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## VARIABLES INFLUENCING PUBLICATION IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL WORK<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

The manuscript presents a descriptive summary of variables influencing professional publication in four major journals: Social Work, Social Service Review, Social Casework, and Clinical Social Work Journal. Data were drawn from a random sampling of the years 1960 to 1976. The following descriptive variables were analyzed: degree, sex, occupation, organizational affiliation, and geographic location of author; topic of article; and single VS multiple authorship. Implications: the data have for the production of knowledge in social work and future research questions are briefly elucidated.

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## Introduction

Publication of manuscripts should be an important facet of one's professional involvement in that the advancement of any profession depends upon members' abilities to systematize knowledge and provide rationale for the provision of services. Kuhn (1962 and 1970) in classic works on the study of the sociology of science indicates that the production and systematization of knowledge is like a political process; that is, the debate that occurs about knowledge is similar to the passage of legislation which is affected by who supports it and the power they hold, how it is introduced and other competing legislation and issues.

Lindsey (1976, 1977, and 1978) studied the composition of editorial boards in the social science disciplines and the professions including social work in an effort to relate board composition to production of knowledge in the field. His data emphasize factors that influence what articles are accepted for publication such as methodological preferences, i.e., the use of different measuring techniques and designs; employment setting - university, public or private agency; and so forth. Moreover, the data suggest that reviewers' scholarly productivity varies greatly among the social science disciplines. Editors of social work journals publish less than editors of psychology and sociology journals and this suggests a different selection process for knowledge that will be formalized. Research studies such as these provide insight into the factors operative in the selection of knowledge to be formalized and systematized for the profession. Both Lindsey and Kuhn provide preliminary support to the assumption that power and status of professionals are important variables in the acceptance rate of publications and therefore those who possess power and status in the field greatly influence the production and systemization of knowledge (Ben-David & Sullivan, 1975).

To date there have been no major studies executed to determine what factors influence professional publication in the field of social work, even though there exist many assumptions and stereotypes in this regard. We lack an initial descriptive study of characteristics of those who publish in the field and who thus ultimately influence the development of the knowledge base. A descriptive study would provide the basis for more extensive research to isolate the effects of such variables as author's power and status on publication productivity and to determine how these variables influence the production of knowledge. This study examines the descriptive variables of degree, sex, occupation, organizational affiliation, geographic location and faculty rank of author; topic of article; and single versus multiple authorship in relation to rate of publication in four major journals. The manuscript concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings and suggestions for future research.

## Methodology

Four journals were selected for analysis, Social Work, Social Service Review, Social Casework, and Clinical Social Work Journal. The first three have been the major vehicles for social work publication in the past, and the last journal

was included for its emphasis on clinical articles. From the pool of years, 1960-1976, a random sample of years was drawn. Years selected were 1960, 1968, 1975 and 1976. The sample consisted of all the articles of the above journals for those years. This procedure yielded a 29% sampling of all possible items. The time span chosen was believed to be large enough to reflect current trends. Since "Clinical Social Work" has only been in circulation for the years 1973-1976, it was sampled in toto. Data from each article were recorded as follows:

1. Journal name
2. Year: 1960, 1968, 1975, 1976. (1973 through 1976 sampled for "Clinical Social Work Journal")
3. Degree of Author: Ph.D., D.S.W, M.S.W., M.S.S.W., M.A., M.S., J.D., L.L.B., Ed.D, Unknown, Other
4. Sex: Male, Female, Unknown
5. Occupation: Educator, Administrator, Practitioner, Researcher, Student, Other, Unknown
6. Organizational Affiliation: University, Private Agency, Public Agency, Private Practice, Research Institute, Unknown
7. Geographic Location: Northeast, Southeast, Northwest, Southwest, Midwest, California, Other, Unknown
8. Faculty/Rank: Lecturer, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Professor, Dean, Researcher, Student, Unknown, Not Applicable
9. Topic of Article: Casework, Groupwork, Community Organization, Research, Social Policy, Social Work Education, Other, Unknown
10. Number of Authors: 1, 2, 3, 4

The data were coded and subjected to computer analysis. The reliability for the classification system was established by subjecting a 10% random sample of articles to another person's classification. The reliability scores were above .98 on the classification of items. When disagreement occurred regarding classification, the data were not included in the analysis unless the disagreement could be resolved.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Analysis

In order to permit meaningful interpretation of the data, percentage publication rates were compared where appropriate with the manpower statistics provided by the

NASW Manpower Data Bank (1975) and the Council on Social Work Education publication entitled "Statistics on Social Work Education in the United States: 1977." Percentage publication figures therefore are viewed in reference to percentage of individuals, schools, and so forth, that fall into the various categories. Percentage difference scores then provide a means for comparing the differences in publication rates among the categories.

Review of the data in Table 1 provide several interesting comparisons regarding geographic region. Geographically the Northeast is the leading producer of publications in social work with 39.78%; the Midwestern states follow with 30.50%; and California produced 12.42%. Other geographic regions, including the Southeast (6.76%), Northwest (3.62%), Southwest (2.67%), and other, i.e., foreign countries and territories (2.20%), provided a lesser contribution.

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Insert Table 1 About Here  
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To be meaningful, percentage data on publication rates must be compared with the percentage of schools of social work located in a given geographic area. Percentage difference scores depicted in Table 1 were derived by subtracting the percentage of publication from the percentage of schools in the same area. Two contrasts are particularly obvious. The Northeast produced 13% more publications as compared to the percentage of schools and the Southeast produced approximately 17% less. Perhaps the initiation of new schools of social work in the South has directed attention from the publishing process to organizational and curriculum requisites. Or, the larger difference in publication rates between the Northeast and Southeast could be due to the historical emphasis on publication that has characterized the Northeast. Another factor might explain the discrepancy. Articles initiated from the Northeast could have a higher acceptance rate due to the status these universities historically have and/or that a substantial number of reviewers come from these universities (Lindsey, 1978). Differences among other geographic regions are not as dramatic. Since the number of schools located in the Northwest and Southwest is small, the data should be reviewed carefully.

Data in Table 2 indicate that by gender, 40.25% of the publications in the social work journals were published by women as compared to 58.96% published by men. The

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discrepancies between publication rates of men and women as compared to membership in the two professional associations during the time of the study suggest that men publish more than women.

Data on the type of degree were difficult to compile since of those journals

sampled only 55.98% reported the degree of the author. From the available data presented in Table 3, it may be surmised that professionals with the M.S.W., M.S.S.W., M.A., M.S., Ph.D., and D.S.W. degrees publish at a similar rate. However, there are wide discrepancies when viewed in light of percentage composition of the Council and

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Insert Table 3 About Here  
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of NASW. The percentage discrepancies in publications of those with masters and with doctorates differ in magnitude in the membership categories. However, both discrepancies for the doctorate are positive whereas both for the masters are negative. These data suggest a possible relationship between the doctorate and publication in social work. It is feasible that the doctoral degree program, as contrasted with the master's program, socializes students to the value of adding knowledge to the profession through the publishing process. Whereas the main focus of the master's degree program centers on understanding the behavioral science knowledge developed from research and the application of practice principles from such an understanding (Hudson, 1978; Weinbach and Rubin, 1980; Wodarski, 1981). However, we must again caution the reader against drawing any firm conclusions since in 44.02% of the articles studied no information was provided on degree of the author.

Data in Table 4 on the type of position held by the author indicate this to be

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Insert Table 4 About Here  
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a major factor contributing to publication rate. Educators produced 45.98% of all publications in the reviewed social work literature. Administrators produced 22.68%, or approximately one-half the number of publications as did educators. Practitioners in agencies produced 17.64%, students produced 3.15% of the publications, and researchers 4.09%. The reported low figure for researchers might possibly be due to their classifying themselves as educators.

The comparison data provided by the NASW Manpower Data Bank reveal similarities in percentage of administrators comprising the profession and percentage of publications they produce. The largest discrepancy occurred in the proportion of educators to their contribution to the publishing process. Educators comprise 9.2% of the membership; however, they provided 45.98% of the articles produced, a discrepancy of +36.78%. In sharp contrast, practitioners comprise 63.7% of the membership yet provided only 17.64% of the articles, a discrepancy of -46.06%. One prerequisite to publishing is keeping abreast of the literature, a characteristic that does not appear to be common among practitioners. Kirk, Osmaiov, & Fischer (1976) and Weed & Greenwald (1973) have indicated that only a small number of practitioners read journals. One might conclude that this factor might be operative in the low publication productivity of this group. Moreover, there is an incentive structure present for publication among educators where there is little or none for practitioners.

Analyses according to the type of institution (Table 5) reveal that 54.25% of the publications came from universities whereas private agencies produced 25.94%.

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Insert Table 5 About Here  
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Public agencies produced 16.82% and individuals in private practice, 1.41%. Again the discrepancy between publication rate and percentage of NASW membership is substantial. Most significantly, the percentage difference for universities is +45.05% and for public agencies -29.18%. A less substantial discrepancy occurred between percentage of individuals in private agencies (-10.56%) and practitioners involved in private practice (-2.39%). These data illustrate an interesting dilemma for the profession. The bulk of its knowledge is produced by individuals in universities who for the main part are not involved in practice. Thus it is possible that knowledge producers may not be experiencing the relevant practice situations necessary to produce the requisite information for the profession.

Examination of the data in the category, faculty rank of those in educational institutions, shown in Table 6, reveals that 24.18% of the publications came from

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Insert Table 6 About Here  
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assistant professors, associate professors accounted for 21.82%, professors 20.94%, and deans 3.24%. The greatest negative discrepancies occurred at the lecturer and assistant professor ranks. At the associate and professorial ranks the discrepancies increased in a positive direction, +2.00 and +8.47% respectively. The discrepancy for deans is small and in a positive direction.

Data in Table 7 show the majority (49.43%) of the articles published in the journals studied center on topics relevant to casework. 18.78% are relevant to social

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Insert Table 7 About Here  
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policy, 3.2% to community organization, 8.8% to administration, 4.8% to social work education, 3.53% to group work, 1.9% to research, and 9.5% cannot be classified according to these categories.

It is interesting again to compare the proportion of publications related to casework with the percentage of practitioners who identify themselves as caseworkers. The percentage discrepancy here is +17.7%. The next largest discrepancy, -12.20%, occurred in administration with only 8.8% of the literature being devoted to this category but with 21% of the practitioners identifying this as their major area of practice.

Other discrepancies shown might be expected to occur within normal variations. No category existed that provided a comparison level for social policy. It is possible that the high percentage of articles devoted to casework could be explained by the fact that the majority of leaders in the field were trained as caseworkers. They now have assumed leadership positions on editorial boards and thus influence the types of articles published.

As is the case with other social science disciplines, social work articles are predominantly of single-authorship. 54.63% of all articles were single-authored, 29.83% were reported by two authors, 11.77% by three authors, and 3.77% by four authors. No article reviewed within the time frame of the study had more than four authors.

#### Summary of Association Between Selected Variables

In order to isolate the effects of the combination of different variables, a variety of 2 x 2 tables were constructed and subjected to Chi-square analysis. The following combinations were analyzed: time, i.e., years sampled in the study, and sex, time and type of institution, and time and multiple authorship. The combinations were based on the rationale that time and sex would reflect changes.

Position and sex of the author combined to produce interesting findings. Educators and administrators who publish are mostly male. Practitioners who publish are mostly female. Males and females account equally for the researchers who publish. Another significant combination was the position on the faculty and sex. Males at the lecturer and assistant professor level published more than females, whereas female associate professors published more than male associate professors. Professors and deans are about the same in terms of publication output according to gender.

#### Discussion

A number of major implications are evident from results of this descriptive study. The predominance of single-author articles in the social work literature corresponds with the incidence observed in such related disciplines as psychology and sociology. This incidence does not correspond, however, with developments in the hard sciences such as physics and mathematics where the majority of articles are multiply-authored. Multiply-authored articles offer a means of more adequately testing ideas in terms of validity of conceptualizations and the empirical methods employed to test the various hypotheses. It will be interesting to see if as social work develops as a science, the number of multiply-authored articles will increase correspondingly (Kuhn, 1962 and 1970).

That more men than women publish might be expected to change in the future. The discrepancy in publication productivity between the sexes may be due to males having been involved longer in professional positions that require publication as a means of advancement. Even though social work historically has been a field staffed largely by women, they have not dominated faculty and university administrative posi-



tions. Now, however, more women are obtaining faculty and administrative positions. Since promotional requisites of faculty positions include more publication, it might be expected that as job trends become more homogeneous, publication rates would equalize. However, our preliminary data and data recently provided by Kirk and Rosenblatt (1980) are not validating such an assumption.

Data in Table 3 clearly indicate a relationship between possession of the doctorate and publication in social work. The data are quite striking in terms of the percentage discrepancies for both NASW and Council membership. At the master's level there is a negative relationship between percent of membership and percent of publications, whereas at the doctoral level the discrepancy is in a positive direction. Thus it can be concluded that knowledge development in the field is enhanced by persons holding doctoral degrees. Moreover however, the doctorate serves to socialize one more into the pursuit of publications (Orcutt & Mills, 1979).

Table 4 indicates that as the professional gets away from a university environment where there is an administrative demand to produce publications and a peer structure to support publishing, there is a concomitant reduction in publications. Practitioners in public or private practice produce substantially fewer publications than individuals located in universities. These data emphasize the schism that exists between producers of knowledge and the individuals who apply it (Bernstein & Freeman, 1975; McNaul, 1972). Such a division cannot enhance the exchange of ideas between practitioners and educators that is necessary for production of knowledge relevant to practice needs. Data in Table 1 suggest also that certain university environments may be more committed to the publishing process. Future research should isolate the variables that can facilitate the exchange of ideas between practitioners, such as prior educational experience, incentive structures for publishing, and ideas and norms regarding the publishing process (Kirk, Osmalov, & Fischer, 1976; Reid, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1968; Weed and Greenwald, 1973; Kolevzon, 1977; Wodarski & Feldman, 1973; Wodarski, 1981).

The data on faculty rank raises some interesting questions (Table 6). Negative discrepancies occurred in the percentage of publications and Council membership at the lecturer and assistant professor ranks. The discrepancy is smaller and in a positive direction at the associate level and increases substantially in a positive direction for professors. Professors make up 12% of the Council membership but account for 21% of the publications. Two explanations might be posited. One, rank leads to publication, or two, publication leads to rank. In light of the emphasis on publication as a prerequisite to promotion at most major universities, it is more logical to assume that the latter explanation is more valid. The data on faculty rank suggest that organizational goals for promotion operate to add to the profession's knowledge base.

Interestingly, the percentage difference for deans is not as great as might be expected. One of the assumptions in regard to administrative positions is that time is rarely available to publish, therefore deans would be expected to publish less. However, in a study by Otis and Caragonne (1979) it is suggested that a substantial

number of deans are committed to their own research and writing. Deans surveyed in that study indicated they wanted more time to continue their research and for subsequent publication of their findings. The more difficult question to ascertain would be, do deans provide an atmosphere that facilitates publication by the faculty.

The data on the percentage of publications related to casework and the percentage of individuals who make up this segment of the NASW membership support an assumption that the major portion of literature in the social work journals still emphasizes the traditional approach in social work, that is the one-to-one approach (Glenn and Kunnes, 1973; and Ryan, 1971). The emphasis, however, on solving social problems through this approach is currently undergoing dramatic changes (see Social Work, January, 1981, which is the second issue devoted to synthesis of old and new approaches to social work practice).

This study describes the relationship between knowledge production and various author and situational variables. It builds on Lindsey's 1976, 1977, 1978 findings that elaborate the factors operating to influence the composition of editorial boards and thus the knowledge development in the social sciences disciplines and professions such as social work. As social work emerges as a science akin to such other social sciences as psychology and sociology, it will become necessary to study in much greater depth the variables that affect the accumulation and production of knowledge.

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**Table 1**  
**Percentage of publications, percentage of schools and**  
**percentage differences according to areas of country**

Area	% Publications	% Schools	% Difference
Northeast	39.78	26.50	+13.28
Midwest	30.50	26.50	+ 4.00
California	12.42	9.63	+ 2.79
Southeast	6.76	24.09	-17.33
Northwest	3.62	6.02	- 2.40
Southwest	2.67	7.23	- 4.56
Other	2.20	-----	-----

**Table 2**  
**Percentage of publications by sex**  
**according to percentage of N.A.S.W. and C.S.W.E. membership**

Sex	% Publications	% Membership N.A.S.W.	% Difference	% Membership C.S.W.E.	% Difference
Male	58.96	37%	+21.96	50%	+8.96
Female	40.25	63%	-22.75	50%	-9.75

Table 3  
 Percentage of publications by type of degree  
 according to percentage of NASW and CSWE membership

Type of Degree	% Publications	% Membership N.A.S.W.	% Difference	% Membership C.S.W.E.	% Difference
Master's	44.10	82.2	-38.1	61.47	-17.37
Doctorate	42.97	3.3	+39.67	33.42	+ 9.55

Note: The only other substantial contribution to publications by degree were M.D.'s at 8.98%. Other degree holders yielded the following percentages: the Ed.D., 2%, the J.D. and L.L.B., 1% and others, .5%.

Table 4

Percentage of publications by type of position  
 compared to percentage of membership in N.A.S.W.

Type of Position	% Publications	% Membership N.A.S.W.	% Difference
Educators	45.98	9.2	+36.78
Administrators	22.68	21.00	+ 1.68
Practitioners	17.64	63.7	-46.06
Students	3.15	.6	+ 2.55
Researchers	4.09	.9	+ 3.19



Table 5  
 Percentage of publications by type of organization as  
 compared to percentage of N.A.S.W. membership

Organization	% Publications	% Membership N.A.S.W.	% Difference
Universities	54.25	9.2	+45.05
Private Agencies	25.94	36.5	-10.56
Public Agencies	16.82	46.0	-29.18
Private Practice	1.41	3.8	- 2.39

Table 6

Percentage of publications according to rank on faculty  
as compared to percentage of C.S.W.E. membership

Rank	% Publications	% Membership C.S.W.E.	% Difference
Lecturer	6.19	14.84	-8.65
Assistant Professor	24.18	29.19	-5.01
Associate Professor	21.82	19.82	+2.00
Professor	20.94	12.47	+8.47
Dean	3.24	2.2	+1.04
Researcher	6.78	1.86	+4.92
Unknown	16.81	-----	-----

Note: Instructors composed 9.17% of the Council membership and the classification of others yielded 14.28%. Not reported yielded .0019.

Table 7

Percentage of publications according to topic, percentage of N.A.S.W. membership in respective categories and percentage differences

Topic	% Publications	% Membership N.A.S.W.	% Difference
Casework	49.43	31.7	+17.73
Community Organization	3.2	3.3	- .1
Administration	8.8	21.0	-12.20
Social Work Education	4.8	6.3	- 1.5
Group Work	3.53	2.4	+ 1.13
Research	1.9	.9	+ 1.0
Social Policy	18.78	-----	-----
Not Classified	9.5	-----	-----

Note: No corresponding category could be derived from the N.A.S.W. membership.