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Social Work Advocacy: Professional Self-Interest and Social Justice

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This study employed an analysis of the advocacy-related resources and materials available through the 50 NASW state chapter websites. Results revealed that a large number of states had no information about advocacy on their websites (42%). One third of the mission statements reviewed contained language indicating that advocacy was part of the chapter mission, while nearly as many included no content related to advocacy or social justice on their homepages. Nearly two thirds of the websites contained no resources, tools or links to help with advocacy practice, promotion or education. Thirteen advocacy themes emerged, which represented policy issues within the state advocacy agendas. Professional Self-Interest was the issue with the highest frequency (17%) across the 2010 state chapter agendas, but the 12 other social justice issues combined dominated the legislative agendas (83%). Professional self-interest issues accounted for the highest rate of prevalence on state agendas, as it appeared on 86% of the chapter agendas analyzed.

Key words: advocacy, content analysis, NASW, social justice, social work

The profession of social work originated as the advocating voice for the vulnerable and oppressed in society, and its purpose is to improve social conditions for those persons (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2003; Trattner, 1999). Previous literature has suggested the social work profession has lost its way, and is facing a crisis of identity (e.g., Abramovitz, 1998; Baylis, 2004). Moreover, social workers have been accused of being more dedicated to advancing the profession and private practice than to social justice and political advocacy (Ritter, 2008). This study explored the advocacy agendas of state chapters within NASW to determine whether there was a tilt in the balance of advocacy agendas toward issues concerned with the promotion of professional self-interest or advocacy for social justice issues which promote client welfare.

Review of the Literature

The social work field arose as the advocating voice for the most disadvantaged and oppressed persons in society, those unable to find a voice on their own, and has traditionally been charged with creating conditions for social reform (Trattner, 1999) and ameliorating poverty and injustice. Today, the profession still purports to challenge social injustices, and to empower and advocate for vulnerable populations through systems-level changes (NASW, 2003). Social work is unique from other helping professions, in that the mission not only calls for service to persons in need, but also for the betterment of social conditions for those persons. Combating social injustice for marginalized populations, through social change and advocacy activities, is a basic function of the profession, as mandated by NASW and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) (CSWE, 2014; NASW, 2010). In fact, the CSWE Commission for Diversity and Social and Economic Justice has recently developed a task force to critically examine and develop a definition of social justice for the social work profession, underscoring the importance of social justice to the field.

As such, enhancing social justice is a primary purpose of the social work profession and is central to its mission. Still,

considerable debate has occurred within the social work literature regarding the ways in which the profession defines social justice. For instance, some scholars rely upon Rawls' theory of distributive justice (Wakefield, 1998). The distributive justice theory maintains that society should aim for a realistic utopia, where primary goods are distributed to all, and justice equals fairness for all persons (Brown, 2002; Rawls, 1999). Wakefield (1998) asserted that the distributive justice theory reflects social work's essential mission in its concern with meeting basic human needs across economic, social and psychological realms, in order to ensure all persons have the means to lead a minimally decent life. Others (e.g., Galambos, 2008; Reisch, 2002) highlighted the disconnect across theories and definitions of social justice. While consensus has not been reached, scholars in the field emphasize the importance of social justice to social work practice, research, and teaching.

Reisch (2002) specifies the ways in which social work may address social justice despite the profession's inconsistency and lack of clarity. These include: a focus on distributing resources to populations that are most vulnerable or oppressed; an understanding of the mutual interests in social service delivery for the worker and the client; engagement in multi-level practice that engages clients and builds from their lived experiences; and, advocacy for the elimination of oppressive policies and programs and the development of policies and programs that promote well-being for all people (Reisch, 2002). This study focuses on the profession's explicit advocacy agendas.

Historical Context of Social Work

The roots of the profession of social work date back to the late nineteenth century, as a response to the call to address poverty and alleviate human suffering (Greene, 2005). A divergence between the pursuit of social justice through advocacy and community work, versus casework, began over a century ago, with the settlement house movement and the charity organization societies (Epple, 2007). Since its inception, social work has struggled between meeting the needs of individuals within society and enacting social change.

The settlement house movement, led by Jane Addams,

focused on affecting social change at the community level, and settlement house workers were the profession's first social change agents (Trattner, 1999). Settlement house workers focused on addressing the causes of poverty and advocating for its prevention to improve social conditions. This is in contrast to charity workers, who focused on the deficiencies of the poor and the treatment of those deficiencies by providing treatment and services to meet the basic needs of individuals and families (Van Wormer, 2002). To improve a person's functioning within society, charity workers sought to influence the nature of individuals' perceptions and emotions, rather than address societal needs and inequities (Wakefield, 1992).

The bifurcation of the functions of early social workers has persisted throughout the advancement of the profession. Abraham Flexner's 1915 call for professionalism within the field further exacerbated this divide by challenging social workers to develop a theoretical base for professional practice and build a body of knowledge for the profession through scientifically-based research (Brill, 2001; Trattner, 1999). Though Flexner's charge has inspired great progress in social work intellectual production (Brill, 2001), the research and theory development for the profession has been primarily consumed with direct practice interests, rather than social justice and advocacy imperatives (Karger & Hernandez, 2004). In its journey to establish professionalization, many argue the field of social work has allowed its social justice mission to fall behind (Donaldson, Hill, Ferguson, Fogel, & Erickson, 2014). In order to intellectualize the field, social work has relied heavily on infusing psychological theories into frameworks for practice, often overlooking theories of education and economics, which are equally relevant to promoting social work interests (O'Brien, 2003). Some researchers claim that this infusion of psychological theory into social work practice has led the field away from its social justice mission, and that rather than unifying and legitimizing the profession, Flexner's call to professionalism further confused the identity of the profession (Karger & Hernandez, 2004; O'Brien, 2003).

It seems that recognizing social work for its unique strength, of being a field with the mission of pursuing social justice, has been largely overlooked in the hopes of building its identity as

a respected profession. Currently, two social work identities remain: one providing casework and therapeutic services, and the other focused on societal reform, social justice and community organization. Though most social workers perceive themselves as falling somewhere in the middle of the two extremes, it is important to understand where the profession is in terms of promoting social justice, while considering the influence of psychotherapy and private practice.

Social Workers in Private Practice

Social work scholars contend the rapid growth of psychotherapy in social work practice is the greatest issue of concern facing the social work profession (Specht, 1990) and that there is considerable difficulty providing meaningful preparation for macro-level practice in the social work educational curriculum (Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014). The Practice Research Network (PRN, 2003) conducted a survey of NASW membership in 2002, and found that 38% of social workers reported working in a private practice setting. Moreover, 71% of the respondents considered their principal role in their practice area to be in direct practice, case management, or clinical supervision.

Thus, psychotherapy has become a common form of social work practice and increased numbers of social workers are working in private practice settings, oftentimes providing services to a sector of society which has the means to pay for services. This shifts valuable resources away from working with persons with the greatest need for social work services, as vulnerable populations have been unable to afford the services of many clinicians in private practice (Specht & Courtney, 1994). Specht (1990) asserted that the shift toward psychotherapy as social work practice does not honor the true mission of the field. As such, Wakefield (1992) reasoned that psychotherapy as social work practice needed to be redefined as psychotherapy for social work practice. This would allow for psychotherapy to be viewed as a tool, rather than the primary means, of practice.

Though literature has repeatedly charged social workers with neglecting to fulfill their advocacy role in practice (Ritter, 2007), there are few studies found to support or challenge

these claims. Mission fulfillment of the advocacy imperative can happen in a variety of ways and at all levels of practice, whether in a clinical, private practice role, community organizing setting, or somewhere in between (Mosley, 2013). It is important to understand the relationship between advocacy, social work, and research, in order to understand the place of advocacy in the social work profession.

Advocacy and Social Justice

Advocacy and social reform are central tasks of the social work professional, and have historically been regarded as core practice skills that, along with the emphasis on social justice, distinguish social work from other helping professions (Crean & Baskerville, 2007; Ritter, 2007). Richan (1973) defined advocacy as an "action on behalf of an aggrieved individual, group or class of individuals—people subject to discrimination and injustice" (p. 223). Advocacy efforts can be carried out for individuals, groups, and communities in society (Richan, 1973; Spicuzza, 2003). Political advocacy and community organizing are vital functions of the social work purpose, to be carried out across all domains, including clinical social work settings. At a minimum, social workers are to be policy sensitive in dealing with clients; social workers need to understand policies affecting their clients, how to access resources, and the potential barriers to accessing resources for their clients (Jansson, 2003).

While social workers intervening at all systems levels may engage in some type of advocacy, the profession's formal advocacy efforts provide insight into its commitment to cause advocacy. For example, Scanlon, Hartnett, and Harding (2006) conducted a survey in 2003 of NASW state chapter directors to understand the state level scope of NASW political practices, policy goals and priorities, and the perceived effectiveness of advocacy efforts. Twenty-two NASW state chapter directors indicated their top three current policy issues via a survey distributed by the authors. State budget and funding issues and mental health parity were the most frequently reported policy priorities, followed closely by abolition of the death penalty, professional licensure issues, and welfare reform. When considering the policy goals and priorities, findings suggested there was an overall lack of input from membership and

clients in the setting of policy priorities, where most chapters utilized a top-down approach to agenda setting (Scanlon et al., 2006). As such, Scanlon et al. (2006) noted that NASW chapters should utilize a client-centered approach to agenda setting establishing policy priorities, rather than a top-down approach. They also suggested chapters seek input from local membership in order to gain relevant information on pressing client-centered policy issues.

Ritter (2007) also used survey methodology to examine advocacy in social work practice, finding that over half (54%) of the sample of licensed social workers categorized themselves as "inactive" in relation to their political participation. When questioned about their political interests, the respondents indicated that they were more interested in national politics (94% were "somewhat interested" to "very interested"), than local politics (86% were "somewhat interested" to "very interested"), though a high level of interest existed for both. Ritter (2008) also found that the majority (two-thirds) of social workers surveyed preferred working with individuals rather than working on social change; however, membership in NASW was a strong predictor of involvement in advocacy activities. This finding reiterates the potential importance of NASW as professional association.

Edwards and Hoefer (2010) recently examined the websites of 63 social work advocacy organizations to determine the extent to which social work advocacy utilizes "web 2.0" capabilities, such as social media, blogging, wikis, and video-sharing. They found that the social work advocacy organizations in their sample largely used websites to convey information about relevant issues, provide specific actions for individuals to take, and facilitated individuals' communication with decision-makers (e.g., via email). Additionally, websites for organizations that were associated with NASW were more likely to provide an option for users to connect to a social networking site and to include the option to share advocacy information via social networking or email. The authors call for more research on the use of the internet in social work advocacy. Collectively, this limited research also points to the need for more investigation of social work advocacy practices for social justice. This study expands upon the existing research to examine advocacy communications, resources, and agendas of

state NASW chapters to contribute to the empirical knowledge base for understanding the advocacy activities of professional social workers.

The National Association of Social Workers

The NASW is the largest professional social work membership organization in the world, representing the interests of social workers and the profession (Scanlon et al., 2006). Approximately 132,000 social workers are active members of the NASW, represented through 55 chapters. These 55 chapters are comprised of 50 state chapters, and additional chapters including Guam, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, New York City, Washington, D.C. (NASW, 2015). Through its focus to advance sound social policies, the NASW is actively involved in legislative advocacy, with the bulk of policy advocacy efforts occurring at the state chapter level (Scanlon et al., 2006). As the premier membership organization and interest group for social workers (Hoefler, 2000), the NASW is a prime advocacy avenue for the profession (Teater, 2009).

Limited research, however, has been conducted to understand the role of the NASW and its effectiveness in promoting social work advocacy (Scanlon et al., 2006). Teater (2009) stated that now, more than ever, social workers are called to impact social policy legislation at the state level, and others agree that as states are given increasing authority over social programming, social workers must become more politically involved (Hoefler, 2000, 2005). As the largest interest group for social workers, the NASW has the power to guide and influence social workers in the advocacy arena and communicate to its membership and other social workers the importance of influencing policy and legislation.

This communication is increasingly done via the internet. Interest group organizations, such as the NASW, have developed a strong online presence over the past decade, as information technology has become a mainstream form of public communication. Organizations use websites to communicate with their membership and to provide information to their clients and the general public. As advocacy is an integral function of the social work profession, and the NASW

mandates the practice of advocacy for social workers, it is important to understand the messages the NASW is sending regarding advocacy through its websites to its membership, clients and the public.

Purpose and Statement of the Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to enhance understanding of the messages the state NASW chapters are conveying to their membership, their clients, and the general public about the role of advocacy in present day social work, and to gain insight into the types of issues on the advocacy agendas of state NASW chapters. The data utilized in this research study were taken from publicly accessible information on the fifty state chapter websites. The following research questions guided this study:

- (1) What information did NASW state chapters convey to social work professionals, clients and the public about the status of social work advocacy through their websites?
- (2) Which issues were the most prevalent in the 50 NASW state chapter policy agendas in 2010?
- (3) Do state NASW chapters advocate more often for policies promoting professional self-interest, or client-centered, social justice related issues?

Methods

This study utilized a content analysis approach to research, which is defined as a "methodological measurement applied to text for social science purposes" (Shapiro & Markoff, 1997, p. 14). Content analysis allows a researcher to translate qualitative information—communication and messages—into a quantitative form through coding (Finn & Dillon, 2007). Coding systematically categorizes information in order that it can be analyzed scientifically (Finn & Dillon, 2007).

Sample and Data Collection Strategy

The population was comprised of the 50 state NASW chapter websites. At the time of this study, each state chapter had an actively operating website, thus the total population was included in this research. The text available on the websites, including relevant advocacy web content and downloadable documents, was gathered to analyze the information and content related to the status of advocacy on state NASW chapter websites. Specifically, the data sources included: webpage text, advocacy and legislative agendas for 2010, chapter newsletters, position papers, and legislative briefings and testimonies. Further, legislative issue-prevalence data were collected from the NASW sponsored CapWiz Advocacy website, an online advocacy database. Many chapters utilized this resource by populating it with information on legislative issues of current interest particular to their states. The CapWiz Advocacy website is a potential avenue for providing social workers with state-specific information on legislative issues, elected officials, advocacy tips, and media resources. The data for this study were taken from the current issues and legislation section of the database and were included if the policy position for the state chapter included the language "We Support this legislation" and "We Oppose this legislation," and excluded if the language read "Monitoring."

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded in two distinct phases. Phase I utilized qualitative thematic coding to identify policy themes evident in the state advocacy agendas depicted on state chapter websites and in CapWiz legislative issues. After the themes were identified, a coding sheet was developed to document the occurrence of each theme within website documents. These themes were then further coded into a binary format, indicating whether the advocacy item primarily promoted professional self-interest issues (PSI) or whether the advocacy item primarily promoted client-centered, social justice issues (SJCC). Instances of issues were also recorded: each of the 13 advocacy issue categories was coded by state to determine the overall issue frequency in state agendas.

Limitations

Though this research is an important preliminary contribution to understanding the advocacy activities of NASW state chapters, it is not without its limitations. An assessment of state NASW chapters' advocacy status and issue prevalence may include other sources of data, such as policy statements, advocacy agendas spanning over the past decade, surveys of state leadership and membership gauging the perceived importance of advocacy, the utilization of membership and clients in the agenda setting process, and other organizations' perceptions of NASW policy priorities. This study analyzed 60% of NASW state chapter legislative agendas and priorities, but with the accessibility of the population parameter in this research framework, a rate closer to 80% would more adequately reflect the overall advocacy priorities of social work professionals.

Another important limitation of this study to note is the consideration of legislative cycles. During this study, the researchers became aware that not all states were in legislative sessions, and that some states, specifically Texas, operate on a bi-annual basis. The legislative agenda for the state of Texas' NASW chapter for 2011 was posted, but as this study only considered 2010 agendas, it was not eligible for analysis. Future studies should consider the state legislative session schedules, and again, a multi-year analysis would prevent the exclusion of this type of relevant information.

Key Findings

Research Question 1: What information did NASW state chapters convey to social work professionals, clients and the public about the status of social work advocacy through their websites?

Results indicated that 90% of chapter websites (n = 45) contained an advocacy link on the homepage, and only 8% of those links were inactive. Seventy percent of the websites conveyed a message of advocacy and/or social justice directly on their chapter homepages, using keywords such as "social justice," "advocacy," "public policy," and other references to current legislative agendas and activities (n = 35). Additionally, many

sites contained links to state legislative resources (44%, $n = 22$), federal legislative resources (32%, $n = 16$), and documents or other resources providing advocacy education and activism tools for social work practitioners (36%, $n = 18$). A little over half ($n = 26$) of the state NASW chapter websites included direct links to the NASW's CapWiz advocacy webpage. Current legislative agendas (48%, $n = 24$), past legislative agendas (20%, $n = 10$), and recent legislative accomplishments (20%, $n = 10$) were accessible to the public through the websites as well. Only 66% ($n = 33$) of the chapter websites contained chapter-specific mission statements with language including the terminology of "social justice," "policy," and/or "advocacy."

Research Question 2: Which issues were the most prevalent in the 50 NASW state chapter policy agendas in 2010?

Of the 50 state NASW chapter websites and the CapWiz online databases reviewed, 29 contained legislative agendas for 2010. Within these agendas, 472 total advocacy issues were uncovered, and 136 (28.8%) of those 472 issues were found through the CapWiz web resource. The remaining 71.2% of the legislative issues were gathered from online legislative agendas, testimonies, and chapter newsletters. Data analysis indicated that these issues represented 13 broad theme areas: (1) Professional Self-Interest; (2) Health Care; (3) Child Welfare; (4) Mental and Behavioral Health; (5) Poverty/Employment; (6) Domestic Violence; (7) Homelessness/Housing; (8) Elderly/Aging Adults; (9) Civil Rights—LGBT/Immigration; (10) Crime/Sex Offenders/Death Penalty; (11) Education; (12) State Government/Economy; and (13) Other.

Professional self-interest included topics such as: loan forgiveness, assistance and repayment; distance education; licensure standards and regulation; and Medicare reimbursement. Health care included Medicaid funding, women's health, affordable healthcare, insurance, and hospital access. Child welfare examples included adoption services, child welfare services funding, and foster care youth and transitional youth services. Mental and behavioral health included mental health parity, co-occurring disorders, alcohol and drug treatment, forensic mental health, and behavioral health and mental health for minors. Poverty/employment included public assistance

programs, rural economic development, living wage, affordable child care, and job training and education. Research on domestic violence, domestic violence shelters, and victim

Table 1: Frequencies and Percentages of Policy Issue Theme Areas

Theme Area	Specific Bill		Topic		CapWiz		Website		Totals	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Professional Self-Interest	34	12.5	47	23.5	23	16.9	58	17.3	81	17.2
Health Care	46	16.9	24	12.0	22	16.2	48	14.3	70	14.9
Child Welfare	40	14.7	18	9.0	15	11.0	43	12.8	58	12.3
Mental and Behavioral Health	24	8.8	24	12.0	16	11.8	32	9.5	48	10.2
Poverty/ Employment	23	8.5	17	8.5	18	13.2	22	6.5	40	8.5
Domestic Violence	2	0.7	5	2.5	1	0.7	6	1.8	7	1.5
Homelessness/ Housing	3	1.1	6	3.0	2	1.5	7	2.1	9	1.9
Elderly/ Aging Adults	9	3.3	11	5.5	3	2.2	17	5.1	20	4.2
Civil Rights: LGBT/ Immigration	13	4.8	15	7.5	6	4.4	22	6.5	28	5.9
Crime/ Sex Offenders/ Death Penalty	39	14.3	7	3.5	16	11.8	30	8.9	46	9.7
Education	15	5.5	16	8.0	8	5.9	23	6.8	31	6.6
State Government/ Economy	23	8.5	8	4.0	6	4.4	25	7.4	31	6.6
Other	1	0.4	2	1.0	0	0.0	3	0.9	3	0.6
Totals	272	57.6	200	42.4	136	28.8	336	71.2	472	100

Note: The 'Totals' in column 6 refer to the sum of the number of theme areas found in the CapWiz database (column 4) and the chapter website (column 5). The theme areas (column 1) are in reverse chronological order based on the N in the totals column.

service programs were legislative issues included in the domestic violence category. Homelessness/Housing included affordable and transitional housing, rental assistance, and crimes

against the homeless. Legislation regarding elderly/aging adults included caretaker education, monitoring of in-home care, mixed-income senior programming, adult protective services and elder dignity. Civil rights included LGBT, same-sex marriages, immigration, and civil unions, among others. Crime included sex offenders, death penalty, victims rights, penal institutions, human trafficking, incest, dating violence, and juvenile offenders. Legislation categorized as education included public school reform, school attendance, and bullying. State government/economy included rainy day funds, sales and taxes, state budgets and fiscal policies. Legislative items such as environmental waste control, for example, were categorized as other.

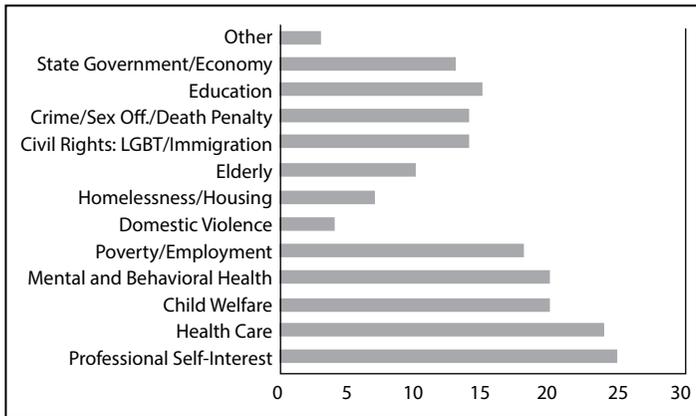
Results indicated that the most prevalent NASW policy issues in 2010 were Professional Self-Interest (17%), followed by Health Care (15%), and Child Welfare (12%). The least prioritized political agenda issues identified through this study were Domestic Violence (1.5%) and Homelessness/Housing (2%).

Research Question 3: Did state NASW chapters advocate more often for policies promoting professional self-interest, or client-centered, social justice related issues?

Overall, 17% of the issues on state NASW policy agendas found in this study were related to professional self-interest and encompassed policies related to professional licensure, loan forgiveness, title preservation, and pay and reimbursement legislation. Nearly one out of every five agenda items was related to promoting professional self-interest issues for social work practitioners, while the majority of action agenda items pertained to the combined 12 other social justice client-centered issues (83%).

This question was alternately considered in terms of how many state action agendas contained issues related to each of the 13 policy categories. Professional self-interest issues were present on 86% (25) of the state legislative agendas, making this the category promoted by the most states. Figure 1 provides a graphical summary of the issues and number of state action agendas prioritizing each issue.

Figure 1. Issue Prevalence in NASW State Chapters Legislative Agendas



Discussion and Implications

This study examined the condition of advocacy in social work practice, and whether there exists a tilt in the balance of the advocacy agenda toward issues concerned with the promotion of professional self-interest, rather than advocacy for social justice issues. This is important, because while advocacy to strengthen the profession may indirectly enhance social justice through the efforts of individual social workers, cause advocacy that promotes the interests of the disadvantaged has the potential to induce more widespread structural change. Results indicated that professional self-interest had the highest issue frequency (17%) on 2010 chapter policy agendas, but the combined 12 other social justice categories dominated the agendas (83%). However, professional self-interest issues appeared on the most state agendas, 86% of the 29 chapter agendas analyzed.

Though it is encouraging that issues pertaining to social justice dominated the agendas, the promotion of professional self-interest was a topic of discussion found twice as often in the data than any single social justice issue. Furthermore, professional self-interest appeared more prominently here than in prior work. In Scanlon et al.'s (2006) survey of NASW state chapter directors, the most prevalent issues on their advocacy agendas were related to state budgets/funding and mental

health parity. This was followed by death penalty abolition, professional licensure, and welfare reform.

As promoting social justice and social change are tenets of the profession of social work and the profession's governing code of ethics (NASW, 2003), it is concerning that 30% of all NASW state chapter websites contained no content related to advocacy or social justice on their homepages, and 64% of the websites did not contain any resources, tools or links to these types of resources in any of their web content for advocacy practice, promotion or education. Likewise, only half of NASW state chapters posted a link to the CapWiz legislative resource and offered it through their website to its membership. Thus, these findings raise the question of whether this advocacy tool is widely known, or whether the national NASW office might offer some technical assistance and training for state chapter leadership in order to ensure the NASW membership is utilizing this sophisticated resource to its fullest potential. Of all 50 NASW state chapters, only three included links to chapter newsletters that communicated legislative agendas to their state membership.

Nearly half of the websites studied did not communicate any legislative agendas or accomplishments. This study's findings should be considered in light of this limitation. Without access to the advocacy agendas of 42% of the NASW state chapters, it is not possible to completely understand the scope and degree to which social justice advocacy activities take place in the profession, because it is not clear whether the advocacy agendas observed in this study are an accurate reflection of the advocacy agendas of all chapters. In the context of past work illustrating the top-down nature of state NASW advocacy efforts (Scanlon et al., 2006), it is possible that the communication of advocacy agendas to members and the public is simply not a priority. Those who communicated online about their advocacy agendas may be more inclined to promote/participate in advocacy activities than those who did not communicate advocacy/social justice issues at all.

This study provides a snapshot of advocacy practices and issue prevalence as accessible through the NASW state chapters' online presence, and will contribute to social work by reducing the divide between understanding the imperative of

advocacy in the profession's mission and heightening awareness of the reality of social work advocacy in practice. These preliminary descriptive findings will inform future research activities in building a knowledge base for understanding the current relationship between social work and advocacy practice. In order to gain a more robust understanding of advocacy efforts and actual impact of social work advocacy practice in the United States, future research should consider the time and resources allocated to addressing state chapter agenda items and the success rates of local advocacy initiatives. The political climates of states in relation to the advocacy imperatives should also be considered in future research. Another important aspect to understanding the practice of social work advocacy would be assess chapter members' advocacy priorities to explore whether the advocacy agendas and issue prevalence reflect those of individual members.

In sum, the findings of this study suggest that the promotion of professional self-interest in social work advocacy is considered to be an important issue to NASW members. Still, the findings also showed that social justice issues play a major role in setting the overall policy agendas for NASW state chapters that communicate their advocacy agendas to practitioners, clients and the broader community through their online presence. As the field of social work continues to maintain its commitment to advocacy and social justice, as evidenced by the current NASW Code of Ethics (2010), it will become increasingly important for practitioners and researchers to critically examine the profession's advocacy efforts. In turn, social work's impact on our broader society may be most realized.

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