 50% of the participants were part-time and the other 50% were full-time students during their MSW program.

The researcher transcribed every participant (n=6) interview and inputted them into the Atlas.ti 8 software. The researcher applied various stages of

studying and analyzing the data as it was being collected. The stages were interchanged at various times in the synthesizing process and theme development. The first few interviews were broken down and that developed into coding with the transcribed data and researchers journal notes. The participants responses to the questionnaire were coded. The first 4 interviews were each analyzed in a network setting to try and find relationship and additional themes. A total of 11 codes were created and categorized as pattern formed. For example, some codes addressed student stress, comfortableness practicing MM, identifying how participant felt about MM, whether participants found MM to be beneficial implements in the curriculum, and their recommendations on where it the MSW curriculum it should be applied. Codes were formed from the repetitive patterns found in the data. The researcher also used the handwritten notes on the questionnaire that had the same emerging themes.

There were several key findings that emerged from all six participants answering similarly. The first that emerged was that all participants shared they experience students' stress while in the MSW program. This theme was coded as Experienced Student Stress. The second that emerged was that all participants indicated they viewed MM positively and a code was created, MM viewed positively. The third finding was that all participants noted they would have been interested in learning more about MM. The fourth finding was all participants suggested MM should be implemented early in the curriculum, most stating within the first year of their MSW program.

Data Interpretation

There were 4 key themes that emerged. Some of them coincided with research mentioned in the literature review earlier. First was that MSW student stress levels while in the program. The second was that MM was viewed as positive. The third was that participants interest in learning more about MM. The fourth was participants recommendation of where in the MSW curriculum MM should be implements. The fifth was the apparent lack of participants feeling equipped to confidently practice MM.

<u>Master of Social Work Student Stress</u>

Stress as an MSW was undoubtedly experienced by all participants based on their response and elaboration. Some of the responses ranged from having to juggle various roles such as parenting and work load. Participant #1 stated "I've experienced and immense amount of stress throughout my three-year program. Just managing, like projects, homework family, social activities, work, internship. It was very stressful." Participant # 3, when asked about whether they experience stress replied, "Yes, especially because I worked full time while doing the program. And raising kids, so I had a lot on my plate and had to manage my time. I did not have a lot of free time". An interesting theme that also emerged was that when asked if the coping skills they used were learned in the MSW curriculum, only one participant mentioned they learned deep breathing. The other 5 participants mentioned that they used coping skills from previous experience and their responses varied but mostly revolved around spending time

28

with family and some mention of self-care. While MSW's are taught to help clients find their coping skills, perhaps there needs to be more emphasis in helping MSW students discover theirs in more detail and application. The themes that emerged matched the research that demonstrates graduate students undergo high levels of stress during their academic and field responsibilities (Birnbaum, 2008; Bonifas & Napoli, 2014).

<u>Interest in Mindfulness Meditation</u>

All participants stated they would've wanted to learn more about MM and viewed it positively. Participant #2 stated "I would've appreciated that they would've offered more in-depth training and information and integrated into the curriculum". Participant #5 shared "I think I would've wanted to learn more not just for myself but to use to help my patients in the future in my career." The desire to learn was present in all participant, indicating perhaps an unmet need within the MSW curriculum. This resonates with research were educators and clinicians are aware of the benefits of MM yet there is a lack of MM in the Social Work education field/curricula (Gockel, 2015). Perhaps if MSW students had MM as part of their curriculum, they could benefit from MM's positive benefits such as improving their self-care, reduce emotional distress, improved cognitive abilities/attention, improve overall quality of life, raising empathy, cognitive flexibility, and self-awareness (Birnbaum, 2008; Gockel, 2015; Tarrasch, 2015).

Mindfulness Meditation Implementation Early in Curriculum

Participant not only were interested in learning more, but they all shared the similar responses about their recommendation on if it was added in the MSW curriculum where it should be placed, within the first-year. Participant #3 mentioned the following, "I also would've like meditation to have been discussed at an earlier time, not just at the end of the program. Perhaps the very first semester to teach it, even though it was briefly mentioned in different course. It would have been more beneficial as a mandatory class at the beginning". Participant #6 stated "I definitely think the 1st year so that they were like, this is what it is and what you us can utilize. It would be so helpful and perhaps stuff could be less stressful".

Master of Social Work Curriculum not Equipping Students in Mindfulness Meditation

An important finding was that participants did not feel the MSW curricula fully equipped them to feel confident practicing MM. All the participants wanted to learn more about MM because they did not feel comfortable or equipped to practice MM. It is important for MSW graduates to have the tools they need to not only help other people but be able to help themselves and practice what they teach by learning this within their MSW program (Tarrasch, 2015).

When participants were asked how comfortable they felt practicing MM personally/professionally there were an array of responses. Three of the participants felt somewhat comfortable practicing MM, they either felt comfortable

professionally or personally but not both. Two participants said they were not comfortable practicing MM and only one participant mentioned that they felt comfortable practicing MM both personally and professionally. Participant #3 stated "Personally very comfortable. Professionally no because I would not feel comfortable if I had a client, teaching them or using it with them".

When participants were asked if they felt that the MSW curriculum equipped them to feel confident in practicing meditation professionally/personally, none of the participant felt fully confident in both. All 6 participants stated that they either did not feel confident or they felt somewhat that the MSW curriculum somewhat equipped them wither professionally or personally. One participant noted that she felt comfortable practicing it because of her own experience not the MSW curriculum. Lastly, when participants were asked if they thought MM being implemented in the curriculum would overburden students and 5 participants said they did not think so, while 1 said it depended on the student.

Overall, participants shared that not only would they like to have learned more about MM, but they would like to see MM incorporated early in their curriculum (within their 1st year of the program) and they did not believe adding MM would overburden students. If MM was incorporated in the MSW curriculum in a form of a workshop/session, perhaps MSW graduates would feel more confident practicing MM personally, reducing their stress, and professionally by implementing it with their clients. The more prepared MSW graduates are, the better impact they can make on individual clients, families, and the community.

Implication of Findings for Micro and Macro Practice

The implication of the findings in the study imply that if MM is incorporated in the MSW curriculum to benefit students, it can also benefit the social work field, impacting not only on a micro level but also on a macro level.

On an individual level, participants expressed undergoing stress while in school due to educational and personal demands (i.e. assignments, internship, workload, and juggling various personal roles and family commitments). Some participants thought that if they had learned more about MM in the curriculum perhaps it would've helped them practice it in their internship with clients and personal life, on a micro level. Additionally, some participants mentioned that learning more about MM could have reduced their stress level.

On an organizational level, the participants were affected by the MSW curriculum at their university and some felt that if they would've learned more about it, they would have been able to practice it at their internship impacting as mezza/macro level.

On a macro level, participants tend to experience high levels of stress not only in their educational setting but out in the field, feeling confident about MM professionally/personally could impact the level of care they provide to the communities they serve by reducing burnout (Gockel, 2015). Learning more about MM could help them be better social works that can be more resilient to stress and the trauma that comes from working with vulnerable populations

(Bonifas & Napoli, 2014). The better equipped social workers are, the better they can create positive change to the nation.

Overall, results of this study are from a small sample and there should be more studies that examine MSW curriculums from other parts of the state and nation to get a better grasp on how to better equip MSW graduates personally and professional. MSW curriculums could benefit from better preparing their students to deal with stress as this could make them not only better students but better practitioners.

Summary

This chapter covered the way the data was analyzed, and key findings were discussed. The implications of the finding were discussed and revealed that if f MM was incorporated in the MSW curriculum in a form of a workshop/session, perhaps MSW graduates would feel more confident practicing MM personally, reducing their stress, and professionally by implementing it with their clients.

CHAPTER FIVE

TERMINATION

Introduction

This chapter addresses the termination and follow-up of the study and the communication of findings to study site and participant. The ongoing relationship with the study participants is also discussed due to the researcher knowing the participants in school. Lastly, a dissemination plan is discussed

Termination of Study

Participants were thanked for their participation after the interview and given a debriefing at the end of their interview. This debriefing included what the study was designed for, mentioned where they could access results, and provided contact information for the researcher's advisor if they had additional questions about the study. As for the gatekeeper at the research site, the Director of the School of Social Work, she is aware of where the study results will be located and there is no need for continual contact.

Communication of Findings to Study Site and Study Participants

The final project is submitted to the California State University San Bernardino Graduate Studies for review. Once approved, it would be submitted to ScholarWorks. Participants were made aware of the location of the study's findings, as it was provided in their debriefing statement (See Appendix B).

Ongoing Relationship with Study Participants

The relationship with the participants ended after the interview, unless the participant requested the study results. For those participants with whom the researcher was familiar, the relationship resumed as normal. It is understood that the researcher might run into them again at school function or in the MSW field as practitioners. If the participants asked about the research afterward, they would be directed to view the results in ScholarWorks.

Limitations

While the sample size of the study (n=6) was small, saturation was reached, and no new information was revealed by the 6th participant. There was a 7th participant but the voice recorder did not record the interview, thus the data from the participant was not utilized. Overall, results of this study are from a small sample and there should be more studies that examine MSW curricula from other parts of the state and nation to get a better grasp on how to better equip MSW graduates personally and professionally. MSW programs could benefit from better preparing their students to deal with stress as this could make them not only better students but better practitioners.

Dissemination Plan

Results from the study would be shared with MSW faculty via poster to see if they would find it beneficial to include mindfulness meditation in their MSW curriculum in the future. The dissemination of the research findings was provided

via electronic poster by Aug 8, 2019 and highlighted the study's results and

implications towards MM and the MSW curriculum.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SAN BERNARDINO

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
School of Social Work
INFORMED CONSENT
MSW Students Perspectives on Mindfulness Meditation and MSW Curricula

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to explore Master of Social Work (MSW) students' perceptions of mindfulness meditation (MM). The study is being conducted by Deyssi Partida, an MSW student under the supervision of Dr. Brooklyn Levine-Sapozhnikov, an adjunct faculty at California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-Committee at CSUSB.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to examine if MSW students would find mindfulness meditation beneficial and if they would like to see it incorporated in their MSW curricula.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked in an interview setting about their thoughts on mindfulness meditation, their experience of stress as an MSW student, and their preference for incorporating a mindfulness meditation program or course into their MSW Curricula. Participants may choose to meet in person or over internet conference (i.e. Zoom). If you agree to participate and click on the Yes button, it will route you to Acuity Scheduling so you can book a date and time and interview preference. The interview will be voice recorded without any identifying information.

PARTICIPATION: Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants can discontinue their participation in the study at any time, even during the interview.

CONFIDENTIAL: Participants personal identifying information will not be gathered. Participant responses will be coded for tracking purposes.

DURATION: The interview will be 15-30 minutes.

RISK: There are no foreseeable risk to the participants.

BENEFITS: There will also not be any direct benefits from the study to the participant.

VIDEO/AUDIO/PHOTOGRAPH: I understand that the interview will be voice recorded and that by clicking on the I agree button, I agree to this.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the research advisor Dr. Brooklyn Levine-Sapozhnikov via email at Brooklyn.sapozhnikov@csusb.edu.

RESULTS: Results of the study can be obtained from Pfau Library ScholarWorks (http:scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu) at California State University, San Bernardino after Summer 2020.

CONFIRMATION STATEMENT: I have read the information above and agree to participate in your study.

https://app.acuityscheduling.com/schedule.php?owner=17591183

APPENDIX B

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
School of Social Work

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Thank you for your participation in the study. The study was designed to explore MSW students knowledgeable about mindfulness meditation, their thoughts on mindfulness meditation, and whether they would like to see more of it within their curriculum. While mindfulness meditation is widely used as an intervention for mental health diagnosis, there seems to be a lack of mindfulness meditation education about the practice throughout MSW education. This is to inform you that there was no attempt to deceive you.

If you have any question about the study, please feel free to contact the research advisor Dr. Brooklyn Levine-Sapozhnikov via email at Brooklyn.sapozhnikov@csusb.edu. If you would like to obtain a copy of the results, the study can be obtained from Pfau Library ScholarWorks (http:scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu) at California State University, San Bernardino after Summer 2019.

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
School of Social Work
Questionnaire

Disclose I am an MSW student at their campus.

Basic Demographics Questions:
- Ethnicity?
- Sex?
- Year of MSW program:
- On campus? Pathway?

Stress
1. Can you tell me a little bit of whether you have experienced stress as an MSW student?
   a. What is the most stressful?
2. Any coping skills you try to practice?
   a. Did you learn any of those skills as an MSW student or on your own?

Meditation Knowledge
3. What does mindfulness meditation mean to you?
   a. Positive? Negative? Neutral?
   b. Would you like me to provide a definition?
4. Do you have any experience with mindfulness meditation?
   a. Have you ever practiced it or heard of anyone around you practicing it?
   b. If so, how many times a week?
5. Where did you hear of mindfulness meditation in the MSW curricula?
6. Would you want to learn more about mindfulness meditation?

Comfortableness utilizing Mindfulness Meditation as Intervention
Mindfulness Meditation can be employed as an intervention technique. Some of the research on mindfulness indicates that mindfulness meditation can help to reduce stress in students, increase empathy in clinicians, and improve the client-therapist relationship. Sometimes there is a disconnect between what research shows and what actually works or happens in practice.
7. Based on the information discussed, do you think mindfulness meditation would be useful to use in treatment for mental health?
8. How comfortable would you feel practicing mindfulness meditation personally?
9. Professionally?
10. Do you feel that the MSW curricula equips you to feel confident in practicing meditation both personally and professionally?
    a. If yes, tell me where you have learned it?

In-put for MSW Curricula
Graduate school can be stressful, and the course can be overwhelming according to research. Research also shares how MSW professionals have a high burnout and undergo stressful times.
11. In the time that you have been an MSW student, what would be the best way mindfulness meditation could be included into the curricula?
    a. 1st year orientation? Micro courses? Seminar courses?
12. Do you think it would over burden students?
    a. If yes, what are alternatives
    b. If no, how do you think mindfulness meditation might help the students and the professional?

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