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WHAT IS THE READINESS OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS TO WORK WITH AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS?

Ignacio Aguilar Pelaez

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TO WORK WITH AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS?

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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

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this research proposal is to assess the readiness of social work graduate students to work with Autistic individuals. The study was conducted in partnership with an undisclosed Southern California university. The study was conducted from a positivist perspective and used the social model of disability theory as a theoretical orientation. Researchers surveyed 64 MSW students utilizing a Qualtrics survey, specifically designed for this study. The results in this study indicate that most of the social work students who participated in this study possess a satisfactory understanding and knowledge of ASD. Although the results showed that over 75% of participants have not received any type of ASD training, most participants reported feeling moderately capable and moderately effective in working with ASD individuals. The results showed that regardless of exposure to ASD training, MSW students feel capable of using the skills learned in their MSW program to help and support ASD individuals. This study can provide insight to MSW students on their skills and capabilities to work with Autistic individuals. Additionally, researchers suggest implications in areas such as the social work field, research, policy, education, and workplace that can potentially benefit the professional development of graduate MSW students to be better equipped to work with ASD individuals and other minority groups facing systemic oppression.

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DEDICATION

I would like to take this moment to thank my beautiful and supportive family. First of all, the person who has always been by my side in my best and worst, my wife. You have been there every step of the way, especially in those moments when I felt like quitting. Your encouragement and motivation are key to helping me get where I am now. I can't express enough with words how much it means to me to have you in my life. I love you so much, my love.

I want to also thank my handsome son Gael and my beautiful daughter Mila. Although you are still little, you might not recognize the challenges and sacrifices that we have faced as a family. I hope I can be a positive role model for you that inspires you to accomplish your goals and dreams. I love you guys so much! I hope one day you can read this, so you know that I wake up every day intending to be the best father for you. I might mess up a few times but never doubt how much I love both of you my little ones.

I must make a special mention to my parents and my parents-in-law who have been immensely supportive. There have been times when I have had to sacrifice spending time with you because of school and work. Thank you for your understanding and for always supporting my aspirations. Every single one of you is an inspiration to become the best version of myself personally and professionally. I love you all!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE:

ASSESMENT

Introduction

Chapter one covers the assessment phase of this research project. In this

chapter, the focus of the study is presented along with the hypothesis. This

chapter covers the paradigm used to conduct this research and the reasoning as

to why this paradigm is ideal for the present study. Also, a literature review is

presented to demonstrate the relevance of this research in the social work

setting. Additionally, the theoretical orientation used to support this research will

also be discussed. Finally, this chapter concludes with an analysis of how this

research can be beneficial for social work students in the working field.

Research Question

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

(2020c) Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) also known as Autism, is a

neurodevelopmental disability that affects social, communicative, and behavioral

areas of an individual. Although ASD awareness has been more prominent in the

late years, there is still a considerable percentage of people and professionals

who lack the knowledge on how to approach and build relationships with people

with ASD. Malik-Soni et al. (2021) states that one of the barriers for ASD

individuals in the health care sector is doctors' lack of knowledge on ASD.

Medical students in the U.S. have reported not being properly trained to work

with ASD children, while in the UK students report having low confidence in providing care for ASD adults and children. People who have no knowledge of ASD oftentimes might miss or misperceive certain aspects of ASD, while people with training, knowledge, and/or interaction with ASD individuals can become more aware and sensitive to cues that people in general can mislabeled or misinterpret. An example of this is law enforcement officers attending to a call involving an ASD individual in which lack of training can cause that officers misinterpret "ASD specific behavior as noncompliant, threatening, disorderly or suspicious" (Gardner & Campbell, 2020, p. 4221). The ASD community is not exempt from experiencing situations like this in other settings. Therefore, the importance of professionals being prepared to work with ASD individuals is imperative to avoid a negative impact in the outcomes of ASD clients.

The objective of this research is to answer the following research question: What is the capability of social work students to work with ASD individuals? What is the role of ASD general knowledge and training on the capabilities of social work students when working with this population? The hypothesis developed based on the research questions is the following: Social work students with training in ASD are more prepared and capable to deal with ASD individuals and their families compared to social work students who do not have any type of ASD training.

Paradigm and Rationale for the Chosen Paradigm

The paradigm chosen to conduct this study is positivism. According to Morris (2014) In positivism the role of the researchers is limited to collect the data and analyze the results in an objective manner. The assumptions of positivism of reality asserts that reality can be observable and analyzed with logical reason in order to find relationships or interactions with human behavior. To find and reveal those relationships or interactions between certain elements the information is collected through the collection and analysis of quantitative data. This means that the nature of the data should be observable and measurable in the form of numbers to facilitate the measurement of variables. By analyzing the data researchers can draw conclusions and understand better the role of real events and how they affect human behavior. Therefore, positivism is the ideal paradigm for this research to understand what the relationship between ASD training and the readiness of social workers is to work with ASD individuals.

Literature Review

Introduction

ASD is characterized by a complexed symptomatology and for this reason, it must be diagnosed by a professional. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM, 5th ed.) (American Psychiatry Association, 2013) provides a specific set of symptoms that are based on deficits observed in communication and social interaction and restrictive behavioral repetitive patterns. ASD diagnosis falls into a severe to mild spectrum depending on the

symptoms presented. The more severe the symptoms are, the more dependent autistic individuals are on other people. Autistic individuals with mild symptoms can be independent with minimal assistance from families or others.

Prevalence and Difference in Social Groups

To fully understand the importance of ASD it is imperative to understand its prevalence in the population. ASD is a developmental neurobiological condition whose prevalence has been growing over time, not only in the United States but in the entire world (Senouci et. al, 2021). According to the CDC (2020-b), The Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network reported in 2016 that 1 of every 54 children between the ages of 8 and 11 was diagnosed with ASD. This report showed an increase when compared to the statistics of the same report in 2000 when the prevalence was 1 in every 150 children of the same age. In addition, when compared to the report from 2014, there was an increase of 9.3% over two years. Matson and Kozlowski (2011) argued that the increase of ASD is attributed to several reasons such as changes in diagnostic criteria, changes assessment tools, and inaccurate diagnosis among other factors. Matson and Kozlowski (2011) also argued that identifying every single factor contributing to the increment in ASD cases can be a difficult task and many factors are still not known.

Although the reason for the continuous increase in ASD might remain unknown, it is important to understand the role of ASD in social groups. According to the CDC (2020-a), ASD can occur to anyone regardless of racial,

ethnic, or socioeconomic status. However, differences by ethno-racial group do arise in diagnosis. Some studies find that Black and White children are equally likely to be diagnosed with ASD, but Hispanic children have a lower rate of diagnosis. Others find that Black children are also less likely to be diagnosed with ASD. Imm et al. (2019) showed the prevalence of an ASD diagnosis among White children to be 15.1 per 1000. On the other hand, Black and Hispanics showed a lower prevalence of 11.2 and 11.3 respectively. Imm et al. (2019) attributed the differences to the lack of resources and access to the healthcare system that Black and Hispanic populations face. Additionally, the CDC (2020a) showed a significant difference in the number of boys and girls diagnosed with ASD. Boys are more than four times more likely to be diagnosed with ASD when compared to girls.

Causes of Autism Spectrum Disorder

For a long time, there was a controversy that associated vaccines with causing ASD. This idea originated in 1998 when Andrew Wakefield and colleagues argued that the MMR (Measles, Mumps, and Rubella) vaccine caused Autism (Sathyanarayana Rao & Andrade, 2011). After a series of events, the *British Medical Journal* published articles with evidence that debunked Wakefield's theory (Sathyanarayana Rao & Andrade, 2011). Still, some people believe this idea despite research showing that there is no significant association between vaccines and ASD (Zerbo et al., 2018).

The single cause of ASD remains unknown but elements like genetic factors and environmental factors affect the brain's development (Hodges et al., 2020). Gandal et al. (2018) found 767 genes with genetic mutations that are associated with ASD. Park et al. (2016) argued that siblings who are born in a family who already has an ASD individual have a 50 percent predisposition to develop ASD. In Monozygotic twins the chances of developing ASD increase to 82% to 92% compared to dizygotic twins with a rate of 1% to 10%. It is evident that genetic factors play an important role in determining ASD, however environmental factors are also important to mention.

Hodges et al. (2020) identified several factors that can contribute to the development of ASD. The first factor is exposure during pregnancy to Thalidomide and Valproic acid. Exposure to these two acids has been linked to increasing the risk of newborns being born with ASD. Another factor is the age of parents. According to Hodges et al. (2020), the probability of a child being born with ASD is directly correlated with older parents. Another environmental factor can increase the risk of ASD in children born prematurely. Infants born prematurely are at risk of not only developing ASD but also other developmental conditions (Hodges et al., 2020). Hodges et al. (2020) affirm that several other factors that occur during different levels of prenatal development can contribute to ASD. However, several of those factors still need to be researched to determine if they have a big impact on the course of development. The data presented on genetic factors and environmental factors can explain why ASD

does not occur in a specific type of person and rather every single person can have an equal opportunity to be on the Autism spectrum.

Impacts on Development

According to the CDC (2021), ASD symptomatology might seem evident around age 3. However, in some children learning acquisition can start to slow down and, in some cases, the learning curve might completely stop by age two or later. Autism is a complex condition that can be presented in different ways and during different levels of development. For example, a child can have difficulties learning, communicating, connecting with parents, siblings, and peers, and can also present behavioral issues. During adolescence, Autistic adolescents might experience the challenges of unemployment or under-employment, lack the opportunity to pursue higher education beyond high school, and limited social interactions (CDC, 2022).

As adults, Autistic individuals might face difficulties in decision making, living independently, forming a family, and maintaining a job. Bal et al. (2018) argued that since ASD diagnosis is based on symptomatology, older adults might receive an inaccurate diagnosis. As established earlier symptoms change over time and older autistic individuals might not display the symptoms needed to receive an ASD diagnosis. Bal et al. (2018) encourage researchers to find ways to accurately identify symptoms or develop an alternative set of symptoms for teenagers and adults for them to receive the help they need.

<u>Intervention</u>

ASD is a lifelong developmental disability that can affect different areas of one's life (Senouci et al., 2021). Nevertheless, some treatments and interventions can help with the severity of the symptoms, especially for individuals who are diagnosed as low functioning of the spectrum of ASD. According to Neville et al. (2018), positive results in development have been associated with early intervention by targeting areas of social initiation, joint attention, shared affect, and functional and symbolic aspects of play. Addressing those areas of development has had a positive impact on communication-language, cognition, and adaptive behavior. Neville et al. (2018) argued that 25 hours of early intervention a week are optimal to obtain better outcomes; however, they express the importance of parents serving as mediators for early intervention. Neville et al. (2018) conducted research to evaluate a social-communication-based parent-mediated intervention to address developmental deficits of ASD. the results showed that parent intervention only has a small significant impact on the overall outcomes. These results were attributed to the differences in ASD training and method of intervention. This suggests that parents' intervention might be not enough to make a strong impact on autistic children; therefore, educators and people in the community need to do their part.

Morgan et al. (2018) evaluated the effectiveness of CSI (Classroom Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, and Transactional Support (SCERTS) Intervention). CSI is an intervention used by teachers to build individual goals for

each student to nurture social interactions and learning. The goal of CSI is to identify the individual needs of each ASD student and provide the support to acquire the skills needed for social communication and emotional regulation. The results of this study showed significant improvement in the areas of social interaction, social skills, executive functioning, and a decline in maladaptive behaviors. Morgan et al. (2018) argued that the sample used in this study was large enough to have strong external validity and duplicate it in other classrooms. Although the intervention mentioned above can have positive outcomes, several factors need to be taken into consideration. One of those factors is the severity of ASD. Stedman et al. (2018) argued that there is a lack of research focused on intervention specifically for autistic individuals displaying severe symptomatology.

Although early intervention and support during the earlier stages of development it is also imperative to look at the whole picture and provide support at different levels of development. For instance, the best form of intervention would be to have allistic providers and professionals learn more about Autism, how it manifests, and strategies on how better support Autistic clients. Bishop-Fitzpatrick et al. (2019), argued that social workers have had an important role in helping with social issues. An example of this is Title IV-E Child Welfare Training Program to train social workers to be more efficient in the practice of child welfare. However, ASD education and training is not one of the main components in several Master of Social Work (MSW) programs in the United States. Bishop-Fitzpatrick et al. (2019) presented a study that showed that only

18% of the content offered within the top 50 schools of social work is focused on developmental disabilities, and only 6% offered specialization on developmental disabilities. In another study also presented by Bishop-Fitzpatrick et al. (2019) showed that the disability-related content offered in the top 25 schools of social work accounted for only 6% of the entire MSW courses offered. Bishop-Fitzpatrick et al. (2019) argue that there is a need to increase the number of social workers trained to work with autistic people. In conclusion, there is limited research on the ability of social work students to work with ASD individuals. This situation creates uncertainty on whether providers are currently being effective at addressing the needs of ASD clients and how future providers are preparing to work with the ASD community.

<u>Summary</u>

The literature review of this study aims to provide a clearer understanding of ASD and its importance for social work students and society in general. The increasing rates of ASD diagnosis and the prevalence among various social groups indicate that ASD is a topic of importance to the public. Although there is not a specific factor that is attributed to the onset of ASD, it helps to understand that it impacts multiple life domains. Therefore, some Autistic people might need support from family, friends, and society to have a good quality of life. Improving the outcomes of Autistic individuals is a group effort from different members of society. As part of the community and as professionals, social work students need to prepare to be as capable as possible to work with different minorities

including Autistic people. Therefore, being knowledgeable of ASD and how it affects individuals in different areas is imperative to provide the resources and tools needed to avoid being alienated from society.

Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical orientation that guides this research is the social model of disability. The social model theory has been an ongoing theory constructed for the benefit of disabled people. A main component of the theory is the emphasis put to differentiate impairment and disability. "*Impairment* is the functional limitation within the individual caused by the physical, mental, or sensory impairment. *Disability* is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers" (Barnes, 1991, p.2). This theoretical framework states that social injustices and obstacles that individuals with disabilities experience are the result of society not providing the adequate resources for them to function in the mainstream society (Tregaskis, 2002).

Individuals with disabilities can also be considered an oppressed minority because many lack access to the resources available for them to improve their lives. Although the social model theory has been a precursor for the individuals with disabilities to obtain the tools necessary to function in society, it is still an ongoing issue that needs to be addressed. According to Bishop-Fitzpatrick et al. (2019), the social work profession has not taken a leadership role in addressing

the challenges of the Autistic community. Bishop-Fitzpatrick et al. (2019) also argue that social workers have the skills to research, advocate, and educate the workforce to create a more inclusive society for ASD individuals. Therefore, the rationale for using the social model of disability for this research is that social workers who are unprepared to work with Autistic individuals become a barrier that contributes to disability instead of serving as a support for ASD individuals to fully integrate into society.

Potential Contribution of Study to Micro and/or Macro Social Work Practice

This research can make a positive contribution to both micro and macro social work practice. At the micro-level, the results can provide insight to social work students on their capabilities to work with disabled individuals. If participants perceive themselves as lacking the skills required to work with a specific population, they might feel motivated to inform themselves about the topic and look for professional training on the matter.

From a macro level, a potential outcome can be the possibility of opening the doors for student leaders who identify with the issue and advocate for training to be part of the program, either as an elective or as a workshop. Similarly, if the results show that students are not being provided with the tools to address our target population, the board of directors can consider this study and find a way to address it for future generations of students. Finally, it might be possible that after reviewing the importance of this topic the school of social work takes initiative to raise awareness of the importance of ASD training and knowledge to

other departments at CSUSB. By spreading awareness to other departments

students can become future professionals who can be sensitive and capable of

providing adequate support and resources for our autistic community.

Chapter Summary

Chapter one introduced the research question for this study which seeks

to explore the readiness of social work students to work with Autistic individuals.

Since our research question tries to find the relationship between our two

variables, the paradigm that best suits our study is Positivism. The literature

presented in this section aims to provide important information on prevalence

and differences in social groups, causes of ASD, stage of development, and

treatment and prevention. The literature review demonstrates the need for

professionals to pay close attention to the increment of this issue and how

important it is to attune to the needs of this population. This chapter also provides

information on the Social Model of Disability as the theoretical orientation. The

Social Model of Disability can help explain how the lack of knowledge of ASD

causes Autistic individuals to not receive the needed tools and support to

function effectively in society. This study hopes to contribute to the social work

field to analyze how social work students are preparing to work with ASD

individuals. Ultimately, the goal is to create awareness and influence other

professionals to be conscious of the importance of supporting Autistic individuals

to succeed and thrive in their community.

CHAPTER TWO:

ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

Chapter two discusses the engagement stage of the present study. This chapter reviews the study site and the location where the research took place. In addition, it provides information about the plan of engagement with gatekeepers to request their permission and support to conduct the study. This chapter also discusses the researcher's self-preparation and how to address potential issues such as diversity issues, ethical issues, and political issues. Finally, this chapter also introduces what technology can be used to conduct this study.

Study Site

The study site for this research study is an undisclosed Southern California University, specifically the School of Social Work affiliated to this university. Based on the population needed for this study, students enrolled in a Master of Social Work program are ideal candidates to conduct this research. The population size of MSW students in the School of Social Work is approximately 175 students (School of Social Work main line, personal communication, December 1, 2022). These students are enrolled in the MSW program and its different modalities such as full-time, part-time, and the Pathway MSW program.

The school of Social Work that served as our study site offers the opportunity for students to obtain Master of Social Work (MSW) and Bachelor of Arts in Social Work (BASW) degrees. The School of Social Work also offers a variety of options for students based on their needs and wants of students. The opportunities offered by the School of Social Work include a Distance Education MSW program to support students who are unable to physically attend, a Title IV-E training program designed for students who are focused on public child welfare practice, and a concurrent MSW and Master of Public Administration to provide students the skills for advance administrative positions in social work services. According to the university's statistics, this campus serves about 83% of local students, which means it provides the opportunity for local students to pursue higher education.

Gatekeepers Engagement

The gatekeepers for this site are the director and the program chairs of the School of Social Work. This researcher made initial contact through a formal email to the director and program chairs introducing the research purpose and why the School of Social Work would be an optimal site to conduct this study. In this email, there was an invitation to a meeting. This meeting took place via video conference to discuss more in detail the research goals and how the School of Social Work might use the results as useful data for future modifications or additions to the program. The director of the program granted permission to

conduct this research. An email was sent to all MSW students requesting participation in the survey.

Self-Preparation

Since this research is using the positivist paradigm, the preparation of the material for research was completed before the research was conducted (Morris, 2014). As part of self-preparation, this researcher worked ahead of time by developing the research questions and goals of the study. Additionally, this researcher conducted a literature review to gain insight into the issue that is being addressed in this research. Another potential strategy for self-preparation was to rehearse the presentation that was presented to the gatekeepers. This researcher rehearsed in front of a small audience of colleagues and classmates who provided feedback and asked questions about the study. This strategy helped the researcher to become more confident and prepared to introduce the study to the gatekeepers. Finally, before the study was conducted, the researcher developed the survey and formulated the questions that provided as much information as possible about the readiness of social work students to work with autistic individuals.

Diversity Issues

According to the study site statistics from 2021, most of the student population has a Hispanic background (66%). This made it difficult to create an ethnically diverse sample that could strengthen external validity. The sampling

method of choice used was purposive sampling. This sampling process will attempt to provide an equal opportunity to participate for all MSW students in the school of social work. This was the method utilized to potentially help to reduce the diversity issue that might affect the research.

Ethical Issues

The fact that this study included human subjects made it susceptible to ethical issues that might arise during the research process, including a potential breach of confidentiality. The researcher provided an informed consent which stated that participation in this research was voluntary, and participants had the right to refuse participation or stop participating at any point if they felt uncomfortable. This researcher needed to clarify that there would be no retribution or consequences from the School of Social Work if participants decided not to participate in this study. Since this study could challenge some of the capabilities of students of social work, it was important to also express in the informed consent that confidentiality was extremely important, and their responses will not be associated with their identity. All data gathered remained confidential, by using code numbers instead of names, and were utilized only for research purposes.

Political Issues

There is a potential political issue that might arise if the results of the study show that the students are not prepared to work with Autistic people. If the

results show that students lack the skills or capacity to work with the ASD community, this might negatively affect the reputation of the School of Social Work. However, if this is the case, it is a great opportunity for the School of Social Work to look more closely at this issue and be proactive about it. The researcher discussed this matter with the director during the initial presentation of the study. The researcher presented this issue as an opportunity to review what the school of social work is doing well and what is something that needs to improve. Ultimately, the main goal is to be able to serve the ASD community more effectively and knowing what is done wrong is an important piece of information to find a solution for this social issue.

Role of Technology

Technology played an important part in the research process and engagement. Communication with gatekeepers was primarily through email and the survey was distributed to participants online. The use of video conference calls was also an important tool to meet with gatekeepers and program director to discuss the research and its outcomes. Zoom was the method of choice due to its reliability and flexibility to meet face to face in a video conference format. The flexibility of meeting anywhere at any time makes this tool a powerful way to communicate, especially with every person having a different schedule. Finally, technology also played an important role in the interpretation of the results. Once data was collected, the use of statistical software was required to better interpret

the results and provided a more comprehensive explanation of what those results meant.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed important elements that needed to be considered for the engagement stage of the research process. The study site was an optimal place for this study because of the accessibility to social work students. In addition, the steps to initiate engagement and follow up with gatekeepers on site study were also reviewed. It is important to note that the researcher responsible for conducting the research, but the support of program director was vital in encouraging more students to participate in the study. Furthermore, this chapter reviewed the researcher's self-preparation and the steps that were required to successfully conduct this research. The chapter explored specific strategies on how to address diversity, ethical and political issues that might be faced during the research process. Finally, the researcher analyzed the role of technology and what tools can be helpful to conduct research more effectively.

CHAPTER THREE:

IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

Chapter three provides an overview of the implementation phase of this study. First, this section reviews the characteristics of the participants and how they were selected to be part of the research. Additionally, this chapter informs the readers on how the data was collected and what data collection tool was utilized to conduct the research. Also, information is provided regarding the phases of data collection, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, this chapter reviews the process of termination for participants and how the findings of the study will be disseminated.

Study Participants

The participants for this study were graduate students enrolled in a Master of Social Work program at an undisclosed Southern California university. Participants were from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds due to the student population and geographical area that the university serves. The gender of participants can also vary and is not specific.

Selection of Participants

For this study, the participants were selected using purposive sampling. The researchers attempted to sample all students enrolled in an MSW program

at a School of Social Work affiliated to an undisclosed Southern California university. This sampling method allowed researchers to recruit as many participants as possible due to the small sample size available. As a gatekeeper for the university, the research supervisor facilitated the distribution of the recruitment flyer via school email to all students enrolled in an MSW program.

Data Gathering

The tool utilized for data collection was an online survey designed to explore the association between social work students and their ability to work with autistic individuals. The method of administration was a self-administered strategy to allow participants to complete the online survey on their own time and at their convenience. The survey was divided into three sections. The first section included demographics and a series of questions aiming to assess the familiarity of students with ASD. The second section of the survey included a series of "true" and "false" statements assessing the general knowledge of students with ASD. Questions or statements such as "Autism is a psychological condition that affects children", "Most children can outgrow Autism if early intervention is provided", and "Individuals with ASD are not capable of developing social relationships with others". The third section included a series of scenarios in which participants rated themselves using a Likert scale to express whether they agree or disagree with the statements. The researcher formulated the survey specifically designed for this study. Since this was the first time the survey was

administered, its psychometric properties had not been assessed prior to this research.

Phases of Data Collection

The data collection process was designed to take place without the presence of the researcher. The researcher emailed program director with a direct link to the survey. Program director was requested to forward the email recruitment flyer to all MSW students with invitation to participate in the survey. Participants were given 15 days to complete a survey to allow enough time for students who have a busy schedule. The direct link provided opened a window in which students were able to read the informed consent for the research and were provided with an option to continue with survey or to decline participation.

Data Recording

Once participants completed the survey, which was self-administered through Qualtrics, a popular web-based software used to create surveys and other types of reports for research purposes. Qualtrics possesses a high-end firewall security system that reassured participants that their responses will not be associated with participants' names in any shape or form. This study is anonymous, the survey did not collect personal identifiable information about participants. Once the survey was submitted, the responses were stored in a Qualtrics database. This database could only be accessed by the researchers of this study. To access the Qualtrics database, researchers had to use a 2-step

verification security measure which provided extra security for participants' responses. Finally, participants' responses will be kept for 3 years and deleted along with the database after that period.

Data Analysis

For this study, a frequency analysis of the variables was conducted to analyze the data collected. Additionally, we scored the knowledge questions and assign a composite score for each participant. Finally, we tested to see if previous experience or training in ASD leads to a different mean knowledge score. This test will confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis that social work students with ASD training are more proficient in working with ASD individuals. To carry out this test the researchers used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to determine the association between the two variables

Termination and Follow Up

Upon completion of the survey, the participants were redirected to another window. In this window, the researcher included a short message of gratitude for participating in the study. For this research study, there is not any follow-up needed with participants since the positivist paradigm does not require follow-up. At this point, participants were dismissed from the study and their participation was complete.

Communication of Findings and Dissemination Plan

The results of the study were designed to be digitally shared for easy access for those who desire to see the findings. This research study will be available at CSUSB Scholar Works website at http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu and at the School of Social Work Symposium. The researchers will share study research upon completion director of study site to publish it in their school records to allow participants to have free access to study.

Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter described the characteristics of the participants and how they were selected for this study. The chosen participants are part of a Master of Social Work program at an undisclosed Southern California university. Participants will be selected using purposive sampling to have all MSW students participate in this study and obtain a large enough sample that is representative of the entire population. The data collection tool assigned for this study was a survey due to its reliability and validity. Additionally, the researcher also explained the process of data collection, data recording, and data analysis. Finally, this chapter informed the way the researcher will provide access to the findings to the board of directors of the School of Social Work, professors, and students,

CHAPTER FOUR:

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter will focus on describing and analyzing the findings of this study. This includes participants' demographic information that participated in study. Additionally, this section provides a thorough overview of the key variables. Also, this chapter includes a data analysis and discussion of the findings. Finally, the chapter explores the implications of this study in different settings in the field of social work as well as the strengths and limitations of the research study.

Demographics

In this study, the participants were 64 students from the School of Social Work at an undisclosed Southern California university. Table 1 shows the gender of the participants in the study. The participants included 55 females (85.9%), 7 males (10.9%), 1 participant identified as Nonbinary/Third gender (1.6%), and 1 participant selected the "prefer not to say option" (1.6%). Table 2 shows the participants' age group and the number of students for each age group. The table shows 23 participants (35.9%) ages 21 to 29, 26 participants (40.6%) for ages 30 to 39, 8 participants (12.5%) for ages 40 to 49, 6 participants (9.4%) for ages 50 to 59, and 1 participant (1.6%) for the ages of 60 and older. Table 3 shows the ethnicity of the participants. 28 participants (43.8%) identified as white, 3

participants (4.7%) identified as Black or African American, 1 participant (1.6%) identified as Asian, 1 participant (1.6%) identified as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 21 participants (32.8%) identified as Hispanic or Latinx, 8 participants (12.5%) identified as multiracial, 2 participants (3.1%) chose to not specify their ethnicity, and there were no participants who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native. Table 4 shows the enrollment year that participants are currently in their MSW program. 26 participants (40.6%) are in their first year of the MSW program, 24 participants (37.5%) are in their second year of the MSW program, and 14 participants (21.9%) are in their third year of the MSW program. Finally, Table 5 shows the type of program that students are currently enrolled in. 38 participants (59.4%) reported to be enrolled in the in-person MSW program and 26 (40.6%) participants reported to be enrolled in the Pathways online MSW program.

Table 1. Demographics Characteristics of Participants: Gender

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender (n=64)		
Female	55	85.9%
Male	7	10.9%
Non-binary/Third gender	1	1.6%

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Participants: Age

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age (n=64)		
21-29	23	35.9%
30-39	26	40.6%
40-49	8	12.5%
50-59	6	9.4%
60 or older	1	1.6%

Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of Participants: Ethnicity

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Ethnicity (n=64)		
White	28	43.8%
Black or African American	3	4.7%
Asian	1	1.6%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	1	1.6%
Hispanic or Latinx	21	32.8%
Multiple races	8	12.5%
Not specified	2	3.1%

Table 4. Demographic Characteristics of Participants: Enrollment Year

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Enrollment Year (n= 64)		
1st year	26	40.6%
2nd year	24	37.6%
3rd year (Pathway students)	14	21.9%

Table 5. Demographic Characteristics of Participants: MSW Program

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
MSW Program (n= 64)		
In person	38	59.4%
Pathways (online)	26	40.6%

Key Variables

The research tool used for this research study was a survey, which was divided into three sections. Section I included questions about participants' familiarity with ASD. Section II included questions that measured the general knowledge of participants about ASD. Section III included questions that measured participant's perception of capabilities to work with ASD clients.

Section I consisted of 7 questions about the participants' familiarity with ASD. Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics of participants' responses to each question. When asked what ASD stands for, 52 participants (81.3%) selected the correct response. When asked about how familiar participants were with ASD, 5 participants (7.8%) reported being not familiar at all, 5 participants (7.8%) reported being not familiar, 34 participants (53.1%) reported being somewhat familiar, 14 participants (21.9%) reported being familiar, and 6 participants (9.4%) stated being very familiar. When participants were asked if they knew someone diagnosed with ASD, in the process of being diagnosed with ASD, or self-

diagnosed with ASD, 49 participants (76.6%) reported knowing someone and 15

participants (23.4%) reported not knowing anyone. Participants who reported

knowing someone with ASD were asked to specify their relationship with the

person they knew and were allowed to mark more than one option. Family

member was the highest reported option (35.2%), followed by client (33.3%),

friend (29.4%), coworker (1.9%), and none of the participants self-reported being

diagnosed with ASD. When participants were asked about their professional

experience working with ASD individuals, 26 participants (40.6%) reported never

worked with ASD individuals, 24 participants (37.5%) reported working with ASD

individuals on a few occasions, 13 participants (20.3%) reported working with

ASD individuals on several occasions, and 1 participant (1.6%) reported working

with ASD individuals in a regular basis. Finally, participants were asked if they

had ever received training in ASD, 15 participants (23.4%) reported having some

type of training, and 49 participants (76.6%) reported not having any type of

training.

Table 6. Section I – Autistic Spectrum Disorder Familiarity

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
What does ASD stand for?		
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	10	15.6%
Autistic Spectrum Disability	1	1.6%
Autism Spectrum Disorder	52	81.3%
Autistic Spectrum Disability	1	1.6%
How familiar are you with ASD?		
Not familiar at all	5	7.8%
Not familiar	5	7.8%
Somewhat familiar	34	53.1%
Familiar	14	21.9%
Very Familiar	6	9.4%

Do you know someone who has been diagnosed with ASD, is in the process of being diagnosed with ASD, or is self-diagnosed as ASD?		
Yes	49	76.6%
No	15	23.4%
If yes. What is your relationship with this person(s)? Check all that apply		
Self	0	0%
Family member	18	35.2%
Friend	15	29.4%
Client	17	33.3%
Coworker	1	1.9%
Have you worked with someone with ASD as a client?		
I have never worked with ASD clients before	26	40.6%
I have worked with ASD clients on a few occasions (less than 25% of professional experience)	24	37.5%
I have worked with ASD clients on several occasions (25%to 75@ of your professional experience)	13	20.3%
I have worked with ASD clients on regular basis (75% to 100% of your professional experience)	1	1.6%
Have you received training to prepare you to work with ASD individuals?		
Yes	15	23.4%
No	49	76.6%
If yes. How much training have you received?	1	1.6%
10 hours	1	1.6%
12 hours	1	1.6%
20 hours	2	3.1%
40 hours	1	1.6%
1 week	1	1.6%
2 weeks	2	3.1%
2 months	1	1.6%
3 months	2	3.1%
2 years	2	3.1%
ABA therapy	1	1.6%
MSW program		

The data shows that about 70 to 80 percent of participants are familiar with ASD to a certain degree. About 23.4% of participants have come across with someone with ASD. Finally, the results also showed that over 76.6% of participants have not received any training in ASD.

Section II involved 7 questions about general knowledge of ASD. These questions were analyzed as a group and scored 1 point per correct response. Table 7 provides the descriptive statistics for the number of correct answers to general knowledge of ASD questions. A total of 5 (7.8%) participants received a score of 4 which was the lowest score of correct responses. A total of 6 (9.4%) participants were given a score of 5 correct responses. A total of 23 (35.9%) participants received a score of 6 correct responses. Finally, a total of 30 (46.9%) participants received the highest score of 7 correct responses.

Table 7. Section II – Scores of Correct Answers of General Knowledge of Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Score	Frequency	Percentage
4	5	7.8%
5	6	9.4%
6	23	35.9%
7	30	46.9%

The results show that 46.9% of participants got all knowledge questions correct and 35.9% of participants missed only one question. Therefore, about 82.8% of participants have a significant understanding and knowledge of basic information about ASD.

Section III involved a series of questions in which participants were asked to rate their capabilities in each scenario. Table 8 presents the descriptive statistics of participant's responses to each question. When asked how capable participants were of building a relationship with someone with ASD, 3 (4.7%) participants rated themselves as not capable, 7 (10.9%) participants rated themselves slightly capable, 21 (32%) participants rated themselves moderately capable, 23 (35.9%) participants rated themselves very capable, and 10 (15.6%) participants rated themselves extremely capable. When asked how capable participants felt working with ASD individuals, 6 (9.4%) participants rated themselves as not capable at all, 14 (21.9%) participants rated themselves slightly capable, 21 (32.8%) participants rated themselves moderately capable, 15 (23.4%) participants rated themselves very capable, and 8 (12.5%) participants rated themselves extremely capable. When asked how effective participants were at making accommodations to support ASD individuals, 8 (12.5%) participants rated themselves as not effective at all, 14 (21.5%) participants rated themselves as slightly effective, 21 (32.8%) participants rated themselves moderately effective, 11 (17.2%) participants rated themselves very effective, and 10 (15.6%) participants rated themselves extremely effective.

When asked how prepared participants felt to conduct a crisis intervention with

an ASD individual, 23 (35.9%) participants rated themselves as not prepared at

all, 17 (26.6%) participants rated themselves as slightly prepared, 17 (26.6%)

participants rated themselves moderately prepared, 5 (7.8%) participants rated

themselves very prepared, and 2 (3.1%) participants rated themselves very

prepared. When asked how likely participants were to work with ASD individuals

in the future, 5 (7.8%) participants rated themselves as extremely unlikely, 8

(12.5%) participants rated themselves as somewhat likely, 12 (18.8%)

participants rated themselves neither likely nor unlikely, 26 (40.6%) of

participants rated themselves somewhat likely, and 13 (20.3%) of participants

rated themselves extremely likely. Finally, when participants were asked how

important is to receive specialized training to support ASD individuals for social

work students, 1 (1.6%) participant considered it is not important at all, 4 (6.3%)

participants considered it is slightly important, 12 (18.8%) participants considered

it is moderately important, 18 (28.8%) participants considered it is very important,

and 29 (45.3%) participants considered it is extremely important.

Table 8. Section III – Autistic Spectrum Disorder Statements

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
How capable do you feel you are to build a relationship with someone with ASD		
Not capable	3	4.7%
Slightly capable	7	10.9%
Moderately capable	21	32.8%
Very capable	23	35.9%
Extremely capable	10	15.6%

How capable do you feel you are to work with ASD individuals?		
Not capable at all	6	9.4%
Slightly capable	14	21.9%
Moderately capable	21	32.8%
Very capable	15	23.4%
Extremely capable	8	12.5%
How effective do you feel you are at making accommodations to support ASD individuals?		
Not effective at all	8	12.5%
Slightly effective	14	21.5%
Moderately effective	21	32.8%
Very effective	11	17.2%
Extremely effective	10	15.6%
How prepare do you feel you are to have a crisis intervention with an ASD individual?		
Not prepared at all	23	35.9%
Slightly prepared	17	26.6%
Moderately prepared	17	26.6%
Very prepared	5	7.8%
Extremely prepared	2	3.1%
How likely is that you will work with ASD individuals in the future?		
Extremely unlikely	5	7.8%
Somewhat unlikely	8	12.5%
Neither likely nor unlikely	12	18.8%
Somewhat likely	26	40.6%
Extremely likely	13	20.3%
How important is it for you, as a social work student, to receive specialized training to support individuals with ASD?		
Not important at all	1	1.6%
Slightly important	4	6.3%
Moderately important	12	18.8%
Very important	18	28.8%
Extremely important	29	45.3%

The results showed that 82.8% of participants feel they are at least moderately capable of building a relationship with an ASD individual. 68.7% of participants feel at least moderately capable of working with ASD individuals.

65.6% of participants perceived themselves as effective at making accommodations for ASD individuals. 37.5 % feel prepared to conduct a crisis intervention with an ASD individual. 60.9 of participants reported that it is likely for them to work with ASD individuals in the future. 92.9% of participants feel that it is important to receive specialized ASD training.

Data Analysis

For this study, we conducted a frequency analysis of the variables. Researchers scored the knowledge questions and assigned a composite score for each participant. Finally, researchers tested to see if previous experience or training in ASD led to a different mean knowledge score using bivariate correlation analysis. We also tested for participants' perceived readiness or capabilities to work with ASD individuals led to a different mean knowledge score using bivariate correlation analysis. The results showed that none of these tests were significant.

Discussion

Social workers are expected to work, advocate, and support a wide variety of populations and minorities who face social injustice. ASD individuals are a minority group that faces social and economic disparities such as social isolation, treatments geared at "curing" ASD, poverty, and racial and socioeconomic disparities (Bishop-Fitzpatrick et al., 2019). ASD is a developmental neurobiological condition that has increased over the years in the United States

(Senouci et. al, 2021), and regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (CDC, 2020-a) anyone can be diagnosed with ASD. Therefore, the growth of instances of ASD constitutes the need for social work students to become aware and capable of identifying and addressing the barriers and obstacles that ASD individuals encounter in modern society.

This study focuses on the readiness of social work students to work with ASD individuals. There is a lack of literature research on this specific subject, hence the researchers of this study believe that the results can provide more insight into students' perceptions of their capabilities working with this specific group. Although ASD and developmental disabilities coursework is limited in the social work curriculum (Bishop-Fitzpatrick et al., 2019), the results in this study indicate that most of the social work students who participated in this study possess a satisfactory understanding and knowledge of ASD. Most participants reported feeling moderately capable and moderately effective in working with ASD individuals. It is worth mentioning that over 75% of participants have not received any type of ASD training before. This shows that regardless of exposure to ASD training, MSW students feel capable of using the skills learned in their MSW program to help and support ASD individuals. Although only about 60% of MSW students are likely to work with ASD individuals in the future, 92.9% of participants understand the importance of receiving specialized training to become more efficient at working with ASD individuals. This study shows that regardless of exposure to ASD training, MSW students have a positive

perception of their readiness to work with ASD individuals. Further research

needs to be conducted to identify alternative tools to assess more efficiently the

readiness and efficacy of MSW students working with the ASD population.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Social Work

Social workers have the valuable labor of addressing social injustice and

systemic oppression affecting minority groups. This study provides insight into

the potential challenges that MSW students might encounter upon graduation.

Working with minority groups can be challenging for a variety of reasons. MSW

students must explore and discuss the unexpected challenges of entering the

social work field with professors, classmates, colleagues, and mentors. MSW

graduate students might need additional training and capacitation to work

efficiently with their target population. When working with people diagnosed with

ASD, social workers who perceive themselves as unprepared to work with this

population should seek additional training to expand their scope of practice and

be a more qualified holistic professional.

Research

As the number of people diagnosed with ASD increases, it is imperative to

acknowledge the challenges that ASD individuals face in society. There is a need

for the social work field to conduct research aiming to find systemic interventions

that can be applicable to address such barriers and challenges. Finding effective

models and interventions to support ASD individuals that allow them to integrate

37

into society more efficiently and smoothly is a critical step that needs to be reflected on. The field of social work is set apart from other helping professions by the importance of advocating and empowering individuals who cannot do it for themselves. Therefore, advocating and supporting research that provides findings with knowledge, applications, interventions, and models on how to support this specific group is imperative in the social work field.

Policy

At a macro level, this study provides insight into the importance of addressing issues that affect ASD individuals in different settings in society. ASD individuals are protected and supported by the Americans with Disabilities Act to provide equal opportunity to individuals with a disability. Social workers must ensure that policies under this law are followed to protect and support ASD individuals. Social workers can contribute to this cause by reviewing, modifying, or creating new policies in their local agencies. Besides supporting ASD clients, this practice could also allow better opportunities for ASD individuals interested in entering the social work field as practitioners. Finally, social workers can also make an impact on policy at a micro level. Many people lack the knowledge of what they are entitled to under certain policies. Social workers can offer education to clients and their families on old and new policies that benefit ASD individuals. This practice can empower clients to be informed and updated on the resources and benefits that they are entitled to in their community.

Education

      This research can have potential implications in the education setting. First of all, the results showed that regardless of students not having specific ASD training, most students possess skills that make them feel capable of working with ASD individuals. However, there is always room for improvement, and the inclusion of academic activities or workshops that promote the importance of ASD could be an important step to take. Schools of Social Work can partner up with agencies that provide education and training for MSW students to become more sensitive to the needs and challenges of ASD individuals. Additionally, the Schools of Social Work could also assess the possibility of including internship sites that can potentially give exposure to those students who are interested in working with the ASD population. This alternative can open the doors to upcoming generations of MSW students to be more involved and inclined in addressing social issues for individuals with disabilities including ASD individuals.

Workplace

      This study can also provide insight into the importance of ongoing education and capacitation that social workers need in their professional practice. This highlights the duty of agencies to ensure the constant capacitation of social workers to be adequately informed and educated on how to efficiently work with the populations that they serve. This ongoing capacitation can include frequent workshops, training, and presentations from other professionals on research and practices that can support their target population. This helps the agency to have

prepared professionals who can ensure the reputation of the agency stays afloat, better services being delivered, contributing to the social work cause of addressing social injustice and systematic oppression.

<div align="center">Strengths and Limitations</div>

Strengths

This study was successfully conducted thanks to the collaboration of the School of Social Work at an undisclosed Southern California university. Partnering with this site allowed researchers to access and recruit current MSW students. Additionally, the sample size of participants is favorable to help researchers get an idea of where MSW students at this university stand regarding their readiness to work with ASD individuals. Lastly, this study can "plant the seed" for students to self-analyze and gain insight into strengths and limitations to promote self and professional growth as they enter their professional careers in the field of social work.

Limitations

As with any research study, there is always room for improvement, and it is important to identify the limitations of this study. One of the limitations of this study was the fact that participants belong to different levels of the MSW program. There exists a difference between the experience and capabilities between advanced-level students and foundation-level MSW students. Therefore, there is the possibility of variability in responses due to advanced-level students having more academic and field experience compared to the

foundation-level students who have just started the program. Another limitation

was the nature of the knowledge questions. The knowledge questions employed

in the survey might have been too basic for participants leading to results that

prevented researchers from performing a deeper and richer analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE:

TERMINATION AND FOLLOW UP

Introduction

This chapter is focused on outlining the termination and follow-up process. First, the researchers will describe the termination process of the study. Additionally, researchers will discuss the method of communication of findings. Finally, researchers will overview the dissemination plan for this research study.

Termination of Study

Due to the nature of this research, participants' active participation will end once participants completed and submitted survey responses. At the end of the survey, there is a message that thanks participants for their participation in the study and information on how to access findings.

Communication of Findings and Dissemination Plan

This study will be published and digitally available at California State University San Bernardino's Pfau library under ScholarWorks. The researchers will inform the director of the study site about the completion of this research study and will be provided with a digital copy of the study. The director will include the study in the school records, which will allow participants to have free access to the study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the termination process of this research study. Participants ended their participation once they completed the survey. Researchers provided information at the end of the survey on how participants can access the results of this study. Once the study is published, it will be available at CSUSB Scholar Works website and at the School of Social Work Symposium.

APPENDIX A:

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Administrative/Exempt Review Determination
Status: Determined Exempt
IRB-FY2023-190

Carolyn McAllister Ignacio Aguilar Pelaez
CSBS - Social Work, Users loaded with unmatched Organization affiliation.
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Carolyn McAllister Ignacio Aguilar Pelaez:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "What is The Readiness of Social Work Students to Work with Autistic Individuals?" has been reviewed and determined exempt by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino. An exempt determination means your study had met the federal requirements for exempt status under 45 CFR 46.104. The CSUSB IRB has weighed the risks and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants.

This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses. Investigators should consider the changing COVID-19 circumstances based on current CDC, California Department of Public Health, and campus guidance and submit appropriate protocol modifications to the IRB as needed. CSUSB campus and affiliate health screenings should be completed for all campus human research related activities. Human research activities conducted at off-campus sites should follow CDC, California Department of Public Health, and local guidance. See CSUSB's COVID-19 Prevention Plan for more information regarding campus requirements.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. The forms (modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, study closure) are located in the Cayuse IRB System with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action. The Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is due for renewal. Ensure you file your protocol renewal and continuing review form through the Cayuse IRB system to keep your protocol current and active unless you have completed your study.

- **Ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study.**
- **Submit a protocol modification (change) if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before being implemented in your study.**
- **Notify the IRB within 5 days of any unanticipated or adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research.**
- **Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system once your study has ended.**

APPENDIX B:

SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS' READINESS TO WORK WITH AUTISTIC

INDIVIDUALS SURVEY

**Social Work Students' Readiness to Work with ASD Individuals
Survey**

Demographics
What is your age?
a)18-20
b)21-29
c)30-39
d)40-49
e)50-59
f)60 or older

What is your Ethnicity (select all that apply)?
a)White
b)Black or African American
c)American Indian or Alaskan Native
d)Asian
e)Native Hawaiian or other pacific islander
f)Multiple races
g)Other: (please specify)

What is your Gender:
a)Female
b)Male
c)Non-binary / third gender
d)Other (please specify)_____
e)Prefer not to say

What is your current enrollment in the MSW Program?
a)1st year
b)2nd Year
c)3rd Year

**"This study has been approved by the California State University, San Bernardino
Institutional Review Board"**

Are you an in person student or a pathways student?
a) In person student
b) Pathways student

Part I. ASD familiarity
This section includes multiple-choice questions. Pick the option that best describes your situation.

What does ASD stand for?
A.   **Autistic Spectrum Disorder**
B.   **Autism Spectrum Disability**
C.   **Autism Spectrum Disorder**
D.   **Autistic Spectrum Disability**

How familiar are you with ASD?
A.   **Not Familiar at all**
B.   **Not familiar**
C.   **Somewhat familiar**
D.   **Familiar**
E.   **Very familiar**

Do you know someone who has been diagnosed with ASD, is in the process of being diagnosed with ASD, or is self-diagnosed as ASD? **YES   NO**
If yes. What is your relationship with this person(s)? check all that apply
A.   **Self**
B.   **Family member**
C.   **Friend**
D.   **Client**
E.   **Coworker**

Have you worked with someone with ASD as a client? Select the statements that best describe your situation.
A.   **I have never worked with ASD clients before**
B.   **I have worked with ASD clients in a few occasions** (less than 25% of your professional experience)
C.   **I have worked with ASD clients in several occasions** (25% to 75% of your professional experience)
D.   **I have worked with ASD clients on a regular basis.** (75% to 100% of your professional experience)

 Have you received training to prepare you to work with ASD individuals?
                              Yes   **No**
If yes, how much training have you received? _____

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48

Part II. General ASD knowledge
This section includes True or False statements. Pick the option that best describes your situation.
 "Autism is a psychological condition"
> **True**   **False**

 "Most children can outgrow Autism"
> **True**   **False**

"Autistic individuals can't build social relationships with others"
> **True**   **False**

"Autism is caused by vaccines"
> **True**   **False**

"Girls are more likely to be diagnosed with Autism than boys"
> **True**   **False**

"An individual with Autism can be independent"
> **True**   **False**

Part III. ASD statements
This section includes questions in which you will have to use a Likert Scale to label your response. Use the scale below as a reference.

How capable do you feel you are to build a relationship with someone with ASD?
1= Not capable at all
2= Slightly capable
3= Moderately capable
4= Very capable
5= Extremely capable

How capable do you feel you are to work with ASD individuals?
1= Not capable at all
2= Slightly capable
3= Moderately capable
4= Very capable
5= Extremely capable

How effective do you feel you are at making accommodations to support ASD individuals?
1= Not effective at all
2= Slightly effective
3= Moderately effective
4= Very effective
5= Extremely effective

How prepared do you feel you are to have a crisis intervention with an ASD individual?
1= Not prepared at all
2= Slightly prepared
3= Moderately prepared
4= Very Prepared
5= Extremely prepared

How likely is that you will work with ASD individuals in the future?
1= Extremely unlikely
2= Somewhat unlikely
3= Neither likely nor unlikely
4= Somewhat likely
5= Extremely likely

How important is it for you, as a social work student, to receive specialized training to support individuals with ASD?
1= Not important at all
2= Slightly important
3= Moderately important
4= Very important
5= Extremely important

This survey was created by Ignacio Aguilar Pelaez.

APPENDIX C:

INFORM CONSENT

California State University San Bernardino

School of Social Work

Social Work Students' Readiness to Work with ASD Individuals

Informed Consent

Survey Purpose

In coordination with the School of Social Work, we are conducting a study to assess the readiness of social work students to work with Autistic individuals. The ability to work with diverse populations is essential for promoting the principles outlined in the NASW code of ethics. However, research concerning student readiness to work with Autistic individuals is scarce. This study seeks to address this gap.

Participants' Qualifications

1. Being 18 years or older
2. Being enrolled in an MSW program at CSUSB

Participation information

Participation in this study is completely **voluntary**. You are encouraged to complete the entire survey for the sake of the research. However, if you feel uncomfortable with a question you might skip it and continue to the next question. You are also entitled to withdraw your participation from the survey at any point in time.

Benefits of Participation in the Survey

There are no monetary or other financial or tangible benefits for participating in this study. However, this study can provide insight into your level of readiness to work with Autistic individuals. Moreover, the big picture is to learn more about our weaknesses and strengths that can help us grow as professionals in the field of social work.

Survey Time Information

As we are aware of everyone's busy schedules with school, work, and personal life we have designed this survey to last approximately 5-10 minutes of your time.

Limits of Confidentiality

We value your participation in this study and the confidentiality of your responses. For this research, your responses will be completely confidential. Once you have completed the survey, your responses will be sent to a database in which you will be assigned a random number that will not be associated with your name or any other identifiable information. Additionally, the database will be encrypted with a password to only allow the researchers to access participants' responses.

"This study has been approved by the California State University, San Bernardino Institutional Review Board"

Participation Risks

There are no physical, emotional, or psychological risks associated with participation in this survey.

Survey Structure and Instructions

The survey consists of three parts. Part number one includes questions about your familiarity with Autism. Part number two consists of general knowledge questions about Autism. Finally, the last section will include questions in which you will be asked to rank on a Likert scale your responses. We ask participants to be as honest and objective as possible when answering each question of the survey. The main purpose is to obtain the most accurate data possible for this research. So please be honest with yourself and answer the questions to the best of your abilities.

If you have any questions in regard to your role as a participant in this study please feel free to contact us at 004525845@coyote.csusb.edu.

Do you willingly accept to participate in this survey?   YES   NO

APPENDIX D:

E-MAIL RECRUITMENT

Social Work Students' Readiness to Work with ASD Individuals
E-MAIL RECRUITMENT

Dear fellow Social Work students,

My name is Ignacio Aguilar Pelaez. I am currently a Master of Social Work Pathway graduate student. In coordination with the School of Social Work, I am conducting quantitative research on the readiness of social work students to work with Autistic individuals. The data collected from this research can be beneficial to students and the School of Social Work by helping identify potential barriers to working with our autistic population. This research study has been approved by the CSUSB Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Carolyn McAllister.

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. The study consists of a survey of 17 questions and should take 5-10 minutes. We understand how valuable your time is and we thank you for taking the time to support our research. Your time and effort are greatly appreciated.

If you have questions about the survey or the study, you can reach us at Cmcallis@csusb.edu.

To access the survey, please click on the link below
LINK: https://csusb.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bKrBFxkCXUtvr0O

"This study has been approved by the California State University, San Bernardino Institutional Review Board"

55

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