Reinvesting in the Social Work Profession

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive and exploratory research study was conducted by the Iowa Chapter of National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in order to understand what issues relating to Social Work Reinvestment are currently facing Iowa social workers and need to be addressed. A total of 374 self-identified Iowa social workers completed the 13-item survey. The results revealed that Increasing Compensation, Expanding Opportunities and Mechanisms (like Loan Forgiveness Programs), and establishing Title Protection were the three most important issues for Iowa social workers, according to the workforce itself. This study is the foundation for future research to be done on the Social Work Reinvestment Initiative (SWRI). It provides a starting point for the NASW, Iowa Chapter’s SWRI Committee with plan of action for the future.
Social workers are essential in the distributing of services for individuals and families in need. However, several challenges face the profession, like the high cost of education and low salaries of workers. These challenges result in less workers entering and staying in the field and fewer opportunities for social workers to receive further education and training.

The Iowa Chapter of National Association of Social Workers (NASW) believes in advocating for Social Work Reinvestment Initiative (SWRI), a policy that “affirms the use of public resources to support the recruitment and retention of a professionally educated, highly skilled, diverse, and well paid workforce” (NASW, 2009).

**RESEARCH PROBLEM AND QUESTIONS**

NASW, the national chapter, announced the SWRI in early August 2006 during their Annual Leadership Meeting. The plan addresses four key goals identified by the Social Work Congress in 2005: recruit new social workers; retain current social workers; retrain experienced social workers; and reactivate community investment in social work (Stoesen, 2006).

The initiative was built upon work done by the National Social Work Public Education Campaign and the study of licensed social work labor force done by the NASW Workforce Center. The goals are to be achieved by legislative and political advocacy; public education, workforce development, and stakeholder engagement (Stoesen, 2006).

In February 2008, just a few years after the initiative was announced, the Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act was introduced by Congressman Edolphus Towns and Congressman Christopher Shays. Named after two pioneers of social justice, the Act addresses challenges the profession is facing in order “to ensure that millions of individuals and families throughout the nation can continue to receive competent
care” (Social Work Reinvestment Act, 2009). The Act included several different grants, including research and work improvement programs.

Unlike the national initiative, SWRI in Iowa is just beginning. Research is needed to measure what aspects of this initiative are most pertinent to Iowa social workers. Therefore, the problem this research addresses is that the Iowa Chapter of NASW does not know what specific issues of SWRI are most important to NASW members. Such knowledge is needed for the Iowa Chapter of NASW to competently educate Iowans about issues that social workers are facing and gather social workers together to advocate for SWRI at the state government level.

The research also addresses two main questions. What issues relating to Social Work Reinvestment are most important to Iowa social workers? Is there a relationship between a social worker’s background (age, educational level achieved or licensure level achieved) and what issues he/she deems as most important to the Social Work Reinvestment Initiative?

The SWRI issues that the statement of the problem and research questions refers to are highlighted by the Iowa Chapter of NASW Social Work Reinvestment Initiative Policy Statement. They include recruitment and retention of mental health, geriatric and more diverse social workers; fiscal issues including expensive higher education, low-paying jobs, and student loans; and title protection (National Association of Social Workers, 2009). The next section will highlight some of the research which exists in regards to these issues.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overall Themes
Beyond research done by NASW, there is little research that specifically addresses SWRI. However, there have been quite a few research studies done regarding the specific issues of reinvestment. When searching the Social Work Abstract Database, the issue of recruitment and retention of workers yielded several results. In contrast, very little research was available for
fiscal issues and title protection. Of all the research found, few if any articles are directed specifically at Iowa social workers.

**Recruitment & Retention**

*Mental Health Workers.* Social workers’ role in Iowa’s mental health services is essential, but the workforce is steadily aging. A study done by the Iowa Department of Public Health found a significant number of these workers will reach age 65 within the next ten years (Kelly, 2006).

Overall, the social work profession is aging with 28% of its workforce being 55 years or older (Kelly, 2006). An aging workforce demands the recruitment and retention of younger workers into the field, especially in mental health services. Unfortunately, mental health workers are often challenged by their work environment. These challenges often increase chances of the worker leaving the profession.

Research done by Blankertz and Robinson shows the entire public mental health service workforce turns over every five to seven years (1997, p. 221). Not only does this high turnover rate add to the mental health agency’s costs in regards to recruitment and training, but it also disrupts services for clients in need. Blankertz and Robinson argue that agencies have to learn what improvements might keep workers there.

Unfortunately, according to a study done by the NASW, these behavioral health social workers have been faced with more stressors in recent years. For example, since 2004 more than three-fifths of licensed social workers practicing in this area reported increases in paperwork, severity of client problems, and caseload size (2006). Other issues reported which could influence stress level of workers is amount of time spent with clients, feelings of personal safety, job security, and geographic location of agency.
Coyle also provides a list of factors which may influence a mental health worker’s job satisfaction: progress in a difficult case, feeling of being help for others, being able to share skills, having self-development opportunities, being part of a team, having autonomy, and enjoying professional respect from other disciplines (2005). In addition, Coyle conducted a comprehensive literature review of mental health workers in the U.S. in relation to stress. Many of the sources he cited are used below.

One report showed 68% of community mental health social workers felt they were under stress (Sze and Ivker, 1986). In fact, social workers often experience greater emotional exhaustion than their coworkers in mental health, psychiatrists or psychologists (Snibbe et al., 1989).

The cause of this stress varies from study to study. Acker found the sources of stress for mental health workers to be lack of supervision, peer or organizational support and lack of other resources (Acker, 1999). Other causes could be the inability to give clients what they need, not enough resources to perform work well, scarce services and resources, and the emotional demands of their clients (Balloch et al., 1998).

A study done in the United Kingdom in 2005 about the stress of social workers who work in mental health had a well organized, comprehensive literature review with a section devoted specifically to the U.S. workforce (Coyle).

There is some contrasting data in the literature as well. Martin and Schinke found psychiatric social workers’ job satisfaction and burnout were within normal limits (1998). Acker (cited previously) found mental health workers showed moderate levels of exhaustion and a high level of personal accomplishment (1999).
This contradiction in the literature means job stress for mental health workers varies. The factors mentioned at the beginning of this section contribute to the level of worker’s stress. Overall, however, research supports the idea that mental and behavioral health social workers face many job difficulties which inhibit the recruitment and retention of workers.

*Geriatric Workers.* Another group of social workers that Iowa needs to recruit and retain in the workforce are geriatric social workers. Like mental health workers, the entire population of Iowa is aging steadily requiring the need for more geriatric workers. In 2006, 14.7% of Iowans are 65 years old or older (Iowa Data Center). By 2030, it is estimated that almost 1 in 4 Iowans will be 65 or older (Iowa Data Center, 2006).

This new wave of elderly brings many more challenges to social workers, especially in the rural areas which have a great proportion of older adults. According to the SWRI policy statement by the Iowa Chapter of NASW, rural workers tend to have “high caseloads, low salaries, difficulty filling staff vacancies and the tendency for agencies to hire non-social workers who lack professional training to fill social work positions” (2009). All of these stressors are a result of the weak recruitment and retention of Iowa social workers in gerontology.

A study done by Poulin and Walter also refers to the rising stress of geriatric social workers, although they did not focus on just rural workers or even Iowa workers. Their findings suggested that geriatric workers had lower levels of stress than mental health and child social workers. However, 26% of the social workers reported high emotional exhaustion and 34% reported moderate emotional exhaustion (1993, p. 309).

The national chapter of NASW conducted a study which found that 46% of geriatric social workers have caseloads of 50 or more clients (2006). In contrast to their heavy workload, geriatric social workers do not even earn as high of a salary as the average social worker.
Geriatric social workers with an MSW earn about $46,894 while the average social worker with the same degree earns $49,500; the average salary for a BSW geriatric worker is $33,593 versus the average social worker who earns $34,597 (2006).

Both the national chapter and Iowa chapter of NASW recognize the need to recruit and retain geriatric social workers. Iowa’s need is greater than other states because Iowa has such a significant aging population.

Diversity. An issue that both mental health and geriatric social workers face is the growing diversity of their clients. Unfortunately, the workers do not reflect this diversity both nationally and locally (in Iowa). For example, MSW behavioral health workers are 89% white, 4% African American, 3% Latino, and 1% Asian/Pacific Islander while their clientele are much more diverse (NASW Center for Workforce Studies, 2006).

According to the Iowa Data Center, 94% of the population of Iowa was white in 2006. The U.S. Census Bureau showed this percentage to be about the same for 2008. The population is projected to increase in diversity in future years. In fact, by 2030, it is estimated that Latinos will make up 9.8% of the population (about 5% more than they already do) and African Americans will make up 3.5% of the population (a little over 1% more than they currently make up) (Iowa Data Center, 2006).

Counties like Buena Vista, Marshall, Muscatine, Black Hawk, and Polk are especially rich in diversity (NASW, 2009). More specifically, these counties are home to many Latino and Asian individuals and families. Language can be a huge barrier for these communities to access services. Therefore, Iowa needs more social workers that can accommodate diverse populations linguistically. Currently, only 3% of Iowa’s social workers are non-white (Kelly, 2006).
NASW recommends not only more recruitment and retention of social workers from non-white backgrounds, but also funding to provide trainings for cross-cultural and bilingual education. The earlier the recruitment of social workers occurs, the better.

A study done by Raber, Tebb, and Berg-Weger actually transitions the need for a more diverse workforce and the next topic, fiscal issues, perfectly. Raber found that “minority social work students” face additional struggles than their white classmates. Minority students tend to have less opportunity to pursue social work education as their opportunities are reliant on access to resources (1998, p.33).

The study’s results provided some suggestions for future recruitment and retention steps: recruiting older students from diverse backgrounds such as transfer students, involvement with alumni and community agencies, involvement with community colleges, and including students in the recruitment and retention process so they can help recruit their peers (1998, p.44).

**Fiscal Issues**

*Education.* Fiscal issues also challenge the recruitment and retention of social workers. One of these issues is the high cost of education and diminishing financial assistance.

According to the Midwest Higher Education Compact, tuition at Iowa’s four-year public universities rose by 80% between the years 1999 and 2005 (May 2005, p.2). In fact, Iowa had the highest percentage increase among its twelve surrounding neighbors of the Midwest.

As tuition rose, financial aid has become more limited. According to the Iowa Chapter of NASW’s SWRI Policy Statement, tuition assistance, textbook reimbursements, and/or practicum stipends which were provided by human service agencies at one point are now no longer provided.

One policy recommendation made by the National Chapter of NASW is the adoption of loan forgiveness programs that would be accessible to social work students. Several state
governments of NASW chapters have already adopted this policy or have begun the process of adopting this policy. These states include Arizona, California, Oklahoma, and South Dakota (“Legislation Issues Chart,” 2010).

According to the SWRI Website, California has successfully established a loan forgiveness program for social workers. The program is for licensed social workers and includes three loan repayment options which are primarily directed at mental health workers (2010).

Other states are still in progress of adopting loan forgiveness. The Iowa chapter of NASW can benefit from the hard work done by other state chapters by comparing how the different loan forgiveness programs work and which one would be most beneficial to Iowa social workers, so they become less discouraged from pursuing higher education or remaining in the social work profession.

*Income & Salaries.* Another fiscal issue many social workers face is low salaries. Even other related professions with similar degrees (like psychiatrists) tend to make much more than social workers do. The Iowa Chapter of NASW identified two examples of social workers who earn less money than other similar professions with equal or less education. First, the mean salary for a bachelor social worker who has less than four years of experience was $22,828 (Abendroth, 2005). Meanwhile, an elementary and secondary school teacher with a bachelor’s degree earned $35,000 (Iowa Workforce Development, n.d.).

The second example they cited was comparing a registered nurse who received some form of higher education that was below a bachelor’s level and a master’s level social worker with four years or less of experience. The registered nurse made $42,840 annually (Iowa Workforce Development, n.d.) and the social worker earned $30,381 annually (Abendroth, 2005).
Overall, 52% of Iowan social workers reported earning a salary between $40,000 and $59,000 and 33% reported earning $20,000 to $39,000 (NASW Center for Workforce Studies, 2004). One reason why social worker’s pay has become so low is the privatizing of human services. As a cost-saving strategy, the state of Iowa contracts services to private agencies where workers are paid less.

A policy recommendation made by the Iowa Chapter of NASW is to continually support any funding of human service programs which are “linked to salaries that provide a living wage and are commensurate with a worker’s credentials, experience, skills, and caseload” (National Association of Social Workers, 2009). If such recommendations are followed, hopefully Iowa social workers will no longer be discouraged by the unlivable wages they are expected to earn.

**Title Protection**

Another way to improve conditions for social workers in the workforce is by protecting the profession’s public image. Unfortunately social work is often shed in negative light, but not necessarily because those who hold social work degrees are practicing unethically.

Currently, there is no state law in Iowa that requires an individual who identifies as a social worker to have a social work degree. As a result, anyone, no matter what their educational background, is able to identify himself/herself as a “social worker.”

This situation is problematic because without a bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, and/or doctorate in social work an individual is less likely to practice social work ethically and competently. Just like a doctor is not a doctor without a medical degree, neither should a social worker be considered a social worker without the education.

A solution to this problem is called title protection. Title protection would punish those individuals who identify as social workers but who have no educational background in social
work. Similar to loan forgiveness, several states have either passed title protection as state law or are in the process of doing so.

According to the SWRI Website, Arizona, California, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Washington have all started the process (“Legislation Issues Chart,” 2010). Most of these states’ end goal is to enact legislation which mandates title protection. Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Missouri, and Wisconsin have already passed title protection. The department in charge of enforcement varies from state to state.

Fortunately, Iowa can borrow language from other states’ legislative documents concerning title protection and gain ideas of where the responsibility of enforcement should be placed.

Conclusion
All these issues add up to mean one thing: SWRI in Iowa is needed. The lack of research about reinvestment in Iowa is evidence enough, but when looking more closely at the specific issues and policies that some other states have already addressed, the need for reinvestment is even clearer. As mentioned earlier, however, the Iowa Chapter of NASW needs to know what issues (just highlighted in the literature review) are most pertinent to Iowa NASW members. Then, the NASW chapter will know where to begin planning action.

METHODOLOGY
Participants and Sample
The participants for this research include any individuals who are currently members of the Iowa Chapter of NASW and the social workers and social work students NASW members recruited to take part in the survey. In general, participants include any social workers practicing social work in Iowa and/or are enrolled in a social work program at an Iowa college/university. NASW members were chosen because the Iowa chapter of NASW had access to a listserv of
over one thousand NASW members, who are almost entirely social workers. The reason the state of Iowa was chosen as the place of practice or education for social work participants is because the Iowa chapter of NASW is in charge of SWRI in Iowa alone.

It was not difficult to find research participants because the Iowa Chapter of NASW had easy access to a current NASW member listserv for the state of Iowa. Additionally, social work educators in private colleges throughout Iowa were contacted by email (Appendix B). Using the snowballing technique, social work educators, students, and workers in general were asked to forward the web link to the SWRI Survey on to all Iowa social workers they knew.

The amount of surveys expected were 250 at minimum with no maximum. Two hundred and fifty is about a quarter of the NASW listserv. The reason no maximum was chosen is because the more Iowa social workers’ voices that can be reflected in the data, the more accurate the data will be.

The final number of surveys completed was 374. The data was able to be evaluated thoroughly and accurately even with the large number of completed surveys and the little time for data interpretation; two benefits were the short length of the survey and the type of questions included. The number of quantitative questions outnumbered the qualitative ones, allowing for more efficient interpretation.

**Design**

The research that was done was a cross-sectional survey design, meaning there was no intervention or treatment tested on the participants; the survey simply measured a specific population’s characteristics through survey answers. The timeframe was also cross-sectional in that participants were expected to take the survey once; the research was not repeated with any participants.
The SWRI Survey can also be described as exploratory because it laid the foundation for the Iowa Chapter of NASW to begin an active campaign. The research was also somewhat descriptive because of the amount of studies which have been done about specific SWRI issues, like recruitment and retention of mental health workers. For example, the current survey in this research is building off the study done by National Chapter of NASW (after they announced SWRI) which was cited earlier in the Review of the Literature. The research is not, however, explanatory because there was no control group or intervention utilized.

The survey contained both quantitative and qualitative questions. On page two of the SWRI Survey, there was two demographic questions which were open-ended, allowing the participant to fill in his/her own age and city of work/school. There was also a multiple-choice question asking for the participant’s state of work/school (Appendix A). Page 3 and 4, Educational Background, included multiple-choice questions regarding participants’ highest social work degree completed, whether or not they are a current student, and which degree they are seeking (if they are a student currently). Question #3 and #5 in this section both contained a fill-in-the-blank question for participants to write in any other degree they had completed or are seeking.

Page 5 and 6, Licensure, also included multiple-choice questions regarding whether or not participants are licensed and what level they are licensed at. Page 7, Employment, contained a multiple-choice question regarding what areas of employment participants identify with. Participants were allowed to choose as many areas as they wished. This question was followed by a fill-in-the-blank question for participants to write in a different area of employment not already listed (Appendix A).
Page 8, Social Work Reinvestment, also had a multiple-choice question regarding what participants believe are the three most important SWRI issues. Again, this question included a fill-in-the-blank for participants to write in a different issue not already listed. Question #10 followed which provided participants the opportunity to write an open-ended response to what other issues relating to SWRI were important to them and question #11 was multiple-choice (Appendix A).

Finally, Page 9, Contact Information, has three demographic questions for those who expressed interest in volunteering for the SWRI Committee (all fill-in-the-blank). The final page provided NASW, Iowa Chapter contact information and asked for any further questions or comments from participants in an open-ended response (Appendix A).

Overall, the research was done in a more standardized, quantitative fashion rather than through interviews and in depth analysis as seen in qualitative research. Data analysis of the SWRI Survey was more statistical and scientific. However, answers to open-ended questions provided the Iowa Chapter of NASW with further insight to Iowa social workers’ experiences.

Since the research was exploratory (and somewhat descriptive), the independent variable and dependent variable were not included in the research (Yegidis et al., 2006, p. 115). The independent variable refers the specific SWRI issues which are most important to Iowa social workers and the dependent variable refers to future action that will be taken by the Iowa Chapter of NASW.

As a result, internal validity was not measured since it was not the purpose of the study to determine whether the independent variable or other alternative variables caused variations in the dependent variable. The research did, however, contain external validity in that the results can be used to represent other cases not studied. Even though the research did not include every
social worker in Iowa, 374 social workers is a very significant number of social workers. The large number of participants strengthens the research’s external validity.

Cultural issues were not strongly considered in the research. The survey contained no demographic questions in regards to race/ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, disability, or religion. The only demographic information which aided in understanding cultural issues in the survey responses are age and the city of work/school (urban versus rural).

Instrument & Procedures

The research instrument was in the form of survey with thirteen questions (Appendix A). The survey was accessible to social workers and students from March 17th, 2010 to April 12th, 2010 on the Survey Monkey Website. The survey was created and results downloaded from the Survey Monkey online program.

The first page of the survey was an explanation of SWRI and the initiative being taken by the Iowa Chapter of NASW. Demographic questions were next, followed by questions about educational, licensure and employment background. The last section of pages contained questions about SWRI. The final page allowed the participant to enter in any additional comments or questions and fill in his/her contact information to become involved with the SWRI Committee (Appendix A).

The link to take the survey on the Survey Monkey Website was sent via email to the Iowa Chapter of NASW’s entire listserv, a total of 1,006 NASW members on March 17th and again on April 6th (Appendix B and C). The same email was also sent to professors of various Iowa private colleges. Using the snowballing technique, recipients of the email were encouraged to share the link to the survey with other professional social workers and social work students.
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By April 12th at 11:59 p.m., 374 completed the SWRI Survey. The participants included professional social workers practicing in Iowa and social work students who attend Iowa colleges and universities.

**Ethical Issues**

Several ethical issues were addressed throughout the research process. The term “social worker” needed to be clearly defined for the context of this research. Social workers refer to any professional individual holding a degree and/or license in social work and currently practicing in Iowa, as well as any student enrolled in a social work program at an Iowa college or university. So, it is possible for a social work student to be from a different state but attending an Iowa school.

Other ethical issues addressed refer to the research process. No informed consent form was used with the participants. The main reason for this is that participants were not considered a vulnerable or at-risk population. Additionally, there was little to no risk of psychological, physical or emotional harm that could have happened to them.

None of the surveys were conducted face-to-face which could have enhanced participants’ experience in taking the survey. Their questions could have been addressed by the survey facilitator directly. In addition, the facilitator could have explained why the survey is important more effectively than an email could.

On the contrary, there are some benefits from not doing the survey face-to-face. The participant can be more assured that their answers are anonymous and confidential. They may also feel less intimidated and more comfortable without a facilitator near them while they take the survey.

There are also some ethical issues relating to the content of the survey. The research was somewhat reliant on participants’ previous knowledge of the SWRI issues and/or their initiative
to ask questions or research these issues. Although the survey directed participants to the Iowa Chapter of NASW’s website to look for more information about SWRI, individuals who had more knowledge of SWRI were at an advantage. Those participants who had little to no knowledge of this issue may have not answered questions as accurately as they could have since they did not know about the issues.

The participants were informed on the first page of the survey that the information from this research will be used by the Iowa Chapter of NASW for SWRI purposes only. It also informed them that the data collected and analyzed is to help inform the SWRI Committee of what steps need to be taken in the future according to what SWRI issues are most important to Iowa social workers.

There is a great chance that the general public and legislators of Iowa may see the results of the survey as NASW educates Iowans about issues facing social workers. None of the content of the survey, however, is sensitive enough for this to be problematic. Additionally, no one will be identified with their survey, even if they provided their name when answering survey questions.

One last ethical issue to consider is the means by which participants had to complete the survey. The way the survey was distributed required participants to have access to a computer and be current NASW members or know a NASW member. Although all social workers do not necessarily have access to a computer in which they could complete such a survey, it can be assumed that many do since students would need computers at their college and most professional social workers would need access to a computer to complete paperwork.

In regards to the participants being NASW members or knowing NASW members, it was most logical to use the NASW listserv because it’s the largest organization of social workers in
Iowa. Too much time and resources would have been used if the survey was distributed to other organizations which social workers are part of (along with other professions) and/or the agencies social workers are employed at.

**Data Analysis**

All the same questions were asked of all participants, allowing a more thorough look at the results. However, not all of the questions were used in data analysis. Any questions after question #10 were not analyzed. The reason for this is because these questions were not pertinent to the research problem and questions. Instead, that data was organized separately for the SWRI Committee’s use.

The open-ended nature of some of the questions required more time to organize and analyze the data. Questions #1 and #2 about age and location were fill-in-the-blank, making the data unable to be organized by Survey Monkey. However, most of the data from this study was quantifiable and easier to analyze. After downloading the data into PDF or Microsoft Excel files, several different programs were used to transform the data into charts and tables.

First, for the background information (education, licensure and employment) and the question about SWRI issues, Survey Monkey was used. This online program provided a summary of each of these areas, the total number of answers for each choice and the percentage of the total which they make up. Survey Monkey also provided charts to organize that data into.

Two demographic questions relating to background were not able to be analyzed and organized in this way, however. Age and location of practice and/or school required the use of SPSS and Microsoft Excel. For both of these categories, answers were coded with numbers that represented each category. For example, any ages 25 and below were coded with a number one; 26 to 35 were coded with a number two; and so on. These codes were entered into SPSS for
frequency analysis. The data from SPSS was then entered into Microsoft Excel and turned into charts.

The second part of analysis involved cross-tabbing the SWRI issues with the background categories (age, location, education, licensure, and area of employment). Survey Monkey provided a crosstab analysis of the nine SWRI issues with education, licensure and employment. However, the percentages provided by Survey Monkey were not accurate since participants could choose more than one answer or sometimes chose “Other” (fill-in-the-blank question) as their answer instead of one of the answers provided. So, the numbers in each overlapping category were used but the percentages were calculated in Microsoft Excel and turned into tables.

A new crosstab was added in Survey Monkey for each question included from #3 to #8 under the following categories: education, licensure, and area of employment. As a result, there were a total of six cross-tabulations total.

In order to crosstab age and location with the SWRI issues, the age and location codes were used again in SPSS. SWRI issues were also coded so that data was usable in SPSS crosstab analysis. The numbers were taken from SPSS and entered into Microsoft Excel and transferred into tables. The final tables containing cross-tabs of SWRI issues and background category questions were scanned for themes. The next section, Findings, reviews the Participant’s data and the themes found.

**FINDINGS**

*The Participants*

Overall, respondents to the SWRI Survey represented social workers from all different backgrounds. The participants were diverse in age and location. They came from all different educational backgrounds, licensure levels, and areas of employment.
Age. Figure 1 shows how many age groups were represented by participants. Of the 374 participants, 80 of them identified as being 25 or younger, about 21% of the total number. The youngest age reported was 18. The next category, ages 26 to 35, included the most participants, with a total number of 99, about 26% of the total. Ninety respondents, or about 24%, identified between ages 36 and 50. The next age group, 51-64, included just a few more participants with a total of 93 (about 25%). The last and smallest group included participants who identified as age 65 or older. This group contained a total of 13 people, or about 4% of the total number. The oldest participant was 75 years old.

Location. Locations which participants provided were split into two categories: urban and rural. Urban areas include those cities with a population over 50,000, as well as cities within a 15-mile radius that have a population of 10,000 or more. For example, the city of Des Moines alone has a population of 198,682 people but suburbs around it (such as Urbandale, Johnston, Altoona, and Pleasant Hill) have populations all above 13,000 people (Iowa League of Cities, 2010). Those cities and/or towns with populations below 50,000 and not within a 15 mile-radius of an urban area were considered rural areas. Fifty thousand is the same cut-off used as the U.S. Census Bureau when determining rural and urban areas (2008).

Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents from rural and urban areas (Appendix D). The majority of participants, about 68%, were from urban areas. In contrast, only 32% of participants were from rural areas.
Education. Looking at Figure 3, the majority of participants have a Masters in Social Work (MSW) as their highest degree; including 183 individuals or 48.9%. The second most common group of participants had not completed any degree yet, which included 80 individuals (about 21.4%). A Bachelor in Social Work (BSW) was the third most common degree among participants. Seventy-five people, or 20.1%, reported having a BSW as their highest degree. The smallest category of participants’ educational background was individuals with a doctorate in social work. A total of seven people, or 1.9%, had attained a PhD as their highest level of social work education.

For the 29 individuals (7.8%) who identified their highest degree as “Other,” 11 of them specified that they were near completion of their MSW. Other individuals identified their highest degree as a Bachelor’s degree in Psychology, Sociology, Human Services, and Liberal Arts; a Master’s degree in Counseling or Health Administration; an Associate’s degree in Arts; or specified the level at which they are licensed.

Quite a few of the participants were current social work students (at any level). According to Figure 4, about 44%, or 163 participants, identified as currently being in a social work program (Appendix D). In contrast, 56%, or 211 participants, did not consider themselves as current students.
Figure 5 illustrates only those participants who identified as current social work students (Appendix D). Of those who identified as social work students, 69.9% (114 participants) were pursuing an MSW. Only about 26.4%, or 43 participants, were pursuing a BSW. Even less participants were pursuing a PhD in social work (3.1%, or 5 participants). Finally, one participant identified as pursing an “other” degree. However, this participant merely identified that she intended to eventually pursue her PhD, but was currently a BSW student.

Licensure. Looking at Figure 6, there were almost an equal number of licensed and unlicensed social work participants (Appendix D). Fifty-four percent of participants reported to be licensed and forty-six percent reported having no license. Of those who have a license 106, or more than half of the total number of licensed social workers are licensed at an LISW level (Figure 7, Appendix D). Those participants who attained a LMSW licensure included about 33.5%, or 67 social workers. Lastly, 13.5%, or 27 participants, had a LBSW license.

Employment. Table 1 shows top 10 areas of employment (Appendix D). The most common type of employment chosen by participants was Mental Health (including counseling and psychotherapy) with a total of 153 participants, or 41%. Clinical/therapy was the next highest category with 98 participants, followed by Adolescents with 92 participants and Child Welfare/Family with 88 participants. Seventy-one participants identified as Students, 61 as working in the area of Aging and Medical health; 53 in case management; and 50 in Addictions and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Employment</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health/Counseling/Psychotherapy</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical/therapy</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescents</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare/Family</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aging</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Health</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Management</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addictions</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Social Work</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
School Social Work. *Table 1* only includes the top ten areas of employment (see *Figure 8* in Appendix D for all areas of employment).

About 12.9% or 48 participants identified one of their areas of employment as “other.” Some of the answers under this category included Military and/or Veterans, Hospice and/or End of Life Care, Adoption and/or Family Planning, Administration and/or Management, LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer), Substance Abuse, and Sexual Assault and/or Domestic Violence Victims Services. Several answers under “other” were already covered in the categories participants could choose from. For example, one participant wrote in “medical” under “other” even though Medical Health was an option to choose from.

**SWRI Issues.**

Question #9 contained the most important data; since SWRI issues are the most relevant to the research questions and research problem. *Figure 9* shows what issues participants deemed as most important to social workers in Iowa. *Increasing Compensation* was considered the most important issue, with 66.6%, or 245 participants. Two hundred and fourteen participants or 58.2% said *Expanding Opportunities and Mechanisms* was most important. The third most important issue was *Title Protection*, with 42.7%, or 157 participants, shortly
followed by Communicate the Value of Social Work with 39.1% or 144 participants. Advocating for Funding was considered important by 33.2%, or 122 participants. The bottom four issues were Collaborate with Employers and Payers (22.6%), Partner with Government Entities (13.9%), Enhance Support for Social Work (10.9%), and Host Legislative Briefings (9%).

Following the demographic/background questions and the question relating to SWRI issues, there were a few more questions. In addition to the SWRI question (#9), question #10 on the same page asked: “Are there any other important issues affecting Iowa social workers that are not mentioned above?” Responses from this question were downloaded Survey Monkey and organized via Microsoft Excel. The responses were then organized into the following categories:

1. Jobs and Salaries – included low wages, high turnover, high stress levels, and trends in the workforce
2. Funding for Services – included Title IXX (Medicare) reimbursement and the state budget impact on social workers
3. Supervision – included strengthening mentorship, providing supervision training, and working with insurance companies to support credential social workers
4. Public Image/Title Protection – included distorted image of social workers that currently exists because of lack of education (especially with employers and the general public)
5. Education – included high students loans and debt from education, more accountability and improvement needed in social work education, and the need to focus more on aging issues
6. Recruitment & Retention – included aging workforce and the need for a more diverse workforce
7. Licensing Issues – included complaints about the current licensing system including inconvenience of continuing education credits, exam fees, and specific content of the exam
8. Miscellaneous – included ethics and confidentiality, diversity and cultural competence, and the need for social workers to run for elected office

All of the above comments were collected from 90 participants’ responses to question #10. The categories were not organized in a particular order. Some of the categories, such as Recruitment & Retention, were already included in the SWRI issues mentioned previously (see Review of the Literature). Supervision, Licensing Issues, and some of the Miscellaneous issues were not included in the Review of the Literature.
Question #11 inquired as to whether or not participants were interested in volunteering with the SWRI Committee. In Figure 10, about 78% (or 289 participants) replied “No” and 22% (or 80 participants) said “Yes” (Appendix E). For those who indicated “Yes,” they were transferred to a page where they could enter their contact information and those who said “No” were transferred to the last page of the survey.

The final question (#12) simply asked for any further comments participants may wish to submit. The 26 participants’ comments to this question included participants thanking the NASW, Iowa Chapter for conducting this survey; reasons why participants could not volunteer for the committee at this time; and participants’ own financial struggles as they relate to education costs and low salary. Other comments included:

- As a consultant, I would be happy to work with a female social worker to get elected to some political office.
- We also need to concentrate more efforts to social justice issues as well
- I disagree with the idea that only social workers who have a specific degree in social work should be validated. I have met many valuable social work professionals who began their careers with degrees in sociology, psychology, human services, education and etc.
- This profession is the best one around! We need to promote ourselves!
- LISW licensing problems are the #1 issue.
- I wonder how the profession could more closely align itself with the business community to offer more EAP services.

The comments above appear exactly as the participants wrote them. Each comment listed was made by one participant and does not reflect multiple participants’ opinions. Comments vary in content, generally addressing other important SWRI issues, disagreement with Title Protection, and suggestions for future action.

**Themes**

This section covers themes found in the cross-tabbed data. As mentioned previously, data collected for question #9 was cross-tabbed with all the previous background questions. Age and location were cross-tabbed by using SPSS and Education, Licensure and Employment were
cross-tabbed by Survey Monkey. The numbers were transformed into percentages and eventually organized into tables on Microsoft Excel. The tables include the Top 3 SWRI Issues identified by each group, so as to make the tables simple and focused.

**Age.** As shown in Table 2, differences appeared between the five age groups. One issue which varied greatly from age group to age group was *Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms.* The age group of 25 and under ranked this issue as most important while participants ages 65 and over did not even list this issue in its top three SWRI issues. The rest of the age groups ranked this issue as second.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Top 3 SWRI Issues Organized by Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages 25 and under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand Opp &amp; Mech: 24.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Compensation: 24.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title Protection: 14.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 26 to 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand Opp &amp; Mech: 21.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Compensation: 22.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title Protection: 18.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 36 to 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand Opp &amp; Mech: 19.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Compensation: 22.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title Protection: 15.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 51 to 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Compensation: 20.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand Opp &amp; Mech: 14.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate Value of SW: 19.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 65 and over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Compensation: 27.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand Opp &amp; Mech: 21.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate Value of SW: 16.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OVERALL</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Compensation: 22.48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, participants ages 25 and under were the only age group to not identify *Increase Compensation* as the most important SWRI issue facing Iowa social workers. The issue of *Title Protection* appeared in all age groups’ top three SWRI issues, except participants ages 51 to 64 who identified *Communicate the Value of Social Work* instead.

**Location.** There also appeared to be a difference between rural and urban participants in relation to SWRI issues (question #9). Participants who practiced social work or went to school in urban areas identified *Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms* as first priority, as seen in Table 3. In contrast, participants who practiced social work or went to school in rural areas identified *Increase Compensation* as the most important SWRI issue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Top 3 SWRI Issues Organized by Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location of Social Work Practice or School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand Opp &amp; Mech: 22.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Compensation: 19.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title Protection: 13.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand Opp &amp; Mech: 22.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Compensation: 19.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title Protection: 14.46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Otherwise, there was little to no difference between participants’ responses to SWRI issues based on location.

**Education.** Participants from different educational backgrounds differed in their responses to what SWRI issues are most important. As shown in Table 4, participants whose highest degree was a BSW or an MSW had the same top two SWRI issues: *Increase Compensation* and *Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms*. In contrast, participants with a PhD had completely different SWRI issues identified as most important. They identified *Title Protection*, *Advocate for Funding* and *Communicate the Value of Social Work* as the most important SWRI issues.

Participants with no completed social work degree also identified *Advocate for Funding* as at least third most important. However, participants with no degree were the only group to identify *Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms* as most important.

When participants were divided into students and non-students, more differences were found. Looking at Table 5, participants who were currently enrolled in a social work program (at any level) identified *Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms* as most important and *Increase Compensation* as next most important, while participants who are not currently students had the same top two in the opposite order. The third most important SWRI issue differed between students and non-students as well. In fact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the highest social work degree you’ve completed?</th>
<th>BSW</th>
<th>MSW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase Compensation</td>
<td>25.45%</td>
<td>22.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand Opp &amp; Mech</td>
<td>22.27%</td>
<td>16.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title Protection</td>
<td>14.99%</td>
<td>16.17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PhD</th>
<th>No degree completed yet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Protection</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate for Funding</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate Value of SW</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are you currently a student?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expand Opp &amp; Mech</td>
<td>24.26%</td>
<td>16.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Compensation</td>
<td>22.36%</td>
<td>22.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title Protection</td>
<td>13.71%</td>
<td>15.29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4: Top 3 SWRI Issues Organized by Highest Degree*  
*Table 5: Top 3 SWRI Organized by Students and Non-Students*
student ranked *Communicate the Value of Social Work* much lower than non-students.

Of those who identified as currently being students, *Table 6* shows that there were few differences between the groups found. All students (BSW, MSW, and PhD) ranked *Increase Compensation* and *Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms* as the first or second most important SWRI issues (*Table 6* in Appendix E). The percentage of PhD students who chose *Increase Compensation* (28.57%) was equal to the percentage that chose *Enhance Support for Research* (28.57%). In contrast, the latter issue was ranked much lower by BSW and MSW students.

**Licensure.** Participants with different licenses or no license at all differed in SWRI issues. *Table 7* shows that there were little differences between licensed participants and non-licensed participants (Appendix E). Both groups identified *Increase Compensation, Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms, and Title Protection* as the top three most important SWRI. However, non-licensed participants chose *Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms* (23.58%) as slightly more important than *Increase Compensation* (22.79%); whereas licensed participants chose *Increase Compensation* (22.24%) as significantly more important than *Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms* (16.21%).

Licensed participants were divided into different licensing levels in *Table 8* (Appendix E). Participants with a LMSW or LISW both believed that *Increase Compensation* was most important followed by *Communicate the Value of Social Work*. However, their third most important issues differed. LBSW’s were the only group to choose *Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms* as most important and they also ranked *Communicate the Value of Social Work* much lower than the other two groups. All

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the highest level of licensure you have completed?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LBSW</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand Opp &amp; Mech</td>
<td>22.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Compensation</td>
<td>20.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title Protection</td>
<td>17.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMSW</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Compensation</td>
<td>23.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate Value of SW</td>
<td>17.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand Opp &amp; Mech</td>
<td>16.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LISW</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Compensation</td>
<td>21.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate Value of SW</td>
<td>16.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title Protection</td>
<td>16.56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
three groups had *Increase Compensation* within their top three issues.

Employment. *Part of Table 9 (shown below) illustrates* what SWRI participants from different employment areas identified as most important (*Table 9, Appendix E has all areas of employment*). Participants from all areas except Medical Health and Developmental Disabilities indentified *Increase Compensation* and *Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms* as the two most important issues. Participants from Medical Health were the only ones to not identify *Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms* in their top three. *Title Protection, Communicate the Value of Social Work,* and *Advocate for Funding* were also listed in the top three of participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1) Mental Health</th>
<th>2) Clinical-Therapy</th>
<th>3) Adolescents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Increase Compensation</em></td>
<td>25.17%</td>
<td><em>Increase Compensation</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Expand Opp &amp; Mech</em></td>
<td>20.04%</td>
<td><em>Expand Opp &amp; Mech</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Title Protection</em></td>
<td>15.14%</td>
<td><em>Communicate Value of SW</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Child Welfare/Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Increase Compensation</em></td>
<td>24.52%</td>
<td><em>Expand Opp &amp; Mech</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Expand Opp &amp; Mech</em></td>
<td>19.54%</td>
<td><em>Increase Compensation</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Communicate Value of SW</em></td>
<td>13.41%</td>
<td><em>Title Protection</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Medical Health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Increase Compensation</em></td>
<td>19.43%</td>
<td><em>Expand Opp &amp; Mech</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Title Protection</em></td>
<td>19.43%</td>
<td><em>Increase Compensation</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Communicate Value of SW</em></td>
<td>16.57%</td>
<td><em>Title Protection</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) School Social Work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Expand Opp &amp; Mech</em></td>
<td>23.29%</td>
<td><em>Increase Compensation</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Increase Compensation</em></td>
<td>21.92%</td>
<td><em>Expand Opp &amp; Mech</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Communicate Value of SW</em></td>
<td>13.70%</td>
<td><em>Title Protection</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13) Developmental Disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Increase Compensation</em></td>
<td>18.63%</td>
<td><em>Expand Opp &amp; Mech</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Advocate for Funding</em></td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td><em>Increase Compensation</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Expand Opp &amp; Mech</em></td>
<td>14.71%</td>
<td><em>Advocate for Funding</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 9: Top 3 SWRI Issues Organized by Top 15 Areas of Employment*
DISCUSSION

The Participants

Age. Overall, participants represent social workers from a wide range of backgrounds. As reported in the Findings section, participants of all different ages completed the SWRI Survey. Figure 1 shows that every age group was about even in representation, except participants 65 and over. It is not surprising that few social workers 65 and over were represented since 65 is the age of retirement and many of those social workers may be out of touch with NASW or even social work agencies in general.

Location. Results about participants’ location did not accurately represent the overall population of Iowa (which is mostly rural). Sixty-eight percent of participants identified as working in or going to school in an urban area, compared to 32% of participants from rural areas (Figure 2, Appendix D). However, these percentages are consistent with the population of Iowa social workers. According to the workforce study done by NASW, 63% of Iowa social workers are employed in metropolitan areas, whereas only 24% reported being employed in a small town, 9% in a micropolitan area, and 4% in a rural area (NASW, 2004). Both the NASW workforce study and SWRI Survey point to the lack of presence of social workers in rural areas.

Education. In regards to educational background, the results were again consistent with NASW’s research. NASW found that the majority (64%) of Iowa social workers have an MSW as their highest social work degree (NASW, 2004). Likewise, Figure 3 (Appendix D) shows that the degree reported most by participants in this research was also an MSW (48.9%) and Figure 4 shows that majority (69.9%) of students were pursuing an MSW. However, NASW found that over one-third of Iowa social workers had a BSW; unlike this research which only included 20.1% of participants having a BSW.
Licensure. There were nearly an equal number of licensed participants as un-licensed participants. Since most Iowa social workers hold an MSW, it is not surprising that the majority (53%) of the licensed social workers had a LISW, followed by 33.5% with LMSW (Iowa Code requires an MSW to be licensed at a LISW or LMSW level).

Employment. Once again the NASW workforce study agreed with the SWRI Survey findings. NASW found that 28% of Iowa social workers identified Mental Health as their primary practice area, followed by Child Welfare/Family and Aging (2004). According to Figure 8, Mental Health/Counseling/Therapy was the most common area of employment for participants in this study as well. Compared to the NASW study, Child Welfare/Family was ranked somewhat lower (fourth most common) and Aging was the sixth most common area of employment. This study found Clinical/Therapy, Adolescents and Students as other common areas of employment.

SWRI & Research Questions

After discussing who the participants were, this section discusses how participants’ backgrounds related to the SWRI issues. Such a discussion requires a peek back at the research questions mentioned at the beginning of this paper.

The first research question was: What issues relating to Social Work Reinvestment are most important to Iowa social workers? According to Figure 9, Increase Compensation (22%), closely followed by Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms (20%) were the top two most important issues identified by participants (Appendix E). Title Protection (14%) was next, closely followed by Communicate the Value of Social Work (13%) and Advocate for Funding (11%). Collaborate with Employers, Partner with Government, Enhance Support for Research, and Host Legislative Briefings all received less than 10% votes.
No hypothesis was made in regards to the first research question, but *Increase Compensation* and *Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms* (which includes loan forgiveness programs, fellowships, scholarships, etc.) were understandably most important. Both of these issues were outlined in the Review of the Literature as the two major fiscal struggles social workers are facing.

The second research question was: Is there a relationship between a social worker’s background (age, educational level achieved or licensure level achieved) and what issues he/she deems as most important to the Social Work Reinvestment Initiative? This question was answered through cross-tabbing the SWRI issues with the background questions.

**Age.** Not surprisingly, participants ages 25 and under were the only age group to believe *Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms* as the most important SWRI issue (*Table 2, Appendix E*). This age group is more likely to be students (especially at the BSW or MSW level) and may see loan forgiveness as a more pressing issue than low salaries, title protection, or legislative matters.

Participants ages 65 and over were the only age group not to identify *Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms* as at least third most important. This is probably due to the fact that social workers who have reached retirement age are less likely to still be students and probably do not have student loans anymore. In general, all the age groups had similar top three issues which confirms that the SWRI Committee (part of NASW, Iowa Chapter) needs to focus most on addressing these issues.

**Location.** Both participants from rural and urban areas had *Increase Compensation, Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms*, and *Title Protection* as the three most important issues, but in different orders. There did not appear to be a strong relationship between SWRI issues and location.
**Education.** In *Table 4*, participants whose highest social work degree was a PhD chose very different SWRI issues compared to the other groups (Appendix E). It is important to note that there were significantly fewer participants in the PhD category compared to the other groups, which means one participant’s responses could easily impact the final results.

Overall, participants who did not have a degree yet and were currently students (especially those completing a BSW or MSW) chose loan forgiveness (*Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms*) as most important (*Tables 4, 5, &6*, Appendix E). Since they are currently students, this issue is seen as more pertinent than other issues. Ironically, participants with the most school under their belts, those with a PhD and those enrolled in a PhD program, rated loan forgiveness much lower.

**Licensure.** Similar trends appeared when looking at participants’ licensing background (*Table 7 & 8*, Appendix E). Those who were not licensed or had the lowest license (most likely current students and/or younger) chose loan forgiveness as most important while licensed participants (LMSW and LISW) chose *Increase Compensation*. Licensed and un-licensed participants had the same top three issues. Between the different levels of licensed participants, the same four SWRI issues appeared.

**Employment.** One noticeable trend in regard to participants’ areas of employment is that all areas relating to education (Student, School Social Work, and Higher Education) identified loan forgiveness as most important, according to *Table 9* (Appendix E). Otherwise, there did not appear to be any trends. All areas of employment had similar top three issues. Participants working in the area of Medical Health identified different issues as most important but it is unclear why.
Future Research.

Now that the results have been discussed, it is necessary to discuss improvements for future research. First and foremost, more time was needed to gather responses. For the short amount of time, 374 participants is a successful number since the minimum number of participants was 250 (see Methodology section). However, more time was needed to allow further outreach to agencies and organizations that employ social workers, especially in BSW social workers who are not students. Given that over one-third of the workforce consists of BSW-level social workers (NASW, 2004) and less than a quarter were represented in this study (Figure 3, Appendix D), more outreach to them is certainly needed.

Instead of one month, around six months would be more appropriate, allowing time for the NASW, Iowa Chapter to research names and locations of Iowa agencies, contact their social workers, and give them time to complete the survey. As a result, more social workers’ voices could be included in the results, improving the accuracy of the results.

More time for data analysis is also needed for future research. With a strict timeline for the research paper, data analysis was somewhat rushed. Although the data analysis was adequate, a longer timeframe would allow for a more thorough examination.

Several questions could be presented in a different form to help ease the process of data analysis. For example, the questions regarding age and location were fill-in-the-blank, resulting in a more difficult and lengthy analysis process since Survey Monkey cannot organize open-ended questions. These questions should be in multiple-choice form in the future. So, the five age group categories could be the options for participants to choose from when identifying their age. For location, “rural” and “urban” could be the two options to choose from, but the researcher would need to clearly define these terms so that the data is not distorted.
Another question that should be changed for future research is the question regarding highest level of social work education achieved. It should have been made clear in parenthesis after the question that those who are currently students should not identify as having the degree completed yet. For example, an MSW student should not select MSW as their highest degree achieved because they have not graduated from the program yet.

There also needed to be more questions added to address cultural issues. One way to do this would be to add demographic questions concerning race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, religion and socioeconomic status. These questions may help understand how social workers from different backgrounds view certain issues, especially if more participants can be recruited for future research.

It is also important to recognize the biases evident in this research study. As mentioned in the section about ethical issues, the survey was made more available for NASW members, not necessarily all social workers. In this regard, the data could be considered biased because it represents (more of) NASW members rather than all social workers. As mentioned earlier, more outreach to employers of social workers (agencies, organizations, etc.) can help correct this bias in future research.

Another bias relates to the accessibility of the survey. For those social workers who do not have access to a computer, they would have faced additional challenges in taking the survey since it was available online only and most outreach was done via email.

**DISSEMINATION**

In regards to dissemination, this research was presented to the Iowa Chapter of NASW’s SWRI Committee, the 2010 Buena Vista University Senior Seminar Class, the Iowa Board of Social Work, and to the NASW Board and NASW members. Additionally, the full research
When presented to the SWRI Committee, members believed Title Protection to be a necessary step in addressing the other areas: Increase Compensation and Expand Opportunities & Mechanisms. The committee believed that the public needs to respect that only those individuals who have at least a BSW (all the way up to a PhD, LISW, etc.) are the only people who can call themselves “social workers.” This will ensure that the public image of social workers remains protected, since the individuals with the educational background and training have a greater chance of practicing by the NASW Code of Ethics. Once the public understands who social workers are then it may be easier to lobby policy makers and government organizations for increased salaries and loan forgiveness programs specifically for social workers.

One of the SWRI Committee’s first steps in moving Title Protection forward was having the NASW, Iowa Chapter present the research to the Iowa Board of Social Work. The Board appeared supportive of Title Protection, but wanted NASW to take some more steps before presenting it to them again. They requested that NASW start a discussion about this issue with the Department of Human Services (DHS), draft language for a Title Protection legislative bill (including how this law would be enforced, fiscal notes, etc.) and do more research about other states’ laws.

Both NASW and the Board of Social Work support Title Protection as the first issue to address before mobilizing members around the fiscal issues. The SWRI Survey certainly supports this step, as Title Protection was the third most important SWRI issue to be identified and fiscal issues were the top two (Table 9, Appendix E).
It is extremely important that the Iowa Chapter of NASW and the SWRI Committee continue conducting research relating to SWRI issues. The unique challenges facing social workers in Iowa, and social workers across the nation, will remain a threat to the profession’s survival unless social workers use advocacy and education skills to bring about substantial change. The results will be a stronger and more ethical social work profession, with social workers’ clients being a priority for policy makers and the general public.
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