

Honors Capstone Critique

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Project Overview

My Honors Capstone study explored how newly graduated Master of Social Work (MSW) students adjusted to telehealth roles. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, telebehavioral health services became a common aspect of care, but many social workers were not properly educated on the topic. I conducted a mixed-methods survey to assess social workers' preparation and identify gaps in their education. Despite limited outreach, our data revealed that 71% of respondents felt inadequately prepared to practice telehealth. Participants reported a desire for additional training in technology use, client interaction, ethical considerations, and transferring in-person therapeutic practices to online settings. This research highlighted the need for advances in social work education to meet the increasing need for telebehavioral health services, particularly in rural communities.

Strengths

One of this project's primary advantages was its connection to a rising field of practice. The project fills a key gap in social work education by concentrating on an issue that has been exacerbated by the pandemic and is still evolving. The mixed-methods design revealed both statistical trends and firsthand experiences. Despite the limited sample size, strong trends appeared around training shortcomings and the need for continuous education, demonstrating the study's value and timeliness. Connecting the project to broader healthcare disciplines also expands its influence beyond social work.

Limitations

One major limitation of this study was the small sample size. Although we contacted approximately 90 recent graduates through their Radford email, only seven completed the

survey, largely due to IRB restrictions that prevented further email outreach. Another drawback is that the sample was limited to individuals who graduated from Radford University, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to MSW programs at other institutions. Lastly, because the study relied on self-reporting, the answers are based on perceived preparedness rather than objective measures of skill or competency.

Context in Recent Literature

This project expands on existing research around the obstacles and benefits of telehealth in social work. Geller (2021) emphasizes the importance of therapists having a strong presence during online sessions and offers practical advice, such as maintaining a consistent workstation, which is related to the findings in my study. Hilty et al. (2023) investigate how technology affects the well-being of social workers, highlighting both the benefits of stronger relationships and the risks of burnout, which reinforces my findings about the need for more support and training. Jiang et al. (2024) analyze recent telemental health training programs and recommend increased consistency throughout the profession, which my project also found to be required to properly prepare social workers for telehealth practice.

Additional Personal Reflection

I had the privilege of presenting this research at the 2025 BPD conference in Las Vegas and had an unreal and rewarding experience. I was provided with a chance to highlight a topic that means so much to me, especially with roots in a small rural community in North Carolina, where these services might be particularly beneficial. For instance, many individuals in my community have no access to mental health services due to transportation, cost, and internet access issues. My community is in the northwestern part of the state, and people must drive an

hour or more to receive the necessary care. At the conference, I channeled the heartbreaking nature of these issues and presented the topic with them in mind.

I met students from all over the country with similar or opposite experiences. I was fortunate to see research projects on food insecurity, DEI issues, and countless other important topics. However, I particularly enjoyed seeing the passion in every corner of the room. I am grateful Radford was able to provide this opportunity because I am certain I would not have been able to fly and have the courage to present my topic. Through support from the honors college and the school of social work, in addition to the monetary support from OURS, I learned what it feels like to represent my hometown and university around some of the most educated students and successful educators in the country. I would recommend that students from all departments take advantage of similar opportunities and represent their school and community with pride.

References

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- Jiang, Q., Deng, Y., Perle, J., Zheng, W., Chandran, D., Chen, J., & Liu, F. (2024). Education and training of telemental health providers: a systematic review. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 12, 1385532.