The Innovative Integration of SBIRT raining Using Standardized Clients and Computer Simulation in Social Work Education

Sheri Boyle

Rosalie Smiley California University of Pennsylvania

Thao Pham

Rosalie Smiley California University of Pennsylvania

Abstract

Through a Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) grant from NORC and the Conrad Hilton Foundation, the Department of Social Work at California University of Pennsylvania (Cal U) integrated SBIRT throughout the social work curriculum. A combination of computer simulation and standardized clients was developed to evaluate students' skills in assessing for substance misuse and engaging with clients. Along with the development of students' skills with assessment, motivational interviewing and active listening were an unintended outcome of student activism. Students, drawing from their new knowledge, training, and experiences, organized advocacy events on campus to promote awareness of the opioid epidemic impact on surrounding rural communities.

Keywords: SBIRT, social work students, advocacy, social work education

Introduction

The common teaching format of social work education in the United States consists of traditional lectures, face-to-face role-playing, video viewing, and field practicum and internships. Recently, social work schools have incorporated simulated client practice in their curriculum. Simulated training has been used in medical and health training for decades. Oftentimes, simulated patients are actors drawn from the community who have been trained to act and respond as everyday patients would in given situations. The benefits of simulated patients have been well-documented in various studies (Tofil, et. al, 2010; Wang, et. al., 2013; Williams, et al., 2016). Recently, medical schools have also found tremendous benefits in using computerized simulation to help train students (Abas and Juma, 2016). However, simulated training alone does not support long-term learning outcomes (Kohl and Dubrowski, 2016). Accordingly, this project granted CalU Department of Social Work the opportunity to combine the traditional curriculum of social work training using both real-life simulated clients and computerized simulation. The results have been not only positive but also transformative.

Background

The opioid epidemic has plagued the United States with crippling addiction and exponential death rates for over a decade. Pennsylvania (PA) is one of 20 states in the United States of America to experience a statistically significant increase in overdose deaths from 2016-2017. PA ranks third in the highest rates of death due to drug overdose (44.3 per 100,000) (CDC, 2018)1. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the University of Pittsburgh recently released a report titled "The Opioid Threat in Pennsylvania," providing up to date information for every PA county. In the communities that surround CAL U, overdose deaths have increased significantly over the past two years and many of the highest overdose rates in the country occur within this region. In 2017, the national average of overdose deaths was 21.7 per 100,000 people; every county within our area of focus has double this rate. Allegheny County experienced 49 overdose deaths per 100,000 people, Fayette County experienced 44 overdose deaths per 100,000 people, Greene County experienced 41 overdose deaths per 100,000 people, Washington County experienced 44 overdose deaths per 100,000 and Westmoreland County experienced 46 overdose deaths per 100,000 people. From 2015-2017 overdose deaths increased 74% in Allegheny County, 88% in Fayette County, 33% in Washington County, and 53% in Westmoreland County. These counties also rank

4th, 10th, 9th, and 8th respectively out of 67 counties in overdose deaths statewide. Though Greene county saw a 7% decrease in drug overdose deaths during this time, it still ranks 12th statewide.

California Borough, home to CalU and the basis of this project, is a fine example of community life in Northern Appalachia. It is a small town with a mixture of both rural and industrial in character. Its total population 6,795 (U.S. Census Quick Facts, 2018) is less than the total enrollment at the University. Sited on flat land at the edge of the Monongahela River, its one stoplight illuminates a historical marker named not for a member of the economic elite, but instead for a leader of laborers. Joseph "Jock" Yablonski, a resident of California, was well known for his leadership and commitment to and on behalf of miners through the United Mine Workers Union (UMW).

Of recent concern, to not only the nation but also counties close to the University, like Washington, Fayette, and Westmoreland, is the opioid crisis. In August 2015, Washington County made headline news in the Washington Post for eight overdoses in 70 minutes. In a recent report by the University of Pittsburgh in conjunction with the US District Attorney Western Division, David Hickton, Washington County was cited as having the highest accidental poisoning deaths for white females between 25-34 years of age (University of Pittsburgh, 2016) This report also highlights the opioid crisis is as much a rural issue as an urban issue.

Cal U is in a rural region, where area providers have limited financing options and are more dependent upon government programs for funding (such as Medicare and Medicaid). Given the characteristics of the population in this rural area, it is not surprising that these counties include medically underserved areas and places that lack access to health care professionals, including behavioral and mental health care professionals. The at-risk populations of the surrounding areas exacerbate these problems. Two of the four counties near Cal U, Greene and Fayette, currently have the highest death rates for drug overdose cases in Pennsylvania (PA). With PA having an increase of 89 percent of drug-related deaths since 1999, the need to train social work and counseling students to address substance abuse in our community is critical.

SBIRT Grant

This epidemic in the University's backyard prompted faculty to apply for an SBIRT grant to prepare BSW and MSW students to assess and intervene with individuals, families, and communities affected by the opioid crisis. CalU's Social Work Department received a seed grant from NORC/Conrad Hilton Foundation to infuse SBIRT with Adolescents into the Master Social Work (MSW) and Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) curricula in spring 2016. At that time, Cal U Social Work Department had 217 students, of which 120 were undergraduates and 97 were graduates. Undergraduates' ages ranged from 18 to 56, and graduate students' ages range from 22 to 54. Ninety percent of BSW students were female, and ten percent are male. Eighty-five percent of MSW students were female, and fifteen percent were male. Aside from the international students, who matriculated from the Middle East and Africa, the racial/ethnic compositions of the students reflected our surrounding rural communities. This composition of students was approximately 65% White (non-Hispanic), 17% African-Americans, 1% Asian American/Other Asian, and 17% Other (Multiple Race/Ethnicity or Unknown).

Although two of the thirty-six courses in the Social Work Department focus on substance abuse and addiction, the social work curriculum at Cal U needed to expand this topic more depth. For example, the substance abuse courses were offered as electives and students would use role-playing to practice case scenarios. In fact, aside from the field practicum, the majority of in-class practice for students is role-playing. The seed money from NORC, University of Chicago and Conrad Hilton Foundation not only provided funding to begin infusing the Adolescent SBIRT in the curriculum but also added more dynamic and robust tools for teaching and training students in the classrooms by adding a computer-simulated training (KOGNITO) along with the use of standardized clients to train social work students on SBIRT. Kognito is an interactive role simulation where health professionals build and assess their skills in conducting substance use Screening and Brief Intervention with adolescent populations and providing referrals to treatment where appropriate.

The goals of the grant program were: to infuse SBIRT content in the social work programs; improve the provision of SBIRT and mental/behavioral health referrals and services available to youth and adults; and create a strong network of service providers that are better able to address the needs of adults and youth at-risk of substance abuse. Goals were met by the Department through the infusion of SBIRT in our BSW and MSW foundation and MSW specialization courses. Additionally, the MSW Department hosted continuing education programs for the community on SBIRT and substance misuse topics with the Washington County Drug and Alcohol task force and other related programs and departments on campus. The

Social Work Department is currently working on collaborating with a large social service agency to train social workers and other professionals who work with children and adolescents on SBIRT.

METHODS

Cal U's, Department of Social Work implemented SBIRT through traditional and online teaching formats. Our MSW students' area of expertise is Advanced Generalist with a Rural Social Work focus; however, our students are not circumscribed by this focus and have found employment in metropolitan areas. Students in the MSW Foundation practice courses, advanced practice courses, and Differential Assessment received classroom lectures and reading on SBIRT and substance misuse, as well as, completed the online Kognito computer simulated training along with standardized clients. Standardized clients are a teaching technique more often used in medical and nursing school and less often in social work education (Sacco, Ting, Crouch, Emery, et al., 2017; Osborne, Brenner & Sprague, 2017). In order to enhance training for both BSW and MSW students, BSW and MSW students were recruited as simulated clients for the different programs. The BSW students acted as clients for the MSW program and the MSW students acted as clients for the BSW program. All students were required to go through the Kognito prior to their training and preparation by MSW faculty to be the simulated client as well as debriefed after the sessions.

With the implementation of Adolescent SBIRT, we enhanced knowledge of substance abuse; provided new practice for our students, field supervisors, and faculty; provided a new plan in addressing an important social problem; and enriched our skills lab by adding the computer simulated training of Kognito with our current use of standardized patients. We also uploaded the recordings in our skills lab using Adolescent SBIRT to our website for further training and education and to increase the awareness and exposure of the project.

RESULTS

In one year, overall 423 BSW and MSW students were introduced to SBIRT through classroom instruction, KOGNITO simulated computer training and/or simulated standardized clients. Table 1 describes how SBIRT was integrated into the curriculum. In addition, all thirteen full-time faculty (five BSW, seven MSW and one Field Coordinator) and five part- time faculty were trained. Nine faculty members also serve as Faculty Field Advisors (FFA). We trained 48 of our Field Placement Supervisors (MSWs) in the community.

Table 1.

Name of Course	Program Level	Course Setting	Actual Number of students trained	Educational Activity or Content Covered	Evaluation: Competencies Assessed/Measures Used	Additional Notes/ Comments
Generalist Practice	Masters	Traditional	53	SBI & Motivational Interviewing; practice with Kognito	Kognito scoring, final exam with content on SBI	Course completed with students trained in Kognito with post scores 75% and above.
Field Practicum I	Masters	Internship	34	Practice SBI with clients in the field; practice with Kognito	Progress notes, field supervisory reports, rating of competencies	9 students Completed practicum; found SBIRT useful; 13 students are currently in progress for the Spring semester since this is a yearlong course.
Differential Assessment (Advanced Practicum)	Masters	Traditional	71	Substance Abuse and SBIRT training with Modules 1-4 & Kognito	Practice with Kognito and standardized client; instructor and peer evaluation of simulated interviews in class	33 students completed standardized clients practice using SBIRT for the final exam. All scored 85% and above. Two students dropped the course.

Practice with Children and Youth	Masters	Traditional	96	2 sessions/6-hr lecture (Risky behaviors, substance use, CRAFFT, SBI video demo)	Practice with Kognito	22 MSW students completed this online course with lectures on SBIRT and practice with Kognito.
Substance Abuse (Elective)	Masters	Traditional	75	5 sessions/3-hr lecture per session on substance abuse, motivational interviewing, SBI with youth	Online lectures; reflection papers; case studies with discussion	Course was changed to online. 25 students completed coursework on youth and addiction and KOGNITO was given extra credit for those who have not completed it.
BSW Field Education (Practicum Seminar, Capstone)	Bachelors	Internship	44	Learner's Guide Module 1&2	Pre-/post-tests; practice with Kognito	18 students completed training with Kognito
Family Practice	Bachelors	Traditional	30	lecture on youth substance use; motivational interviewing practice	Role play in class; practice with Kognito	15 students completed training this semester.
Field Practicum II	Masters	Internship	20	Students placed in educational plan	Supervisors will evaluate students	20 have completed; 20 more in progress this semester and the next. This is a yearlong course.

Findings

Results of assessment of Differential Assessment the year of the grant indicated that 61% of students achieved mastery of knowledge and skills in Engaging and Assessing clients; and 12% of the students achieved accomplished.

The original integration of the computerized simulation of SBIRT provided students with training and practice that they could not have had in the traditional lecture format with role plays. The computer simulation gave students opportunities to apply their knowledge with computerized clients and was critiqued and encouraged by computerized coaches and trainers along the way. Students who received SBIRT training reported:

"SBIRT was such a wonderful learning experience because it assisted me with improving my ability to assess clients. It was helpful taking on the roles of both the client and the social worker. I enjoyed reviewing the scripts and scenarios and I remember all of the laughs when we were all getting into character. We were provided with the opportunity to give and receive constructive criticism, which was extremely helpful, as well. Overall, it was fun and it was an experience that I will always remember. "

'My experience as a Standardized Client for students in the Masters of Social Work Program has been eye-opening and enriching to my own education in the Bachelors of Social Work Program and career development. Gaining empathy-evoking experiences around issues of drugs and alcohol, especially in younger populations, has already proven to be crucial as a Mentor for a non-profit-conducted After-School Program. The practice and feedback that Masters students receive through these simulations has granted necessary and valuable opportunities for young social workers to put their knowledge and skills to the test before stepping into the real world with real clients."

"I enjoyed the SBIRT experience. I found it very helpful in terms of motivational interviewing and how to reframe questions or responses to make them more strength based. I remember the number scale when if you asked someone where they were on a 1-10 if they respond 3 you say great that's good you are at a 3 versus something like why aren't you a 7. I found those the most helpful."

The SBIRT training in the BSW and MSW programs provided a unique opportunity for students to practice and demonstrate many of the Council on Social Work Educations' (CSWE) competencies. This included Research Informed Practice and Practice-Informed Research, as well as, Assessing, Engaging, Intervening and Evaluating practice with Individuals, Groups, Families, and Communities and most interestingly Advance Human Rights, Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice.

An unintended outcome of the research was BSW student's reaction to serving as standardized patients and their ability to integrate policy and practice.

Social Work Student Advocacy

The unintended consequence of the SBIRT grant was the conscious-raising and the student advocacy that resulted from learning about SBIRT and taking on the roles of clients. The process is similar to the Paulo Freire's *conscientization* or the process of awakening or opening awareness of a person to be more sensitive to social, political, and economic conditions in the environment (Freire, 1993). Although we did not use a collaborative teaching format with the SBIRT curriculum, we quickly embraced an intentional collaborative learning approach with our students when they approached us about being affected by what they had learned about the opioid crisis in our region and how SBIRT had made them aware that people do not discuss substance use and abuse enough in their communities. The incorporation of Freire's theory into social work research practice entails facilitating and actively listening to the community to understand their needs and collaborate with community members on finding ways to meet those needs, resolve problems, and foster growth (Branom, 2012; D'Cruz, Gillingham, and Melendez, 2007; Pham, 2016; Sachs J. , 1992; Sachs and Newdom, 1999). The community in our case included our social work students.

During a time when some BSW students were role-playing with MSW students in the use of SBIRT, the death of a fellow student gave rise to an impassioned desire to reduce the stigma that is too often associated with opioid use and overdose. This lead to students organizing one week of events on campus designed to educate and empower students to address issues relating to the opioid epidemic and overdose awareness and focus on the impact of substance use. Students organized and collaborated with social work faculty, university administrators and community leaders to present various events.

The students focused on the events designed to advocate for awareness of the effects of the opioid crisis in rural populations and to promote a reduction of stigma around this topic (Drake, 2018). These students, focusing on the dignity and worth of individuals and the implementation of empathy among the student body, made use of resources provided through the Bachelor of Social Work Association (BSWA) student organization to host a campus-wide candlelight vigil, panel discussion, and lunch and learn presentation.

A brown bag luncheon included a student presentation of information about addiction, opioid use, treatment options, and local, state, and federal statistics regarding the impact of the opioid epidemic. The candlelight vigil allowed individuals to acknowledge, honor and celebrate the lives of those most dramatically affected by the opioid crisis and to share a dialogue about International Overdose Awareness Day (Harm Reduction Coalition, 2018).

"The Impact of Opioid Use in the Rural Communities" was the subject of a panel discussion among professionals in the substance use arena and covered topics including program development, stigma, the use of suboxone in treatment, and availability of Narcan and Naloxone on campus (Harm Reduction Coalition, 2018, Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, 2018). The Centers of Excellence, Harm Reduction Coalition, and campus Counseling Center are some of the resources available for addressing the need for accessible services regarding opioid use. Additional opportunities have been provided on campus to learn about Naloxone, its availability, and how to use it to prevent overdose fatality have been offered, at no cost, to students, faculty and staff members of the university.

Conclusion

Through the SBIRT grant, CalU's Social Work Department has been able to increase student's knowledge of substance misuse, enhance student's intervention skills and change attitudes. Along with the traditional teaching format, simulated client training, and the computerized simulation, social work students acquired the knowledge and skills to screen, briefly intervene, and refer clients for treatment for substance misuse and abuse. What was not anticipated in this educational process, was the advocacy and leadership role that the students took.

With the support and encouragement of faculty, the social work department, counseling center, and campus drug and alcohol facilities, students were able to achieve their aim, as the message of advocacy and empathy reached many

individuals through this series of events. The BSWA leadership received verbal feedback and positive recognition about the events from members of the Panel, fellow BSW students, and social work professors.

They are hopeful the next leaders will carry on this tradition and continue to make substance misuse a priority for the organization.

The SBIRT grant did more than prepare students for clinical practice, it also prepared students for leadership roles and advocacy.

The collaborative project with social work students raised awareness of the opioid epidemic in our communities and provided leadership and service-learning experiences for our students.

It is unfortunate that Paulo Freire's theory of practice has not been widely known in social work curriculum in the United States (Hegar, 2012).

This combination of practice and advocacy has created a unique teaching-learning experience.

It is the combined experiences both inside and outside the classroom that are essential for quality education (Spicuzza, 2003). It is this type of experience and education that will better prepare social work students for leadership and advocacy.

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