

Improving Cultural Competency for New Social Workers

Rheanna Pierce,* Armondo Ray*

Faculty: Brien Bolin

School of Social Work, Fairmount College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

INTRODUCTION: Social workers are meant to be culturally competent in their work as this ensures best practice methods. However, many social workers are not well-versed in microaggressions which falls under the umbrella of cultural competency. This damages not only the name of the social worker, but the field of social work, as well as the clients that are involved. In order to increase cultural competency and reduce possible trauma, this paper examines microaggressions through the lens of new social workers.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to increase knowledge about microaggressions and combat them. This is to help new social workers remain culturally competent and provide best practice.

METHODS: This study examines microaggressions within the social work field, specifically focusing on new social workers. The study used the data from a convenience sample of two graduate level diversity social work classes at a Midwestern State university, where a total of 48 masters students participated in this exploratory study of microaggressions in social work practice.

RESULTS: Participants reported: being trained in different skills compared to other professions (20.8%, n=10), being aware of structural inequalities (22.9%, n=11), or being open-minded (37.5%, n=18) when asked about issues of social justice and micro aggressions. When social work students answered questions about their experience of micro-aggressions over half responded that they had general experiences with microaggressions (50%, n=24). Finally, when the participants were asked about confronting micro-aggressions that have been experienced (31.3%, n=15) reported they would avoid the conflict, or they would try to educate the other person (31.1%, n=15).

CONCLUSION: Schools of Social Work should teach new social workers techniques and skills in order to be culturally aware and have humility in understanding and interactions with other cultures, religions and political beliefs. It is imperative that School of Social Work at the University level begin the narrative now rather than later to ensure that Social Workers are empowering their clients instead of dismissing a part of their client's identity.