



Sex, Marriage, and Welfare Mothers: Personal and Professional Values of MSW Students

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INTRODUCTION

Very little research has examined the relationship between the personal value system and professional value system among social work students.

This study intended to:

- Identify the personal values that social work students may bring with them from their backgrounds.
- Examine how students' personal values are associated with their perceptions of a potential service population, such as welfare mothers.
- Provide a better understanding regarding the developmental patterns of the professional value system among social work students.

HYPOTHESES

- Social work students with conservative attitudes about sex will have more negative perceptions of welfare mothers than social work students with liberal attitudes.
- Social work students with conservative attitudes about marriage will have more negative perceptions of welfare mothers than students with liberal attitudes.

METHODS

Measurement

The personal value system was defined as the students' attitudes toward sex and marriage. The students' perceptions of welfare mothers were assumed to manifest the professional value system.

These latent constructs were measured on a Likert scale of six points.

The study developed three separate measures for sex attitudes, marriage attitudes, and perceptions of welfare mothers. A pilot test and item analysis were conducted.

The reliability coefficient was .888 for sex attitudes, .848 for marriage attitudes, and .889 for perceptions of welfare mothers.

The measures were also validated by using the construct validity method.

Sampling

The sample was drawn from accredited schools of social work in the state of Ohio, based on probability cluster sampling proportionate to the size of the program unit. Randomly selected, five schools participated in the study.

231 MSW students completed the 56-item online questionnaire.

Statistical Analysis

The OLS multiple regression was used to examine (1) a relationship between sex attitudes and perceptions of welfare mothers; (2) a relationship between marriage attitudes and perceptions of welfare mothers.

Other variables were included in regression models, such as gender, age, number of children, race, marital status, political party affiliation, and social work concentration.

RESULTS

As hypothesized:

- There was a positive relationship ($\beta = .287$, $p = .001$) between sex attitudes and perceptions of welfare mothers, holding all other variables constant (see Model A). This means that social work students with more liberal attitudes about sex had more favorable perceptions of welfare mothers.
- There was a positive relationship ($\beta = .311$, $p < .001$) between marriage attitudes and perceptions of welfare mothers, holding all other variables constant (see Model C). This implies that social work students with more liberal attitudes about marriage had more favorable perceptions of welfare mothers.

Other significant variables associated with perceptions of welfare mothers:

- Democrats had more favorable perceptions of welfare mothers than non-Democrats ($p < .01$), holding all other variables constant.
- Micro students had less favorable perceptions of welfare mothers than macro students ($p < .05$), holding all other variables constant.
- Never married students had less favorable perceptions of welfare mothers than ever married students ($p < .10$), holding all other variables constant.

Table 1. Sample Statistics

	Mean and Standard Deviation of Attitudes Toward		Sex
	Welfare Mothers	Marriage	
Total (n= 231)	2.65 (.63)	2.71 (.59)	3.68 (.83)
By Gender (100%)			
Female (88.3%)	2.64 (.61)	2.69 (.58)	3.72 (.80)
Male (11.7%)	2.68 (.77)	2.84 (.68)	3.40 (1.03)
By Marital Status (100%)			
Married (30.7%)	2.55 (.64)	2.83 (.66)	3.84 (.89)
Divorced/Separated/Widowed (19.8%)	2.64 (.63)	2.65 (.56)	3.75 (.84)
Never-Married (58.4%)	2.70 (.63)	2.66 (.55)	3.60 (.79)
By Race (100%)			
White (81.6%)	2.67 (.63)	2.67 (.58)	3.63 (.80)
Black (11.4%)	2.62 (.58)	3.00 (.60)	4.03 (.90)
Other (7.0%)	2.38 (.72)	2.67 (.59)	3.71 (.93)
By Political Affiliation (100%)			
Democrat (57.6%)	2.45 (.58)	2.55 (.50)	3.48 (.77)
Republican (11.8%)	3.05 (.64)	3.06 (.55)	4.22 (.71)
Independent/Other (30.6%)	2.94 (.59)	2.96 (.67)	3.63 (.87)
By Concentration of Study (100%)			
Micro (80.0%)	2.75 (.63)	2.71 (.58)	3.73 (.73)
Macro (20.0%)	2.48 (.56)	2.88 (.65)	3.52 (1.03)
By Number of Children (100%)			
No Child (69.3%)	2.66 (.63)	2.67 (.59)	3.61 (.84)
1-2 Children (19.0%)	2.58 (.68)	2.71 (.62)	3.79 (.81)
Three or More Children (11.7%)	2.66 (.56)	2.96 (.53)	3.97 (.78)
By "Have You Ever Been A Welfare Recipient?" (100%)			
No (74.5%)	2.64 (.62)	2.74 (.59)	3.65 (.83)
Yes (25.5%)	2.67 (.67)	2.74 (.60)	3.78 (.86)
By "Do You Know Someone Personally Who Is Was A Welfare Recipient?" (100%)			
No (16.5%)	2.63 (.60)	2.72 (.67)	3.71 (.93)
Yes (83.5%)	2.65 (.64)	2.71 (.58)	3.68 (.82)

Note: The high end of scale means 'conservative.' The low end of scale means 'liberal.'

Table 2. OLS Regression Model - Sex Attitudes

Independent Variables	Model A	Model B
	Beta (Sig.)	Beta (Sig.)
Sex attitudes mean	.287 (.001)	.251 (.003)
Democrat	-.286 (.001)	-.290 (.001)
Micro	-.167 (.038)	-.139 (.070)
Never married	-.180 (.069)	-.139 (.070)
Female	-.045 (.589)	-
Age	-.177 (.085)	-
White	.059 (.470)	-
No. of children	-.064 (.540)	-
Know welfare recipient	-.044 (.575)	-
Adjusted R ²	.231	.229
F-value	5.508 (.000)	11.118 (.000)

Table 3. OLS Regression Model - Marriage Attitudes

Independent Variables	Model C	Model D
	Beta (Sig.)	Beta (Sig.)
Marriage attitudes mean	.311 (.000)	.302 (.000)
Democrat	-.269 (.002)	-.278 (.001)
Micro	-.175 (.028)	-.159 (.034)
Never married	-.167 (.086)	-.130 (.081)
Female	.002 (.981)	-
Age	-.120 (.235)	-
White	.078 (.343)	-
No. of children	-.023 (.829)	-
Know welfare recipient	-.069 (.371)	-
Adjusted R ²	.248	.258
F-value	5.939 (.000)	12.806 (.000)

CONCLUSIONS

Major Findings

The study found that MSW students with conservative attitudes about sex had more negative perceptions of welfare mothers than students with liberal attitudes about sex.

The study also found that MSW students with conservative attitudes about marriage had more negative perceptions of welfare mothers than students with liberal attitudes about marriage.

Therefore, this study supports the hypothesis that the professional value system may be largely affected by the students' personal values brought from their backgrounds.

Implication

Social work education may need to counter students' negative stereotyping of certain service populations to help with developing professional values and ethics.

Future Research

Further research is needed to examine whether micro and macro students have different value systems based on varying backgrounds or different training in the social work program.

Future research is needed to explore how personal and professional values interact in practice.

Future research is needed to examine whether other helping professions have different patterns in the relationship between personal and professional value systems.

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