

PREPARATION FOR PRACTICE: A SURVEY OF SOCIAL WORKERS'  
PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THEIR GRADUATE CURRICULUM  
FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION/MEDIATION PRACTICE

by

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## Abstract

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Advisor: Professor Michael J. Smith, D.S.W.

This study investigated the perceptions of social work mediators about the effectiveness of their graduate curriculum for conflict resolution/mediation practice. The study is based on a sample of 78 social work mediators from various regions in the United States. The respondents completed a questionnaire on curricula items, education, training and professional practice. The median age of participants was 46.0. The research questions related to gaps in the curriculum and knowledge, skills, and abilities required for practicing conflict resolution/mediation; additional training/education required to achieve competency; and whether the tasks of conflict resolution/mediation are viewed as generalist social work tasks or specialist conflict resolution tasks. Findings revealed that upon completion of their graduate social work education, the majority of the participants (89.7%,  $n=69$ ) did not feel they were prepared to practice conflict resolution/mediation without additional training. Participants completed basic mediation training in a variety of settings and continued training in advanced specialty areas. Advanced training specializations reflect similar areas of social work practice: divorce, child custody, family, children and youth, education/school, workplace and forensics. The competency scale

addressed the knowledge/skills/abilities issue of generalist vs. specialist. An unexpected finding was that 32 of 38 listed competencies, at some level, were thought to be generic skills for all social workers for a total of 86%. Correlation data revealed no relationships between a number of the socio-demographic variables and the preparation for conflict resolution/mediation practice. However, some relationships were found with specific curricula and competency areas. To conclude, the study revealed that social workers' perceptions of their graduate school curriculum did not prepare them for conflict resolution/mediation practice. Although they received the foundation for conflict resolution/mediation practice in their social work program, they gained the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities through a variety of conflict resolution/mediation training programs over a period of time. Social work mediators selected a large number of competencies that are identified as more conflict resolution/mediation specific as skills required for generalist social workers. Therefore, additional research is necessary to understand if this is a professional bias of social work mediators or consistent with the perceptions of a generalist social worker.

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Growing up and experiencing conflict in family and workplace situations led me to believe there must be a better way. Eventually, I became involved with a conflict resolution/mediation certificate program that helped me to develop a new set of skills for resolving conflict in a variety of settings. These skills were a natural extension of my social work training. Armed with a new set of skills I was eager to put them into practice. I have been most fortunate to be living in a long and healthy marriage – a relationship that has spanned 40 years – built on good communication, mutual respect, dedication, commitment and a little bit of playfulness. However, Peter has not provided the opportunity for me to develop my conflict resolution skills further. This was not always the case in other environments. Therefore, they became a foundation for practice in the workplace. Strategies were shared and utilized which allowed for a less stressful personal work environment and the opportunity to share these skills with my students as they enter the workplace.

Finally, I want to thank my committee who coached me gently and firmly to complete the work. Professor Michael J. Smith, D.S.W., the chair of my dissertation committee, read what seemed to be endless drafts, and provided timely and valuable feedback and direction until this dissertation was completed. To the other members of my committee, Professors Burghardt and Vigilante, I express my appreciation for their suggestions in my dissertation proposal and for their ongoing support. Special thanks go to all practitioners – the social work mediators – who agreed to participate in this dissertation study and provided their insights and expertise.

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## Chapter One

### Problem Statement

#### *Introduction*

Social workers routinely work in under-funded institutions taking on society's most difficult problems. They function at the nexus of disputes, dealing with competing human values, and are forced to play multiple roles – i.e. counselor, protector, investigator, enforcer, and mediator. It is the role of social worker as mediator that suggests an exploration of the need for the inclusion of conflict resolution/mediation education into the social work curriculum.

Conflict is a natural and common phenomenon in social interaction. Over the past few decades, conflict resolution methods have surfaced in a number of disciplines, including social work. Effectively resolving disputes requires a client-centered mindset, an interest-based approach, and a thorough understanding of options and their appropriateness to both the client and the dispute. Conflict/dispute resolution involves a number of methods and, depending on the situation and the individual clients, certain methods may be more effective. The method that appears most consistently in social work is mediation. In the mediation process, clients are involved in resolving their own disputes with the assistance of a third-party neutral. Through this method, clients take ownership for the resolution, and not only become empowered, but also are more likely to trust and use the process with confidence. Conflict resolution and mediation strategies are visible in a number of areas in social work and the human services particularly

marriage and the family, divorce, child protection, adoption, healthcare, education, criminal justice and the workplace.

Conflict resolution as a field of practice has been identified as underdeveloped in social work (Keefe & Koch, 1999). In their roles as advocates for clients, dealing with conflict within organizations or helping clients to learn more effective ways of coping with conflict in their lives, social workers are dealing with conflict on a daily basis. Social workers may be engaged in conflict resolution/mediation as part of their generalist practice or as a specialist in the field.

Different types of conflict management are discussed as social work roles, yet there are few opportunities in the social work curriculum for students to explore the theoretical basis for a conflict resolution approach or to gain experience in how to put a comprehensive set of techniques into practice. Aside from generalized statements about the role social workers play as mediators, social work education and social work theory did not embrace the field of conflict resolution until recently (Mayer, 1995). However, social work involvement in mediation is not new as the role of social worker is often seen as that of a mediator (Parsons, 1991) and social workers already possess much of the desired knowledge and many skills to be effective mediators. Although the practice of mediation has been utilized in social work, it is now more clearly defined as a separate practice area requiring an enhanced knowledge base. Studies in mediation have found that “the knowledge and skill base of social work is compatible with and complementary to the requirements for mediation practice” (Gibelman and Demone, 1989, p. 36). Chetkow-Yanoov (1991) emphasized that conflict resolution and skills in mediation have

been increasingly important for social work education and it has been suggested that social workers would be better prepared to practice mediation with formal preparation.

While some social workers identify themselves and serve as mediators, there are a number of questions that surface. Are social workers prepared to manage conflict/facilitate mediation in their practice? What training is required? Is this accomplished in the graduate social work curriculum? Do social workers believe they have the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to include conflict resolution/mediation as part of their practice when they obtain their MSW?

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) recognized mediation as a field of professional practice and with the introduction of the Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators in 1991 (NASW), there was a rise in articles on this topic published in social work journals. The role of social work mediators described in the NASW Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators is as follows:

The mediator is responsible to the system of people or groups involved in a decision-making process. The mediator must provide this system with the structure and tools to make mutually acceptable decisions under difficult circumstances. In this sense, the mediator's role is to empower the system so that it does not have to resort to outside parties, such as the courts or arbitrators, to make the decision (1991).

In recent years, the responsibility for conflict resolution/mediation has increasingly become a function of social workers. The literature indicates that social workers have been actively utilizing conflict resolution strategies, particularly mediation, across social work practice areas. Divorce/custody mediation is one of the most widely practiced types of mediation services offered by social workers (Grebe, 1986; Saunders, 1994; Severson & Bankston, 1995; Barksy, 1999; Mackey & O'Brien, 1998; Cohen, Luxenburg, Dattner &

Matz, 1999). Mediation also has played a major role in social work with families and child welfare working with adoption, runaways, child protection, and permanency planning (Simpson, Corlyon, McCarthy & Walker, 1990; Kilpatrick & Zhang, 1993; Bagshaw, 1995; Kilpatrick & Zhang, 1993; Morrisette, 1997; Ashford & Faith, 2004; Flynn, 2005).

Another area where social workers have primary responsibility is mediation in the schools (Moriarty & McDonald, 1991; Moriarty, Mansfield & Leverence, 1992; Tolson, McDonald & Moriarty, 1992; Schmitz, 1994; Weir, 1995; Williamson, Warner, Sanders & Knepper, 1999; Woody, 2001; Fast, Fanelli, & Salen, 2003). Social workers have also been involved with healthcare, particularly managed care issues (Strom-Gottfried, 1998). Mediation has also been an effective strategy as social workers become more involved with forensic work, nonviolent criminal or civil offenses – victim-offender restitution (Umbreit, 1991, 1993, 1994; Severson & Bankston, 1995).

As social workers continue to deal with conflicts in practically all areas of practice, oftentimes without any specialized conflict/mediation training, a question is raised as to whether there is a need for the inclusion of conflict resolution/mediation education in the social work curriculum. While social work education programs assume a leadership role within the profession by offering curricula that are at the forefront of new and changing knowledge base of social work and its supporting disciplines (Council on Social Work Education, 2001), the curriculum does not routinely incorporate an opportunity for learning conflict/dispute resolution methods in either the baccalaureate or master level programs (Sanchirico, 2000).

Social work education should evolve toward preparing practitioners for new practice areas. One of social work's missions is assisting individuals in reaching their full potential. These life skills include problem solving, decision-making, and conflict resolution. In order to determine whether it is necessary to design and implement appropriate and meaningful educational courses or workshops on any topic, it is essential to know the perceived knowledge and skills of the participants the classes/workshops are intended to impact.

### *Statement of the Research*

The purpose of this study was to explore social workers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their professional education on their knowledge, skills, and abilities to practice conflict resolution/mediation. The study also describes an assessment of participant exposure to various skills and curricular topics. The study was designed to survey social workers who include conflict resolution/mediation as part of their practice; in effect, an expert opinion survey. The dictionary definition of an expert is "a person who is very knowledgeable about or skillful in a particular area" (Soanes & Stevenson, 2003). Experts provide an accessible source of information that can be quickly harnessed to gain information. They can provide knowledge when more traditional research has not been undertaken. This ensures high content, face-to-face and concurrent validity (Beech, 2001). The expert is viewed as a specialist in the field, someone who has knowledge about a specific subject. Areas of exploration included percentage of practice, advanced training, and specific fields of mediation practice. The study identifies who these conflict resolution specialists are based on their demographics. The socio-demographic variables examined

were age, gender, ethnicity, geographic locations of education, type of school, method of concentration, areas of specialization/practice, type of MSW program, year of completion, and highest degree received.

The questions that guided this research were: 1) is there a gap between what is taught in the graduate curriculum and the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to practice conflict resolution/mediation; and 2) what additional training/education is required to achieve competency in conflict resolution/mediation; and 3) are the tasks of conflict resolution/mediation viewed as generalist social work tasks or specialist conflict resolution tasks.

### *Conceptual/Theoretical Framework*

The body of knowledge about social workers and education in conflict resolution/mediation is limited and the studies reviewed do not clearly delineate a theoretical framework. Most articles are descriptive and exploratory in nature. In addition, mediation has been described as “a practice in search of a theory. It has its foundations in several disciplinary areas and it has yet to develop its own explanatory theories” (Boulle, 1996, p. 1). Of the many sociological and psychological theories, models and perspectives that are visible in social work, a number have application to mediation. Many models of social work practice – ecological, systems, generalist, task-centered, and problem-solving approaches – engender concepts such as conflict advocacy and mediation. Systems theory has been used as a theoretical base for social work practice but does not always take into account the power and value differences that exist between groups and systems – a critical component of mediation practice. Practice theory/

practice wisdom as it applies to both social work and conflict resolution/mediation practice is viewed based on contemporary understanding that a profession influences practice. Practice theory incorporates the knowledge and concepts with the specific techniques and skills required for application. The literature suggests that different approaches are displayed within the context of the mediation setting. The section on theoretical framework found in the literature review expands on this topic.

### *Relationship of the Research Question to Social Work*

Knowledge about social workers' preparation for practice in the field of conflict resolution/mediation is important. Increasingly, social workers have assumed the formal role as mediator in a variety of fields of social work practice, including health, aging, child and family, criminal justice, and education. They view themselves as being able to help individuals or groups resolve their own disputes in a collaborative and constructive manner. For example, a divorcing couple experiencing a custody conflict may be convinced that mediation is a better and viable option; in a community setting the social worker may handle tenant/landlord and parent/teenager disputes, school-based conflicts, child welfare and health care negotiations, and victim-offender mediations. Mediation is a beneficial alternative because it empowers clients and promotes recognition or understanding between parties involved in a conflict (Bush and Folger, 1994). The question as to whether graduate programs are adequately preparing social workers to manage conflict in order to advance the interests of clients and to promote social change remains unanswered. Many social workers incorporate components of mediation as part

of their generalist practice. However, the social workers who practice conflict resolution/mediation as an integral part of their practice often seek additional training.

Therefore, a study collecting data on social workers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their graduate curriculum for conflict resolution/mediation practice is important to schools of social work. The social work profession needs to pay attention to new and growing practice areas and the literature shows that the use of conflict resolution techniques has been increasing in social work practice. Data collection from social workers who have an interest in conflict resolution/mediation, and/or have undergone conflict training, and/or are practicing mediators provides information about their graduate school preparation and advanced training. Specific practice areas as to where they have integrated the new skills into their practice are explored.

Conducting a study on this topic is important because there is a lack of information from social workers themselves on their own perceptions of their education and how their education has affected their skills and involvement in conflict resolution/mediation practice. By tapping into a network of experts, it can be determined whether education/training is viewed as a fundamental component of general social work practice or should be considered an area for ongoing professional development and therefore, not integrated into the generalist curriculum. Social work education must prepare the student with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to respond to various levels of concern in micro, mezzo or macro practice and be prepared to change with the demands of practice.

Social workers are involved in conflict resolution/mediation on all levels. On the micro level, social workers are involved in direct practice with individuals and families dealing with personal and family conflicts utilizing their counseling skills – developing helping relationships, assessing and diagnosing complaints, promoting exploration and understanding, and designing and implementing action plans. On the mezzo and macro levels, social workers are involved with small groups, agency issues, administration, social planning and policy, research, supervision and training of other social workers or an organization's volunteers, grassroots organizing, development, community actions, and management of programs sponsored by local, state and federal organizations. They utilize a wide range of social work methods in various fields of practice particularly aging, child and family, criminal justice, and education. This study provides an opportunity to assess social work education and the demands of practice, specifically as current education/training prepares social workers to manage conflict.

### *Organization of the Study*

This study is arranged in five chapters. Chapter One introduces the issue to be explored in this study. The purpose of the study and the research questions are provided as well as the significance of the study to the field of social work. Chapter Two, a review of the literature, provides the reader with a brief overview of the history of the field of conflict resolution, definitions of conflict resolution strategies as the context for this study, and then situates it in the field of social work. It discusses the theoretical framework and highlights practice areas where social workers function as mediators, supervise mediation or suggest that mediation is a viable method of practice. Literature

is organized into practice areas whenever possible. The literature review also touches on articles that address curriculum enhancements in social work programs for future reference. Chapter Three presents the research methodology, the design of the project and discussion of the sample selection techniques, data collection procedures, management and storage. The results of the study will be reported in Chapter Four while Chapter Five will provide a discussion of the results and recommendations for future practice and research.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

#### *Introduction*

It is important to situate this study in the broader history of conflict resolution and mediation practice. A discipline is generally considered a body of knowledge that distinguishes one's view of the world from other views. Most disciplines include a specialized body of knowledge to be mastered, accepted theories/models, research protocols, application of disciplinary knowledge to societal problems, established journals, professional associations and licensing in some cases. Conflict resolution is similar to social work in that it also draws from various disciplines. It is this reason that it is important to highlight its growth as an interdisciplinary field.

The literature review provides the reader with a brief overview of the history of the field of conflict resolution, definitions of conflict resolution strategies, and then situates it in the field of social work. It discusses the theoretical framework and highlights practice areas where social workers function as mediators, supervise mediation or suggest that mediation is a viable method of practice. The literature is organized into practice areas. Based on the results of the study, the need for new or enhanced social work curriculum may be indicated. Therefore, the literature review also touched on articles that address curriculum enhancements in social work programs for future reference. The literature review concludes with a summary and critique and the research question generated from the review.

### *The Field of Conflict Resolution – A Brief Historical Overview and Key Definitions*

This section will discuss five areas. The first will be a brief historical overview of the field of conflict resolution. The second will provide information about the growth of conflict resolution as an interdisciplinary field. The third will touch on the movement of conflict resolution from an academic environment to community practice. The fourth will provide definitions of conflict resolution methods that are currently in practice. The final area will provide a general overview of conflict resolution/mediation in social work practice. It provides a brief historical perspective, touching on various social work theories and a discussion of mediation in social work. The role of social work mediators as described in the NASW Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators is provided.

#### *Historical Overview*

Conflict exists in every personal or professional relationship. Conflict is unavoidable and is a natural and very typical phenomenon in every type of human relationship, at every level: from intrapersonal – the realm of psychology and social work – to international. One of the popular definitions of conflict, offered by Coser (1967), asserts that conflict is "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate the rivals." His definition grew out of the cold war period where conflict between the U.S. and the former U.S.S.R. dominated Western cultural approaches to conflict. With this mindset, conflict was win-lose. Today, conflict is more observable in every facet of society, and with that in mind, comes a need to improve our planning so that conflict can be better managed when it does arise and approach a win-win mindset. Moore (1986)

offers a more contemporary definition: “conflicts involve struggles between two or more people over values, or competition for status, power and scarce resources.”

Throughout most of classical and modern history, conflict had been regarded as innate to human nature and potentially prevalent in all systems. Conflict resolution has its roots in the fields of peace research and non-violence movements. Regardless of its disciplinary status, the field of conflict studies can be traced back to World War I. A group of scholars and practitioners responded to the war with efforts to try to prevent a recurrence of worldwide, violent conflict. Scholars from various fields began to apply scientific methods to investigate the causes and processes of conflict and tried to develop ways to avoid conflict escalation and its destructive results (Burgess & Burgess, 1997). After World War II, research efforts became more intense.

The development of the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* in 1957 (Boulding, 1989) was only a beginning. In 1959, the Center for Research on Conflict Resolution was established at the University of Michigan to serve as a clearinghouse for scholars engaged in research relevant to conflict resolution. Due to institutional constraints including competition between departments for resources, a strong teaching program in conflict resolution could never materialize and to this day, still struggles on many campuses for an individual identity (Harty & Modell, 1991).

Some of the individuals who have contributed strategically to the development of the theory and practice of conflict resolution include Mahatma Gandhi, Kenneth Boulding, Johan Galtung, and John Burton (Bondurant, 1958; deReuck & Knight, 1966; Boulding, 1989; Galtung, 1989). Mahatma Gandhi was the leader of India’s nonviolent struggle for

independence from the British and is viewed by many as the father of the modern nonviolent movement. The method behind his practice of nonviolence was powerful in obtaining his demands without escalating the conflict. One of Kenneth Boulding's primary contributions was to the history of peace and tried to improve the understanding of peace as a positive process, not merely as the absence of war. An advocate for a positive notion of peace, Johan Galtung, suggested that peace be conceptualized as a presence of the right to self-determination, identity, security and justice. He founded and directed the International Peace Research Institute and founded the *Journal of Peace Research*. John Burton has written extensively on international relations and conflict resolution topics for almost 50 years. He is a proponent of human needs theory – a theory of conflict that argues that most deep-rooted conflicts are caused by the denial of one or more fundamental human needs – security, identity, and recognition. (Burgess & Burgess, 1997).

Among the individuals who have carried the subject forward are Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Elise Boulding (Wiberg, 1988). Dr. Elise Boulding, sociologist, peace activist and researcher, has been working in these fields for over 50 years. She helped found the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), the Consortium on Peace Research, Education, and Development (COPRED), and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). Dr. Boulding was instrumental in developing global peace-building programs within the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations University.

Fisher and Ury's seminal work, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In* (1981) sets out the principles of "principled negotiation" which is a way to

negotiate win-win agreements through integrative bargaining. This is one of the most influential books of the dispute resolution movement and lays out in straightforward and easy to understand language a method for win-win bargaining (Burgess & Burgess, 1997). Fisher and Ury created the acronym BATNA that stands for “best alternative to a negotiated agreement.” This was a guiding principle for disputants as they determined whether or not to accept a negotiated agreement. For example, if the best alternative is worse than your BATNA, it would make sense to accept the agreement. On the other hand, if the BATNA is better than the negotiated agreement, a disputant would consider withdrawing from the negotiation and pursue alternatives.

In the mid-1960s, groups of scholar-practitioners were involved in the development of the theory and practice of problem-solving workshops applying controlled communication, a term favored by Burton. Since one of the goals of the process was to direct discussions away from confrontation, posturing and repeating official bargaining positions towards a joint analysis of shared problems and possible solutions, the workshops and resulting published work was entitled *Conflict and Communication* (1969). The problem-solving method was an approach to dispute resolution where the dispute is reframed as a mutual problem to be solved by the parties jointly through consensus (Yarn, 1999). This strategy assumes that disputants can agree on a definition of the problem and are willing to cooperate in seeking solutions. Communication is controlled so that the other party only receives the information you are ready to reveal at a particular point to assist in the negotiation of the dispute. One of the facilitators of these early workshops was Herbert C. Kelman, a social psychologist and conflict resolution scholar who formed the

*Program on International Conflict Analysis and Resolution* at Harvard University. His work in the international arena led to recognition as one of the leading practitioner-scholars of the problem-solving workshop. Problem-solving workshops provide an unofficial setting where parties to a conflict can explore their perceptions of the conflict and each other. This process assists in establishing a working trust between the parties and helps to develop a mutual understanding of the situation (Burgess & Burgess, 1997; Kelman, 1976).

In social work, problem-solving is the rational process human beings use to negotiate a world of reality that is extremely complicated and, at times, both unknowable and unpredictable. It is not always possible for people to follow the guideline a model sets forth but must choose a path that leads most directly to a desired goal. Compton and Galaway (1994) refer to problem-solving as a process or model rather than a theory, and they describe it as "a series of interactions between the client system and the practitioner, involving integration of feeling, thinking and doing, guided by a purpose and directed toward achieving an agreed-upon goal" (1994, p. 43). The concept of problem-solving in conflict resolution utilizes more specific techniques and goals and social work could learn from these methods. Common wisdom and experience seem to indicate to people that they can never know all that they need to know in order to make a "perfect" decision, so they tend to reach for those that are "good enough."

The problem-solving workshop was used in a growing number of centers established throughout the 1970s and 1980s for research and for educational and training purposes. From 1970 to 1985, the practice of conflict resolution flourished, and consensus was reached on many of the core ideas of the field. Scholars agreed on the importance of reframing conflicts as shared problems with mutually acceptable solutions, on the

usefulness of intermediaries in resolving conflict, and on the importance of training for mediators and negotiators (Kriesberg, 1997). Feminist and social movement theories added new insights to the field and work continued in the areas of game theory and social psychology. Conflict resolution became a social movement in the U.S., promoted by peacemaking activities of religious groups, and by the rise of ADR (Alternatives to Dispute Resolution) in the legal system. Other characteristics of this approach are third party consultation, process-promoting workshops, facilitated dialogue, and interactive conflict resolution.

Harvard continued to be at the forefront of the study on negotiation and conflict resolution and in 1986 established the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School. This academic center draws from a range of disciplines including politics, psychology, anthropology, sociology, international and labor relations, community negotiation and public planning. The distinction between positions and interests is central to principled negotiation, an approach developed at the program.

The program had an impact on the study of negotiation and introduced the interest-based, win-win, problem-solving and mutual gain vocabulary of conflict resolution through the work of Fisher and Ury in their seminal work, *Getting to Yes* (1981). This book is at the core of popular texts used in conflict resolution courses. This book is also referenced in a number of the social work articles. Their model of principled negotiation has been crucial to the development of the contemporary field of mediation and conflict resolution because it allowed for movement beyond limiting bargaining and negotiation frameworks that were position-based. It provides a framework about the art of negotiation and offers a

step-by-step strategy for reaching mutually acceptable agreements. Their approach, principled negotiation, has four principles:

1. separate the people from the problem;
2. focus on interests, not positions;
3. invent options for mutual gain; and
4. insist on objective criteria (Fisher & Ury, 1981).

### *The Growth of Conflict Resolution – An Interdisciplinary Field*

The growth of conflict resolution over the past few decades points to recognition as a discipline. A discipline is generally considered a body of knowledge that distinguishes one's view of the world from other views. Conflict resolution is emerging as a discipline that has grown out of the collaborations among a number of other disciplines. The study of conflict resolution encompasses a broad base drawn from multiple disciplines. It includes conflict theory, communication skills, cultural styles and models, problem solving, organizational theory, change movement, and legal processes (Leal, 1995). These topics are similar to the essential social work knowledge, values, and skills that students are generally taught in a graduate social work curriculum. As these topics are covered in the generalist curriculum, the question remains as to whether graduates are prepared to include conflict resolution/mediation in their practice or require additional training and practice.

Conflict resolution is a field that demonstrates the value of collaboration and draws from multiple disciplines. Most of the published material comes from persons who identify themselves primarily with another established discipline. As an interdisciplinary field,

conflict resolution is a blend of psychology, philosophy, political science, sociology, education, anthropology, law and social work, bringing together scholars and practitioners across disciplines.

While there has been an increase in the application of conflict resolution methods in social work, other fields, particularly law, are also experiencing a growth spurt in the application of new strategies for resolution of disputes. Depending on the individual's primary discipline, the focus of dominant elements varies. The field covers a wide range, from domestic conflict resolution – family (Kilpatrick & Zhang, 1993; Saunders, 1994; Bagshaw, 1995; Mackey, & O'Brien, 1998), domestic violence (Imbrogno & Imbrogno, 2000); interpersonal, community, workplace, victim-offender (Gibelman & Demone, 1989), employment, and inter-group conflicts – to international conflict resolution efforts – international trade agreements, investment disputes, human rights violations, maritime disputes, and environmental conflicts (Kauffman, 1995).

Although scholars have argued that conflict studies has developed its own literature and academic programs and should be treated as an emerging discipline, there is still no agreement that it is a discipline in its own right (Schellenberg, 1996). We are living in an age that is becoming strongly influenced by an interdisciplinary worldview. Over the past 80 years, there have emerged literally thousands of research institutes, governmental and non-governmental organizations, university courses and web sites that focus upon conflict prevention and resolution over a range of issues and on many different levels of analysis.

*Conflict Resolution in the Community*

Conflict resolution did not stay in the academy. During this period we can see a shift from the academic and political arena shifting into human service and community applications. The civil rights movement, the women's movement, the environmental movement, and others added to the climate of conflict on the public level and provided a fertile ground for the development of new approaches to conflict resolution. Neighborhood justice centers emerged in the 1960s as part of a movement towards community-based justice. Federal government grants under antipoverty efforts and other Great Society programs funded many of the centers (Yarn, 1999).

The community centers provided mediation services for people in the neighborhood. Many of these centers were directly or indirectly associated with the court systems, an important trend in the movement. By the 1970s, the community-based programs were viewed as alternatives to court and provided a variety of methods of processing disputes – arbitration, conciliation, mediation, and referrals to courts. Their focus, however, was on mediation. Police, local courts, and prosecutors' offices referred disputes between individuals with on-going relationships such as landlord-tenant, domestic, and backyard conflicts to the centers. Typical cases include assault, minor theft, harassment, noise complaints (i.e. loud stereos), dogs, roommate differences, and curfew issues between parents and teens (Burgess & Burgess, 1997). A number of these programs expanded to include a focus on families, adolescence and school-based projects (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000).

These court annexed community programs are frequently staffed with a small number of professionals who administer the program and a large number of community volunteer mediators who facilitate the resolution of conflicts. These volunteer mediators come from all walks of life, bringing a variety of personal, professional and community experience. Volunteer mediators, regardless of their academic credentials – social work, law, psychology, education – all complete the community approved training program and begin by co-mediating cases. A number of these programs offer a small financial stipend to mediators. This free mediation service is often the only conflict resolution forum for poor people who make up a large portion of the caseload. While many may view this as second-class justice for the poor, it provides a forum that is less adversarial and allows people to work out solutions to their problems themselves with results that make sense to all parties (Burgess & Burgess, 1997).

### *Conflict Resolution Methods – Definitions*

#### *“ADR” – Alternative Dispute Resolution*

Conflict/dispute resolution is an umbrella term that covers a wide spectrum of methods for settling conflict. The "alternative" term refers to "alternatives" to litigation – particularly negotiation, mediation, and arbitration (Yarn, 2000). The purpose of ADR is to allow disputes to be settled by discussion and agreement between the parties – permitting people to have more active participation and control over a process for solving their own problems. Common to most of these methods is the participation of a neutral third party. Included among the most common conflict/dispute resolution methods are:

arbitration, conciliation, facilitation, negotiation, and mediation. Of major interest here, is the application of mediation in social work as a new area of practice.

At this point in time, “alternative” techniques are becoming somewhat traditional in many arenas of practice. These “new” procedures were not new but were now being applied much more widely than before. Many other related processes were also developed out of this movement: mini-trials, med-arb, private judging, ombudsmanship, neutral expert fact-finding, and summary jury trials (Burgess & Burgess, 1997). While these methods may be applied in community settings, they do not necessarily extend to social work practice. However, long term care, foster care systems, and aging programs frequently utilize the skills of an ombudsman.

#### *Arbitration*

Arbitration comes from the Latin *arbitrari* meaning, “to examine or give judgment” (Yarn, 2000). It is a method in which a third-party neutral hears all sides of a dispute, reviews the evidence, and issues a decision that is meant to settle the dispute. Arbitration is generally a private judging and parties agree to it in advance through a contract. It is widely used in commercial and labor-management disagreements and is less formal and complex and often can be concluded more quickly than court proceedings. The arbitrator may be a single person or an arbitration board. Arbitration, although not as formal as court-based adjudication, is an adversarial rather than a cooperative process (Burgess & Burgess, 1997).

*Conciliation*

The term conciliation is used in many ways. Conciliation can be defined as an act of bringing together, an attempt to encourage parties to settle their dispute. A third party may or may not be neutral and plays a more limiting role in conciliation. It is usually more passive and less structured than mediation and focuses on encouraging the parties to negotiate and reach agreement on their own. Conciliation is primarily used in disputes where participants are unable, unwilling, or unprepared to come to the table to negotiate their differences (Burgess & Burgess, 1997; Yarn, 2000).

*Facilitation*

Facilitation is a form of assisted negotiation that is typically used for multiparty meetings of consensus-building processes. The neutral third party does not play a substantive role but provides information on process as parties with various viewpoints seek to collaborate on reaching a goal or completing a task. Facilitation is one strategy used to run productive and impartial meetings. It serves the needs of groups meeting with a common purpose, and the facilitator will be watching for undercurrents – verbal and non-verbal – to assist the group in moving forward to solve their problems. The primary function of the facilitator is to bring the parties to consensus on a number of complex issues. It is closely associated with disputes over public resources or the formation of public policy where there are many stakeholders (Burgess & Burgess, 1997; Yarn, 2000).

*Negotiation*

Unlike the other methods noted, negotiation does not necessarily use a third party neutral as the participants in the dispute engage in a process of back and forth discussions

designed to reach agreement or compromise through communication. This process is typically consensual and private with minimal or no third party involvement. Negotiators are involved in a process of joint decision making for the purpose of reaching a settlement in their dispute as they generate options, brainstorm ideas, engage in “give and take,” and attempt to get their mutual goals met (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001; Yarn, 2000). Trained negotiators are used in specific situations such as business, government or union disputes.

### *Mediation*

Similar to arbitration and negotiation, mediation is a type of alternative dispute resolution used to solve conflicts among two or more parties (Moore, 1986). However, it is unique because of its various components. Mediation can be defined as a process by which the participants, together with the assistance of a neutral person, isolate disputed issues in order to develop options, consider alternatives, and reach a consensual settlement that will accommodate their needs (Davis & Porter, 1984; Folberg & Taylor, 1984). The mediator assists the participants to reduce their differences and seek a solution that satisfies the interests of all parties in the dispute. Its focus is on win-win and preserving the future relationship of the participants. Mediation as a process emphasizes the participants' responsibility for making decisions that affect their lives and is a self-empowering process. The mediator's role is to assist the parties to communicate effectively, analyze the dispute, and develop a solution – assisting disputants to reach their own decisions (Burgess & Burgess, 1997). Mediators are very involved in moving the process forward. In some cases, mediators play a problem solving role focused upon negotiating an agreement. In other cases mediation focuses more upon improving

relationships, with the assumption that the improved relations will lead to conflict resolution. Mediation is the most frequent method of practice that is integrated into social work practice.

#### *Mini-trial*

A mini-trial is a hybrid process that combines aspects of negotiation, mediation and adjudication. It is frequently used in business disputes and can best be described as an abbreviated adversarial presentation of the case where the parties then engage in negotiations. A neutral third party is involved to help facilitate a resolution in this voluntary, nonbonding, and non-judicial process. Mini-trials have also been used in product liability, employee grievance and antitrust disputes. This process is much quicker and usually less expensive than a traditional trial (Burgess & Burgess, 1997; Yarn, 2000).

#### *Med-arb*

Med-arb is another hybrid process that combines elements of mediation and arbitration. In this process, the parties first agree to mediate and then to arbitrate any unresolved issues using the same neutral both as mediator and then as binding arbitrator. Collective bargaining labor disputes, particularly labor-management contract negotiations find this process helpful (Yarn, 2000).

#### *Private Judging*

Private judging is a private process that is a cross between arbitration and judicial settlement. The parties in the dispute agree to having a private judge whom they choose and hire themselves to try their case. This can be either a formal or informal procedure depending on location, style of the judge and the wishes of the parties. Private judging is

faster, flexible, and confidential. The decision is submitted to the trial court as a judgment and is binding. However, the decision can be appealed (Burgess & Burgess, 1997).

#### *Ombudsmanship*

An ombudsman is an independent person within an institution whose primary role is to help resolve or prevent disputes. The person is usually appointed by the institution to investigate complaints within or against the institution and serves as a point of contact for the receipt of complaints and grievances. They can provide many services and act as counselors, facilitators, mediators, fact-finders, and consultants (Burgess & Burgess, 1997; Yarn, 2000). While the ombudsperson is described as representing the individual's interest against the institution, they have direct responsibilities to the institution and frequently view themselves as impartial problem solvers rather than advocates – they have responsibilities to both the individual and the institution.

#### *Neutral Expert Fact-Finding*

Neutral expert fact-finding is a process whereby disputing parties appoint a neutral expert to collect factual information relevant to the conflict. It is useful in a mediation process to help clarify technical issues undergoing negotiation. Neutral expert fact finding is also used in court cases to clarify scientific or technical questions that are central to the dispute but beyond the expertise of a typical judge or jury (Burgess & Burgess, 1997).

#### *Summary Jury Trial*

Summary jury trial is a court-connected hybrid procedure where the parties' lawyers present a summary version of their evidence and arguments to a jury drawn from

the court's regular jury pool and receive a nonbonding advisory verdict to facilitate settlement negotiations (Burgess & Burgess, 1997; Yarn, 2000). It is a process where a case that could take many days or weeks is truncated to one day of summation or less. Summary jury trial is designed to provide a strong incentive for parties to negotiate a settlement and provides the disputants with an early evaluation of their case that they can use to decide whether or not to proceed with litigation.

### *Focus on Mediation*

This may seem overwhelming as there are many conflict resolution methods and practitioners frequently move from one method to another depending on the situation and environment. It should also be noted that there is tremendous overlap in concepts and definitions. The focus for this study is primarily on mediation – one of the assisted methods of conflict resolution. Social workers may also participate in the unassisted models when they are either parties to the conflict or issue to be resolved or as coaches or teachers for others who will be conducting their own negotiations (Mayer, 1995). Standards governing the practice of ADR vary from state to state. It is sometimes difficult for disputants to make an educated choice regarding the type of ADR that would best suit their needs and to gauge the quality of the services provided. The areas that are most commonly identified are arbitration and mediation. Arbitration been used in many industry and union conflicts. These cases and terms have appeared in news, local newspapers, and workplace discussions. Mediation has also become a familiar concept. It is now one of the best known and most widely practiced. Schools, communities, and workplaces are employing these strategies with mediation practitioners; including peer

mediators, volunteer mediations, court-appointed mediators, and divorce and family mediators (Tolson, McDonald, Moriarty, 1992; Hechinger, 1994; Brashears, 1995; Barsky, 1999).

Although practitioners may employ any number of effective conflict resolution methods, mediation has been increasingly used as an alternative process for resolving disputes, particularly in social work (Parsons, 1991; DeMaria, 1992; Moriarty, Mansfield & Leverage, 1992; Tolson, McDonald & Moriarty, 1992; Umbreit, 1993; Umbreit, 1994; Bagshaw, 1995; Kauffman, 1995; Severson & Bankston, 1995; Weir, 1995; Barsky, 1996; Kruk, 1997; Chiu & Wong, 1998; Barsky, 2004). Because different disciplines have different understandings of conflict, mediation means different things to mediators with different professional backgrounds. Of the number of different mediation models, the models that appear in social work practice are primarily problem solving, transformative, therapeutic and narrative. It is with this mindset that a closer examination of the role of conflict resolution/mediation in the field of social work is necessary.

### *Early History of Conflict Resolution/Mediation Practice in Social Work*

The social work profession was born out of human need and suffering, out of the violence of an industrial age, and out of a spirit to make humanity and its institutions better. The social worker's responsibilities have always centered on conflict resolution, whether in helping to mediate individual crises, family violence, organizational or societal change (Rice & Mary, 1989). The field of conflict resolution has grown conceptually and in practice and the use of mediation can be observed in many arenas in which social workers practice (Mayer, 1995).

The involvement of social workers in conflict resolution can be traced back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Jane Addams, known to social workers as the founder of Hull House, also played an instrumental role in negotiating for world peace (Sullivan, 1993; Germain & Gitterman, 1980). She was involved in the struggle for social justice and the international women's peace movement. In the community, she took on many organizing responsibilities for the state and national campaigns to outlaw child labor, mediated labor disputes, and negotiated the famous agreement between the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and Hart, Schaffner and Marx (Simon, 1994). Social work's involvement in conflict resolution at this point was more in an organizing capacity than on the individual mediator role.

The development of community organization as a social work practice method grew between 1910 and 1930. Its interest in social action and social reform often placed workers in conflict situations. Workers were involved in problem-solving and various helping roles with communities and political groups. Modern community organization concepts are based in power, social change, and conflict (Germain & Gitterman, 1980). With this in mind, the community organizer is concerned with conflict management in the resolution of social problems. While many social workers were involved with community practice, there was a movement towards group and individual casework services.

"Conflict is inevitable in social work practice. There will be times in the experience of every macro practitioner when incredible resistance is encountered in addressing the needs of oppressed populations. Social work as a profession developed in

response to a basic societal conflict—the persistent antagonism over individualism and the common good” (Netting, Kettner & McMurtry, 1993, p.255). Helping individuals, families, groups, agencies and communities to meet their needs and achieve social justice are traditional generalist social work values that are part of the professional education (Reamer, 1995).

Generalist social work practice focuses on empowerment of clients to solve problems and build on strengths (Glicken, 2007). An important part of the social worker’s professional responsibility is to manage conflict in a productive manner. “Whether advocating for clients, dealing with conflict within organizations, or helping people to learn more-effective ways of coping with conflict in their lives...” (Mayer, 1995) resolving conflict in employment settings or related to the delivery of service to clients, social workers are involved with conflict resolution daily. Generalist practice emphasizes the skills – i.e., interpersonal communication, relationship building, power analyses, assertiveness, conflict management – that are essential to problem identification, assessment, and intervention with all client systems.

### *Theoretical Framework*

This section provides a discussion of practice theory/practice wisdom as it applies to both social work and conflict resolution/mediation practice. In addition, there is a discussion of theories, models and perspectives used in social work that have pertinent application to mediation.

### *Practice Theory*

Social work is unique among the social sciences in adopting the term “practice wisdom.” Within the helping professions as a whole, strands of practice wisdom emerged – for example interviewing skills, casework, community facilitation, group work, counseling, family therapy, and even social research. Though the knowledge focus for social work education is well known and well established, Dybicz uses *The Social Work Dictionary* to define “practice wisdom” as an important “accumulation of information, assumptions, ideologies, and judgments that have seemed practically useful in fulfilling the expectations of the job” (2004, p.197). The significance of practice wisdom seems more than that of the concept “common sense” and provides future direction for continued learning.

Practice wisdom, also described as tacit knowledge or intuition, is inductively derived from cumulative observations and leads to pattern recognition and responses by experienced practitioners. Schön coined the term “knowing-in-action” to refer to such knowledge and believed that it is a meaningful and important source of information that influences practitioners’ decisions and actions (Schön, 1983; Scot, 1990). While it often takes precedence over explicitly learned and formulated knowledge, as it is so easily accessed on demand, it is elusive to critical examination (Zeira & Rosen, 2000). Practice wisdom involves recognizing the limitations of one's knowledge and encourages practitioners both to be committed to reflective development and effectively act (Dybicz, 2004).

The specific theoretical framework for this study is based on the contemporary understanding of a profession that influences practice. The conflict resolution movement is widespread, large, varied and diffuse. It focuses on the discovery, application and dissemination of practical techniques for resolving conflicts at every level and in many different real world contexts. Concentration on real world problem solving provides common ground and professional backgrounds – not the search for abstract theory – a look for the integration of the practitioner and the academic.

Conflict resolution shares the interdisciplinary focus of social work. Social work grew out of multiple specializations in diverse fields of practice. Social work education was grounded in a generic theory that would synthesize the interests of many specialties into a common professional identity (Roberts & Nee, 1970). Social work often borrows theories that are constructed by others that provide the field with helpful explanations for its purpose (Compton & Galaway, 1989; Roberts, 1990; Poulter, 2005). Attention was given to the development of social work theory and this focus is particularly emphasized in social work education through curriculum standards that require research content to impart methods of building knowledge for practice (CSWE , 2001).

A social work practitioner assesses theories as they relate to practice. Practitioners are more interested in the application of present knowledge than in the creation of new knowledge (Compton & Galaway, 1989). Theory helps us recognize patterns and relationships (Turner, 1986). It offers *models* that describe what happens during practice utilizing certain principles and patterns which give the practice consistency, *explanations* for why an action results in particular consequences, *prescriptions* for action, *approaches*

or *perspectives* that allow participants to manage themselves while participating, and *justifications* for the use of the models and explanations of practice (Payne, 1991).

Social work practitioners are faced with a wide choice among useful theories. For example, important theoretical approaches include role theory, systems theory, Marxist theory, critical theory, feminist theory and the following models of intervention: casework, problem-solving, crisis intervention, task-centered, systems, ecological, psychodynamic, cognitive, empowerment and advocacy, and social constructionist. Many of the sociological and psychological theories, models and perspectives have pertinent application to mediation. Particularly relevant is critical theory due to its focus on power imbalances and structural inequalities within society (Martin, 2000). This study focuses on the relationship of social work theory to practice.

At the core of practice theory is a model of the helping process where the skill of the social worker creates a positive working relationship that influences the outcomes of practice (Shulman, 1993). Some practice theories are specific to social work. Practice theory is often used to distinguish theory that has immediate application to the practice of social work (Roberts, 1990). “Practice theory provides a conceptual screen with which to sift for relevant knowledge, select pertinent interventions, and isolate criteria with which to evaluate interventive efficacy” (Simon, & Thyer, 1994 p. 145). Social work practice is well served by practice theory – it specifies what must be done to bring about transformation; it contributes an interpretation of causation, with an explanation of causal processes; it provides an opportunity for testing, refining or changing the nature and

direction of problem-solving process; and it supplies an invaluable narrative for social workers and their clients in an accessible form (Simon & Thyer, 1994).

Social work is derived from practice theory or the assumptive knowledge implicit in what social workers do (Scott, 1990). They need to be skilled in a variety of different theories and methods in order to select the range of interventions most appropriate to each situation. Conflict resolution/mediation, as an interdisciplinary field, also draws on a wide array of theories, skills, and practices. The values and skill set of social workers and mediators are similar. A partial listing of values would include social justice, competence, integrity, importance of human relationships; and the skill set would include building rapport, clarifying, resource development, focusing, starting where the client is, paraphrasing, reframing, and summarizing. Mediation programs employ many different approaches in deciding what training needs to be covered, who is qualified to mediate, etc. Often these approaches have very little in common (Moore, 1986). While programs impose some minimum requirements for mediators, the only qualification in many programs is some form of mediation training. Some programs require an apprenticeship with a mentor, some conduct performance evaluations and others impose degree requirements or a specific amount of experience (Mayer, 2000). Through experience and the dynamic interplay of insights, skill, and values when judging and using knowledge, mediators develop practice wisdom and come to rely on this experience in managing conflicts to add tools to the toolbox.

### *Social Work Theory/Methods of Practice*

#### *Casework*

Mary Richmond's casework model recognized the client's right to make his own decisions, the value of encouraging self-directiveness, and what he thinks can be done about it (James, 1987). She successfully created a model for social casework and the approach now known in the social work field as the person-in-environment perspective. She viewed caseworkers as specialists in social adjustment and stressed the need for a formal social work education.

Richmond was influential in developing the social investigation process and the concept and importance of the therapeutic relationship (Deutch 1987). Within her published work, Richmond demonstrated the understanding of social casework and believed in the relationship between people and their social environment as the major factor of their life situation or status. Richmond believed in focusing on the strengths of the person or family and viewed the community as a resource for any person or family.

Her book entitled, *What is Social Case Work?* is an introduction to case work and the social work profession. This publication outlines the different types of social work practice – in the hospital, in the home, in the workplace, and even including the court aspect of social work (Richmond, 1922). Using a person-in-environment or care-centered approach allows a social worker and the client to try to find a resolution to the client's problem by finding which system is causing the issue (Hiersteiner & Peterson 1999), a fundamental component in the practice of conflict resolution. These systems include the person's family, community, work, education, health, and the social policies or laws of the community and state. In this way, Richmond understood that casework,

group work, community work, social reform, and social research were all interdependent aspects of social work that should come together on behalf of clients (Cornell, 2006).

Social workers who include casework at the core of their practice would utilize components of conflict resolution/mediation in their everyday practice.

### *Group Work*

The practice of social group work was introduced during the early 1920s and viewed the group as having the potential for mutual aid. The worker was to have no preconceived goals or hidden agenda but was expected to “mediate” between the individual and the group, and between the group and the agency (Germain & Gitterman, 1980). Conflict resolution, mediation in particular, provides a forum for the clients to reach their own agreements – what will work best for them.

### *Problem-solving Approach*

Conflict resolution strategies are comparable to a variety of social work approaches in varied settings. Perlman’s (1957) problem-solving approaches are similar to the interactive problem-solving approach of conflict resolution. Similar to a client’s role in mediation, Perlman’s model places weight on the client’s ownership of the problem (James, 1987). Perlman’s (1970) problem-solving approach can be described as a process that is a forward moving course of transactions between active agents – the caseworker and the client. Included with these agents are the people and life-space in which they are involved. She outlined her approach as the “Four P’s” (1957) – person, place, problem, and partialized – a **P**erson comes to a **P**lace with an identified **P**roblem that needs to be **P**artialized. She believed that it was necessary to partialize since

everything cannot be treated at one time. This approach places emphasis on the client's ownership of the problem. Role theory assumes that people occupy positions in social structures and each position has a role associated with it – everyday activity is defined by these roles and living up to the roles and the expectation of others. Perlman considered that 'social role' was a useful concept for understanding relationships and personality (Payne, 1991). Conflict resolution also places emphasis on problem solving and developing good relationships (Rahim, 1986; Thomas, 1976; Walton, 1987).

Perlman's problem-solving approach is congruent with conflict resolution. A look at problem-solving within a conflict/mediation model stresses that you use whatever tools and processes you may have at your disposal in order to engage in a creative, and productive process, if you feel it would be beneficial to the resolution. The focus is on looking at one issue at a time – one that both parties agree is worthy of a discussion – and generate several possible solutions to the problem by brainstorming ideas and making sure that all parties participate in the process. Good solutions emerge from mutually acceptable criteria applied in a clear decision-making process by exploring ideas before settling on the best answer to the problem. Individuals should volunteer what he/she can do to resolve the conflict or solve the problem brainstorming to find the middle ground, a point of balance, creative solutions, etc.

#### *Task-Centered Approach*

Reid's (1986) task-centered approaches are also similar to the interactive problem-solving approach of conflict resolution. His model focuses on the effectiveness of the intervention when a client achieves specific goals of their own choice (James,

1987). The task-centered model is a short-term, problem-solving approach to social work practice. Reid's (1984) task-centered approach was a way of helping people with problems of living. Efforts were concentrated on problems as perceived by the clients and the clients must acknowledge the problems and agree to work on it. The task-centered model adopted an eclectic approach utilizing useful components of other approaches working with the client collaboratively to define problems and possible solutions. Reid's model was heavily influenced by the problem-solving approach. Conflict resolution/mediation places emphasis on clients acknowledging the problem and employing various strategies to jointly explore issues and move towards resolution.

#### *Systems Theory*

Systems theory has contributed to both social work and conflict practice (Keefe & Koch, 1999). A characteristic of any system is that all of the parts are in transaction so what affects one part of the system affects all other parts to some extent. Using a systems approach, the individual or family includes the situation and is seen as a system of interrelated, reciprocal forces that fit together and reinforce one another (Hollis & Woods, 1981). The influence of integrating psychodynamic theory has been the emphasis on feelings and unconscious processes – resistance, aggression, and conflict (Payne, 1991). Increased understanding of personal behavior and motivation may affect the mediation process. The application of systems to mediation is in the identification of interactions and relationships and power imbalances between parties in a dispute (Martin, 2000). A systems approach to analyzing conflict implies that some types of conflict may be functional for a human system (Yanoov, 1992).

Systems theory offers a way of conceptualizing the relationship between people and environments and encourages a balanced approach. The emphasis is on the “goodness of fit” between the client and their environment. Systems theory offers social workers a way of thinking about and assessing the relatedness of people and their impinging environment without specifying the “what” (problem definition) or the “how” (methodology) of practice. This provides the worker an opportunity to draw on the increasingly large repertoire of practice models. The worker aims to enhance the fit between the individual and the environment by developing, maintaining or strengthening supportive interventions and reducing, challenging or replacing stressful systems. The focus is on multiple components – how family, community, social, economic and political factors affect the client’s situation. Germain and Gitterman’s ‘life model’ is the formulation of ecological systems theory and sees people constantly adapting with many different aspects of their environment (Payne, 1991). This has practical application in mediation where the idea is that if there is change in one party, change is likely to occur in the other. The focus is on positive change.

Key assumptions of systems theories are: the system is more than the sum of the parts; changing one part of the system will change other parts of the system; systems attempt to maintain equilibrium (homeostasis); systems have boundaries, structure, rules and subsystems; and systems are flexible and respond to new input with growth (Andreae, 1996). The role of the social worker is to enhance the fit between the individual and the systems affecting him/her. The role of the mediator is to enhance the

fit by resolving conflicts among two or more parties; to improve the relationship in the belief that this will then lead to conflict resolution.

### *Common Threads*

Common threads of conflict resolution and social work are clear once you review the numerous shared theories and methods underlying the practices in both fields. Systems theory complements the field of conflict resolution and the strategies and techniques utilized can be seamlessly integrated into either social work or mediation/conflict practice. Social work and conflict resolution both place an emphasis on people's interests, needs, values and identity utilizing collaborative processes. The work in both fields spans issues that affect children and families, communities, organizations and the environment. The fields willingly adopt the vocabularies and techniques of others to accomplish their tasks. Although this overlap exists, there appears to be little effort to include conflict resolution theory and practice in the social work education. Social work has made numerous contributions to the field of conflict resolution yet it frequently goes unnoticed.

Working with conflict is at the core of what many social workers do yet is not recognized by practice theorists. An important part of a social worker's professional responsibility is to manage conflict in a productive manner (Polowy & Zulu, 1998). Social workers are routinely called upon to deal with conflicts in practically all areas of practice and the client populations they serve (Kruk, 1997). They are often placed at the center of many social conflicts and use conflict resolution strategies and techniques in their role as practitioners, administrators, and policy workers (NASW, 1991). Conflict

resolution/mediation adds another dimension to social work practice. As the fields are closely aligned, this study is designed to capture the perceptions of social work mediators and their preparation for conflict resolution/ mediation practice.

### *Conflict Resolution and Social Work Fields of Practice*

Social workers are increasingly including mediation in their “toolbox” of interventions. Divorce and custody mediation is one of the most widely practiced types of mediation services offered by social workers. (Grebe, 1986; Saunders, 1994; Barksy, 1999; Cohen, Luxenburg, Dattner & Matz, 1999). However, other areas in which social workers practice as mediators include: child welfare settings: adoption, runaways, child protection, permanency planning; education; EEO complaints of discrimination; nonviolent criminal or civil offenses – victim-offender; health care setting; and public policy issues. Table 1, *Representative Social Work Literature*, provides a brief summary of selected articles that describe mediation in social work across practice areas. Further details of these articles follow in this literature review.

**Table 1 – Representative Social Work Literature**

| Topic                                                      | Summary                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>General Discussion of Conflict Resolution/Mediation</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Parsons, 1991                                              | Discusses mediation as a problem-solving intervention. Theoretical base for role and scope of mediation. Provides a brief overview of four methods of resolving conflict.                                                                  |
| DeMaria, 1992                                              | Critiques mediation. Believes there is a danger in training social workers in mediation techniques.                                                                                                                                        |
| Tolson, McDonald & Moriarty, 1992                          | Compares mediation as alternative method to the traditional discipline method for interpersonal conflicts.                                                                                                                                 |
| Chiu & Wong, 1998                                          | Study of self-defined function of social workers in Hong Kong in 1986 and 1994 – function of mediation was most important or second most important.                                                                                        |
| Keefe & Koch, 1999                                         | Examines teaching conflict resolution management as a valuable component of the social work curriculum, explores inclusion.                                                                                                                |
| <b>Community/Environmental</b>                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Kauffman, 1995                                             | Discussion of opportunities and barriers regarding environmental disputes. Conducted semi-structured interviews, reviewed and analyzed documentation.                                                                                      |
| Kaminsky & Yellot, 1997                                    | Describes the models and process of mediation at community mediation programs. Provides a historical overview, administrative structures, funding and fiscal realities and the general process. Offers case study examples.                |
| Martin, 2000                                               | Examines social worker preparation for managing conflict in Australia.                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Mediation in the Schools</b>                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Moriarty, Mansfield & Leverence, 1992                      | Conducted high school student satisfaction survey with the use of mediation                                                                                                                                                                |
| Schmitz, 1994                                              | Describes school conflict management programs. Implementation of student satisfaction, program revisions, and success of student conflict managers.                                                                                        |
| Weir, 1995                                                 | Study of differences in student attitudes regarding conflict and problem solving students who are trained and those who are trained and serve as mediators.                                                                                |
| Kaplan, 1997                                               | Describes research, stages, and case studies of peer mediation programs in elementary and high school levels.                                                                                                                              |
| Klein, 1998                                                | Discusses the role of school social workers in providing in-service training to staff on conflict resolution, understanding anger, developing behavioral techniques and evaluating the school's effectiveness in reducing school violence. |
| <b>Family/Divorce/Child Welfare</b>                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Bagshaw, 1995                                              | Describes mediation by statutory social workers working with families.                                                                                                                                                                     |

**Table 1 – Representative Social Work Literature - continued**

|                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Severson & Bankston, 1995                                         | Discusses the progress/issues/rationale for divorce and victim-offender mediation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Brown, 1997                                                       | Describes stages and tasks involved with mediating divorce cases – research, debates and trends. Discusses the core skills necessary to effective mediate divorce.                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Etter, 1997                                                       | Discusses the application of mediation to the field of adoption. Provides a step process and includes a discussion of pre-placement, preparation for agreements, financial responsibility and permanency planning.                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Gold, 1997                                                        | Discusses the mediation as a four stage process with couple and family disputes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Wilhelmus, 1998                                                   | Explores mediation as one step in the social worker's efforts to provide cultural relevant child welfare services with kinship caregivers in the foster care system.                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Barsky & Trocmé, 1998                                             | Explores the process of mediation used in the context of child protection. Research included extensive interviews with family members and professionals.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Health Care/Managed Care</b>                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Parsons, & Cox, 1989                                              | The article discusses the use of family mediation to resolve conflicts in elder caregiving decision making. Focuses on family mediation as a family-oriented, problem-solving, task completion model that empowers family members to negotiate mutually agreed-on decisions.                                                                                                                |
| Abramson, Donnelly, King & Malick, 1993                           | Discusses conflict in health care settings and the substantial levels of disagreements that social workers who provide discharge planning are dealing with. Suggests that social workers may need to enhance their skills in mediation and conflict resolution, skills that are not taught routinely in schools of social work, to effectively reframe disagreements in discharge planning. |
| Kruk, Martin, & O'Callighan, 1997                                 | Discusses the range of disputes that exist in health care settings and the role of the mediator. Describes the stages of caregiving mediation for discharge planning.                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Strom-Gottfried, 1998                                             | Describes the principles and practices of conflict resolution and their application to managed care disputes. Believes that social workers need to understand and adapt conflict resolution techniques.                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Criminal Justice: Courts/Victim Offender/Domestic Violence</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Umbreit, 1993                                                     | Case example of social worker as mediator in victim-offender mediation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Umbreit, 1994                                                     | Quasi-experimental study of victim-offender satisfaction with mediation process.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Pollard, 1999                                                     | Discusses the use of mediation in family court welfare practice.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Imbrogno & Imbrogno, 2000                                         | Addresses the trend for social work practice in mediation in the area of domestic violence. Mediation is viewed as a preliminary step toward more extensive long-term counseling.                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

In the 1960's, social workers began providing divorce mediation and this service continued to expand. Unlike litigation, the mediator facilitates negotiations between the spouses attempting to reach a settlement that ensures that both parties' issues have been heard and acknowledged. This generally leads to recognition and acceptance of mutual responsibility for the relationship's outcome (Haynes, 1978).

Mediation is compatible with social work practice because its goal is to help parties solve their own problems and empower people in conflict. It builds on social work skills such as problem analysis, communication and systems intervention (Mayer, 1995). The problem-solving approach is frequently viewed as the basis for social work and conflict resolution, notably "interest-based bargaining" (Fisher & Ury, 1981).

The use of mediation as a dispute resolution process dates back to biblical times, but mediation as a method to resolve disputes in the United States gained noticed in the mid-1970s. Some of the most prolific writers, researchers, and practitioners of mediation are social workers, many of whom have introduced it to new areas such as child protection and parent-adolescent conflicts. The "win-win" thrust of mediation fits well with social work's core values of the dignity and worth of each person, the importance of human relationships, and the pursuit of social justice (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 1991). Evidence of this fit is seen in mediation outcomes. Parties to mediation report a higher level of satisfaction with the process and lower financial costs than parties who employ the traditional two-attorney adversarial system to resolve their dispute. Available research also indicates that mediation brings just outcomes because of substantial reductions in the number of adversarial hearings required to complete a

divorce. Still, mediation is a relatively unknown field of practice for many social workers, even though NASW published the Standards of Practice for Mediators in 1991.

*Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators*

The role of social work mediators described in the NASW Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators is as follows:

The mediator is responsible to the system of people or groups involved in a decision-making process. The mediator must provide this system with the structure and tools to make mutually acceptable decisions under difficult circumstances. In this sense, the mediator's role is to empower the system so that it does not have to resort to outside parties, such as the courts or arbitrators, to make the decision (1991).

The standards are a necessary tool for social work mediators as guidance for competent and ethical mediation practice. These standards complement the NASW Code of Ethics (1996) and are consistent with the standards of practice of mediation organizations. According to the Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators it is desirable for social workers to do the following:

- promote the practice of social work mediation;
- provide direction and professional support to social work mediators; and
- inform consumers, employers, and referral sources by providing them with a set of expectations for social worker mediators (1991, p.1).

The social work perspective gives mediators the advantage of the field's commitment to self-determination and conflict resolution. Since 2001, mediation has also become part of NASW's internal procedures when the Board of Directors approved

changes to the association's Procedures for Professional Review that mandated mediation for certain complaints (Stoesen, 2001). More complaints are now handled through mediation than through adjudication in a timely manner. Social workers are ideally suited to mediation practice and while people can practice mediation without additional training, it is recommended. Social workers are advised to check their state certification requirements.

### *Social Work Practice Areas and Conflict Resolution/Mediation Practice*

This section covers a review of the literature to demonstrate the areas of practice where social workers utilize conflict resolution/mediation skills. As an interdisciplinary field there were multiple sources of information ranging from journals and books dedicated to social work to journals and books dedicated to conflict resolution and mediation. The primary interest is in social work practice of conflict resolution strategies, particularly mediation. There are four areas where mediation can be located: as a part of mainstream, generic social work; as a part of social work in a specific area of practice; as an aspect of supervision; and finally, areas of overlap with 'other' professionals (Mantle, 2002). Literature has been organized into practice areas. While social workers include conflict resolution/mediation in many areas, the focus here will be on fields of practice that are more common for social work mediators: family, divorce, range of child welfare (i.e. custody, permanency planning), and schools. With the growth of forensic social work and the large numbers of generalist social workers in hospital settings, a number of references will also be made to work in these fields of practice.

As stated earlier, a review of the literature indicates that social workers have been utilizing conflict resolution strategies in practice. Using a computerized literature search by keying in concepts such as conflict resolution, dispute resolution, social work, and mediation produced numerous results. As an interdisciplinary field, articles were found, for example, in conflict specific, business, psychology, counseling, education, and social work journals. Although technological advances in this electronic age have made literature searches time efficient, the text bibliographies, journal references, and networking were also utilized.

The field of conflict resolution expanded during the 1970s and 1980s and many social workers were actively practicing mediation primarily in the fields of divorce and child custody. School mediation programs began to expand and the school social workers were often responsible for managing the in-school conflict resolution programs. During this period, NASW then recognized mediation as a field of professional practice and with the introduction of the Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators in 1991 (NASW), there was a rise in articles published in social work journals. While most of the articles located were descriptive, an attempt was made to include at least some quantitative studies.

The criteria selected for inclusion in this literature review include:

- inclusion in a journal with a social service orientation;
- a focus on the past two decades;
- representative examples of mediation across practice areas;
- mediation with different age groups; and
- methods for infusing curricula in social work education.

For the most part, we can categorize articles based on specific conflict resolution methods. However, there are those that do not distinguish a specific strategy but discuss the general concept of conflict resolution.

### *Generalist Practice*

The intervention of social workers in conflicts can occur through the framework of counseling, case management, advocacy or mediation. Social workers need to understand the nature of the conflict and the tasks that need to be accomplished to reach a collaborative solution. Mediation is a powerful intervention tool when used in appropriate circumstances. This approach is a natural outgrowth of social work practice because its goal is to help parties solve their own problems and empower people in conflict by building on the problem solving and systems approach. (Mayer, 1995) The following studies provide a brief look at the social worker as mediator.

Parsons (1991) describes the use of mediation as a problem-solving intervention in social work and makes a case that social workers have historically assumed the role of mediator. Her claim is that the framework and skills of a mediator are indigenous to social workers. She discusses the theoretical base for the mediator role and defines the scope of mediation (promoting reconciliation, settlement, compromise). Parsons also provides a brief overview of four methods of resolving conflict – negotiation, arbitration, litigation, and mediation – and the nature and evolution of conflict. Negotiation involves direct communication between parties and if no solution is reached, a third party is needed for either arbitration or mediation. The goal is to avoid litigation and to engage the parties in

taking an active role in the resolution of the conflict. Participants are taught to identify needs, interests and solutions and to present them to the other party.

Parsons stresses the importance of recognizing when to assume the role of mediator rather than another social work role and conceptualizes the context of the mediator role lying between the roles of collaborator-conferee-enabler on one end to broker-advocate on the other. Mediation has also been described as joint advocacy where the social worker promotes the interest of each party (Chandler, 1985). The mediator role can be distinguished from a clinical or advocacy function as the social worker intervenes as a neutral facilitator and no attempt is made to advocate or change the way the system functions. One important factor in assuming the role of mediator is getting participants to recognize that the best way to get their needs met is to decide what each party needs and exchange behaviors. Parsons concludes that mediation's purpose and place in problem solving are inherent in the definition of social work practice.

Bagshaw (1995) reports that statutory social workers have found mediation processes useful in a range of family situations: parent-adolescent, family conferences, mediation between parents, mediation between extended family, foster parents and biological parents, and mediation between family members and agencies in the larger social systems. Social work mediators are concerned with the concept of empowerment, issues of fairness, confidentiality and the balance of power. Bagshaw encourages social work mediators to engage in practice research to build a professional knowledge base.

While mediation appears to be surfacing in many areas of practice, not all social workers agree that it is an appropriate role. DeMaria's article (1992) offers a critique of

mediation and discusses the increase in social work mediators in Australia. He takes a position that mediation impinges on the long-standing activist vs. helping dialectic within the social work arena and puts social workers in a position of managing change, thereby controlling or negating change. Consequently, DeMaria believes that there is a danger in training social workers in mediation as it is a return to conservative roots and claims that mediation only patches up disputes. Mediation is discussed as one method of saving the overworked courtroom for 'real cases' and utilizing community justice centers for a wide range of conflicts. Training mediators is an inexpensive way to resolve disputes. Although DeMaria presents an argument against the role of the social work mediator – a belief that conflict is not resolved but managed by patching up disputes – there is a trend toward social workers assuming this role with support from the government.

Australia has seen a growth in mediation practice since the early 1990s. Clark's (1993) article examines the interest-based model of mediation adopted by the tribunal and looks at the unique features that emerged in the design and conduct of mediation of native title. With a divorce rate of one out of three marriages, family relationship centers were designed to be capable of responding to local needs and to guide families towards conflict resolution processes that are child focused, dignified and relatively inexpensive (Moloney & Smyth 2004). Ralph (2006) discussed these new family relationship centers as they expanded their services to provide flexible, culturally sensitive and accessible services to Indigenous families.

### *Child Custody/Child Protection*

Mediation practice can be traced to several ancient cultures including African culture, where the kinship network provided mediation services in the resolution of disputes. Conflicts between kinship caregivers and the foster care system are now utilizing mediation as one step in social workers' efforts to provide culturally relevant child welfare services (Wilhelmus, 1998). Kinship care captures the arrangement of a centuries-old tradition of extended family and community responsibility for the care of children with the child welfare system. Although this is a legal arrangement, it is difficult to utilize the services of a court to resolve disputes that may arise after placement. According to Folberg and Taylor (1984, p. 35), the legal system is just not able to "supervise the fragile and complex interpersonal relationships between family members that may continue after their immediate dispute is resolved." Mediation is better equipped to manage the subtleties of cultural and ethnic implications within the context of kinship foster care. It provides an opportunity for the kinship foster families to have a voice in the development of intervention in child welfare. The social worker dealing with kinship care issues needs to develop the skills to negotiate and resolve conflicts as the family-agency relationship should take a non-adversarial approach to resolving disputes by incorporating concepts of respect and empowerment within the family.

Pollard (1999) discusses the use of mediation in family court welfare practice. She describes this form of social work practice as a relatively new and little-known area that has developed and expanded over a period of social and political change. Tensions and conflict for workers are also explored as are the various coping strategies employed.

Pollard describes one of the main sources of tension and conflict for the workers as the direct contact with individuals experiencing emotional distress within an institutional context that largely denies or represses these feelings. The court welfare officers employ various strategies to cope such as emotional distancing, gathering facts to avoid emotional pain, and ally with the child/children concerned. The focus is to mediate between disputing parties and to advise the courts as arrangements suited to the best interests of the children.

Barsky and Trocmé (1998) explore the process of mediation used in the context of child protection. Their research included extensive interviews with family members as well as the professionals involved in the child protection process. The study identified four essential aspects to mediation in a child protection setting that contributed to developing more effective working relationships with child welfare clients – bringing all the parties together, maintaining a neutral position, focusing the parties on the best interest of the child, and establishing ground rules for dialogue. The use of mediation's attention to maintaining a neutral position, use of facilitation and problem solving, and developing an alliance with all parties, placed the mediator in a good position to help resolve conflicts that arise between child protection workers and families.

Barsky (1999) explores the use of community involvement in child protection mediation cases. This descriptive article discusses the model of mediation used in Canada, whether mediation enhances community involvement, and compares mediation with other child protection processes. He includes a case example, a chart outlining potential advantages and disadvantages of community involvement. Although there is no

conclusive answer, it is suggested that families that participate in the mediation process start to make greater use of support systems in the community.

Ashford and Faith (2004) studied 200 parents who were randomly assigned to mediation facilitated by master-level social workers or to pretrial conferences guided by judges. They wished to examine the effects of the conflict resolution methods on the attitudes of parents in child dependency disputes. The aim in a dependency case is to protect children by removing them from the home until the parents are able to care for them. The resulting agreements establish plans for intervention, visitation, and progress for treatment, with an ultimate goal of returning the child to the home. Mediation is seen as a more productive alternative as it focuses on improved relationships and mutually agreed upon plans. The focus of the study was on issues of justice, trust, and satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the juvenile court system. Results indicated that although their attitudes of trust toward the juvenile court did not differ, the parents assigned to mediation perceived a higher degree of settlement in the case.

#### *Health Care*

Another example of social workers' effective use of negotiation is described in Strom-Gottfried's (1998) article about managed care. The article describes the principles and strategies of negotiation and discusses the sources and elements of conflict, and the power differentials among participants. Strom-Gottfried provides insight into the principles and practices of conflict resolution by explaining the steps in the negotiation process and their application to managed care disputes. It is further stated that if negotiation techniques are not successful, there are other strategies at the social worker's

disposal including mediation and review by regulatory personnel or ombudspersons. Strom-Gottfried believes that social workers need to understand and adopt conflict resolution techniques.

A discharge plan must often be negotiated to meet the needs of the participants within the context of regulations and organization mandates. There is conflict in health care settings and social workers that provide discharge planning are dealing with substantial levels of disagreements (Abramson, Donnelly, King & Malick, 1993). The research suggests that social workers may need to enhance their skills in mediation and conflict resolution, skills that are not taught routinely in schools of social work, to effectively reframe disagreements in discharge planning. It was suggested that in settings where short-term decision-making is the norm, intervention models for resolving conflict are needed and should include realistic goal setting.

#### *School/Education*

School social workers are often the people who identify the student “at risk” and provide appropriate interventions. They also play key roles in providing in-service training and consultation to staff on conflict resolution, understanding anger, developing behavior intervention techniques and evaluating the school’s effectiveness in reducing school violence (Klein, 1998). A quantitative study (Astor, Behre, Wallace, & Fravil, 1998) conducted a national survey that questioned 1,200 randomly selected school social workers on school violence. The response rate was 52.8 percent; that was similar to other national survey studies and the demographic information reflects general NASW membership. The questionnaire included checklists of services and programs, and training needs. Based on

the results of the study, the authors state that additional training is required at the university graduate level to prepare workers for violence before entering the field. As the study received results consistent with other similar survey instruments and was representative of the general social worker population, it should be generalizable. It should also be noted that this study referenced several training recommendations.

Social work graduates are not the only ones who serve as mediators in a school setting. Fast, Fanelli and Salen (2003) describe a study conducted in an urban middle school to reduce the level of aggression. A small group of seventh grade students were assigned the role of mediator to fifth and sixth grade disputants. The students met with the social work intern on a weekly basis to maintain their skills and to debrief on disputes they mediated. There was no mention in the article as to whether the social work intern had been trained in mediation. Although a reduction of aggressive behavior was not achieved, pretest and posttest measures of self-concept and the teacher's perceptions of problem behavior showed improvements.

There have been a growing number of school mediation programs in the public school system. The school social workers have taken active roles in training peer student mediators and implementing these programs. Evidence of student satisfaction with the use of mediation as a method of dispute resolution was gathered through the administration of a survey designed to evaluate the reactions of high school students involved in the process (Moriarty, Mansfield, & Leverence, 1992). The study design was a five point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." In addition, grade, gender, and three open-ended questions were included. Of the 102 students exposed to mediation over the

course of a school year, a return rate of 92% was achieved. The study results indicate that the majority of students were of the opinion that mediation is a valuable option to solve interpersonal disputes in the school. It should be noted that 97% felt the program should be continued and 83% agreed that they would like to be mediators themselves. The authors do distinguish by their findings that the target population for the use of mediation services might be younger students and female. While the results are preliminary, they believe further investigation should be conducted. In addition, preliminary data suggested that minority students used mediation with greater frequency and further study is indicated to determine the reasons for overrepresentation. It was concluded that mediation represents the potential for students to learn the skills of dispute resolution and carry them outside the confines of the school.

Mediation in schools engages trained students in assisting their peers in resolving disputes. Only a few studies have investigated their effectiveness. Tolson, McDonald and Moriarty (1992) designed a study to test the hypothesis that mediation is an effective alternative to traditional discipline for students involved in interpersonal conflicts. Students were randomly assigned to mediation (28) or traditional (24) discipline measures. Data collected indicated that students in both conditions were predominantly African American (75%), freshman or sophomores, in the middle or low educational track with GPAs at 1.60 or lower. The mediation group contained more females. Effectiveness of mediation and traditional discipline were determined by the following measures: times referred for interpersonal conflicts and times referred for any disciplinary problem during the following 49 days, and a follow-up evaluation completed by the disputants who

received mediation. Results indicated that while mediation reduced the number of referrals for interpersonal problems, it did not change the number of disciplinary referrals. Males receiving mediation did better than females but it should be noted that there was unequal distribution by gender in the experimental and control groups. At least 75% of the students were very satisfied with the mediation process, demonstrating some effectiveness of mediation over traditional discipline methods.

Weir (1995) designed her research study to learn primarily about differences in student attitudes about conflict and the means of problem-solving between students who are trained in conflict and become mediators compared to those who only receive training in conflict. Thirty-two fourth grade students were involved; half in the experimental group who became mediators and half in the comparison group who only received training. The quasi-experimental research design included a pretest-posttest comparison to control for extraneous variables to improve the validity of the conclusions. A strength of the study was the collection of quantitative data with valid and reliable instruments in an effort to provide quantitative rather than qualitative and anecdotal support for the effectiveness of the program. Findings concluded that changes in attitudes were significantly improved for the experimental group which warrants not only the continuation of the program but further research.

More and more school social workers are involved in running conflict management programs. Many of these programs start with young children, beginning in kindergarten primarily as playground “helpers”. Training guides have been developed for elementary, middle and secondary schools and the social workers have been responsible for facilitating

training and administering the programs. Student satisfaction surveys have been implemented with program revisions. Student conflict managers were able to resolve the majority of the cases (Schmitz, 1994).

#### *Criminal Justice/Legal Environment*

Another area where the use of mediation is growing is in the criminal justice system. Umbreit (1993) provides an overview of a case example where a social worker mediated between crime victims and their offenders. Victim-Offender Mediation Programs (VOMP), also known as Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs (VORP) is a restorative justice approach that brings offenders face-to-face with the victims of their crimes with the assistance of a trained mediator, usually a community volunteer. The victim-offender mediation provides an opportunity for crime victims to meet their offender, talk about the offense, express concerns, and negotiate a mutually agreeable restitution agreement. The social worker serves as a mediator and assists the victims in achieving closure and assists the offender to make amends. These programs are sponsored primarily by private social service agencies that work closely with the courts. Other programs are administered through probation departments or other public agencies. Umbreit describes the four phases in victim-offender mediation: intake, preparation for mediation, mediation and follow-up. The mediator/social worker is an active participant during this process and has been trained to work specifically with the population (either juvenile or adult offenders). In this capacity, their role as mediator serves as an extension of their work as a forensic social worker. In addition to the social workers, there are trained volunteer mediators who serve in this capacity. This pool of volunteers keeps program funding to a

minimum. The investment includes training cost for an initial 25-30 hours and on-going in-service training.

Victim-offender mediation is another area of growth and little evaluation research has been conducted. However, Umbreit (1994) continues to write about victim-offender mediation programs and designed a quasi-experimental evaluation study involving 516 interviews with 441 crime victims and juvenile offenders, including pre- and post-mediation interviews using two comparison groups (victims and offenders who were referred to mediation but did not participate; and victims and offenders from the same jurisdiction who were matched on the variables of age, race, sex, and offense but who were never referred to the mediation program). The interviews were conducted over the phone. The results of the survey indicated that 93% concluded with a negotiated restitution agreement. Regarding satisfaction, most of the offenders (85%) and most of the victims (85%) indicated they were satisfied with the process. Offenders in mediation also indicated that they experienced fairness in the justice system. Umbreit concluded that victim-offender mediation had a humanizing effect that is not a common response to the justice system. Based on the quasi-experimental design without random assignment of subjects, one cannot generalize these conclusions to other victims and offenders in other programs. The implication of this study for social workers concerns the potential role they can play in humanizing the criminal justice system by assuming the role of mediator.

Nugent, Williams and Umbreit (2004) conducted a meta-analytic study of the relationship between participation in victim-offender mediation (VOM) and the prevalence of subsequent delinquent behavior. The results suggested that the odds of

VOM participants were only about .70 as great as the odds of nonparticipants reoffending. The conclusion drawn from their work supports the efforts of social workers to advocate for, develop, and participate in VOM programs.

There have been a number of articles that discuss the role of the social work mediator in the legal system (Arnason, Koski, O'Brien, Polimeni, Rosenzweig & Sacks, 1989; Gibleman & Demone, 1989). The emerging role in mediation highlights the congruence between the social worker's professional knowledge and skill base and the demands of mediation practice. The social worker does not view his/her role as adversarial and seeks solutions perceived to be in the best interest of the clients. Attorneys are advocates for the client's position regardless of whether the attorney agrees with the client's choice. By collaborating on cases, law and social work have come to complement each other, to the benefit of professionals in both fields. The articles discuss additional training for social workers as they will be better able to perform the mediating role with formal preparation.

Domestic violence is another area where mediation has been introduced. Domestic violence often refers to violence between spouses but can also include cohabitants and non-married intimate partners. This area of mediation can be discussed with other family articles but is included with criminal justice/legal as there is a debate as to whether these disputes can be mediated. There are concerns as to the appropriateness of this intervention based on the power imbalance of the relationships. Imbrogno and Imbrogno (2000) address the trend for social work practice in this area as social workers, historically, have adapted modes of intervention that mediate and facilitate problem

solving. In this regard, social workers view mediation as a preliminary step toward more extensive long-term counseling. Skill training in conflict resolution has been proposed as one of the treatment models for working with men who batter their wives (Edleson, 1984). However, the hazards of mediation and joint custody as well as the limitations of treatment for men who batter are explored in Saunders (1994).

Flynn (2005) explores power differentials in family mediation with particular attention to cases involving family violence. This descriptive article examines family violence, the extremes of power differentials, and the debate about whether family violence cases are appropriate for mediation. He takes a stand on the issue that family violence cases can be mediated if the mediator role is one of power balancing. While Flynn acknowledges the facilitative role of the mediator, he believes that the presence of the mediator, added to the procedural power of the role, influences the mediation process. He argues that social workers have an ethical responsibility to support and empower the weaker party during family mediation.

#### *Marriage/Divorce/Family*

Mediation has proven to be a flexible intervention model. We have discussed its application in school settings, communities, the criminal justice system, and can now take a look at mediation in family situations, primarily in cases of divorce. Divorce is liable to be a difficult, lengthy and expensive process. Divorce mediation can be an alternative so that couples can take charge of the process and work through issues that need to be decided before the divorce can be granted. The couple will get to make these decisions instead of turning control over to the legal system. Mediation helps the couple work through issues

where words like "custody" and "visitation" can be replaced with "co-parenting" and "primary residence of the child." Mediation assists the couple to cut down on the adversarial approach and come to terms, together. Divorce mediation is one of the major areas where social workers practice.

Severson and Bankston (1995) discuss the application of mediation in two venues – divorce and criminal offenders. They offer a philosophical rationale for the use of mediation, discuss programs, and special issues (appropriateness of use, training and certification) and describe the mediation process with a focus on win-win resolutions. It is their belief that the process complements social work's values by empowering clients to plan for their future through a problem-solving model. Divorce mediation is described as a "marriage" of social work and the legal profession. As mediation is not the practice of either law or therapy, specific training is required to serve as a divorce mediator. While little research measuring the effectiveness of divorce mediation programs has been done, initial reports are that it has met with success. Their review of victim-offender programs indicates levels of satisfaction that correlate with peaceful, cohesive communities. There are indications that mediation programs can support the social work values of healthy communities and social justice.

In addition to divorce, conflict resolution has played a role in other families situations. Morrisette (1997) discusses the use of negotiation by providing a case example describing clinical intervention with farm families when adolescents do not choose to follow their parents in an agricultural lifestyle. This article describes how the use of negotiation assists in the healing process of family work.

Not all articles that appear in social work journals discuss the application of conflict resolution/management strategies by social workers. Mackey and O'Brien (1998) conducted a study of couples from 60 ethnically diverse marriages and explored how they managed to cope with marital conflict. Their research was in response to a challenge that social workers encounter in their practice as they help couples manage conflicts in relationships. Reference is made to helping couples negotiate marital roles.

In ancient China and many third world countries, mediation was the principal means of resolving disputes. Through mediation committees, it is currently practiced on a large scale in China and early Chinese immigrants set up associations to resolve disputes between community and family members in the United States (Kilpatrick & Min-Jie, 1993). Family mediation is viewed as a relevant social work method for reaching vulnerable populations.

Internationally, we see mediation as a field of practice for social workers particularly in Australia and China. Chiu and Wong (1998) conducted a study of the self-defined function of social workers at a time of political transformation in Hong Kong. The target group was new social work graduates of local training institutions. Data collection was conducted in two phases (1986 and 1994) after political changes. The return rate of the questionnaires was 58.3% and 63.9%. Identified were Hong Kong's four major functions of social work: control, mediation, social reform, and revolution. Results indicate a total of 70% of the respondents in 1986 and 68.5% in 1994 regarded mediation as either the most important or second most important function of social work. Social workers in Hong Kong mediate conflicts between individuals, groups, and their

environment. As the data suggest a high level of consistency over the course of time, we could generalize to the larger population of social workers in Hong Kong regarding their rating of mediation as a social work function.

### *Curriculum Development*

Social work education attempts to link theory and practice (Westhues, LaFrance & Schmidt, 2001). The Chinese ideogram 危机 that makes up the expression “crisis” consists of two symbols: danger and opportunity. Those who avoid conflict seem to see only the potential for danger that a challenging situation holds out. A positive outcome of conflict resolution education is the ability to see the possibilities, the opportunities, contained in each conflict situation. We need to look at the *danger* of not providing access to the education/training necessary for effective practice and the *opportunity* for revising and/or developing new curricula to meet the needs of a demanding, changing practice.

Professional practice situations drive the development of curriculum. Practice provides numerous examples of situations to drive learning but selection of situations for inclusion in the curriculum is based on predetermined criteria that emerge from the conceptual framework of the discipline and the context in which graduates will practice. Accreditation requirements of the CSWE (2001) set a minimum standard for foundation practice content and for field education. The core curriculum includes content on human behavior and the social environment, diversity, populations-at-risk, research, policy and services, social and economic justice, and values and ethics. The curriculum development process requires an analysis of a range of practice situations in which graduates will be

expected to perform. The structure of the curriculum is adaptable to the basic social work content areas and is a continuous process (Mancoske, 1982).

Curriculum development is characterized by attention to the sequencing of required courses, balancing substantive content in different sections of the same course, and faculty instruction. Along with an increasingly conflict-ridden environment come new forms of individual and social needs, new ways of expressing old needs and new methods of intervention (Reisch & Jarman-Rodhe, 2000). New fields of practice and new practice methods have been introduced while longstanding fields of practice and methods have been revitalized and updated (Feldman & Kamerman, 2001). The practice of social work evolves and is likely to change more rapidly in the future and concomitantly, to develop new ways to address curricular needs. Development of enhanced curricula provides one of the greatest challenges when constrained to some extent by the CSWE accreditation requirements.

Keefe and Koch (1999) discuss the need for research regarding the effectiveness and prevalence of conflict resolution processes in social work practice. This research will advise educators about the importance of including these processes in the curriculum and about specific forms and applications of the skills in particular fields of practice. They also suggest further investigation regarding different strategies for teaching. Mayer (1995) discusses the need for social work as a field to promote several developments including teaching conflict resolution theory and practice. He claims that the issue is not whether conflict resolution has an important future in social work practice but how consciously and proactively the profession will use its potential and guide its development. It appears that

conflict resolution methods, particularly mediation, have been utilized in social work practice since its inception. A growing presence of conflict in society appears to be almost accepted. A respondent to a recent survey of social workers in Australia stated that there is a culture of complaint that pervades the work which makes it essential that graduates have good conflict resolution and negotiation skills (High, 2001). Social work faculty should be leaders in this academic process (Severson, 1998).

The qualities possessed by mediators parallel the qualities and skills that social work programs wish to develop in students as part of their professional education suggesting a natural fit between conflict resolution/mediation education and social work education. Both require four qualities: the ability to establish an effective working relationship with the clients so that trust will be established and open up lines of communication; the skills to establish a cooperative problem-solving attitude; the creativity to develop an innovative group process and group decision-making; and a level of substantive knowledge about the issues (Deutsch, 1994). Many of the abilities and roles required in conflict resolution are skill sets learned and utilized by social workers on a daily basis. Some of the skills familiar to social workers include active listening, reframing, reflecting, clarifying, probing, confronting, defusing, and summarizing (Edwards, 1996). Social work education should promote development of the skills and roles required in conflict resolution to better prepare workers for practice in the field. One question that remains unanswered is to how best achieve this – through integration in the existing curriculum, as an elective course, or as post-graduate training.

*The Crowded Curriculum*

The rise of conflict resolution/mediation in social work has been well documented. States have been active in adopting these methods in their programs and social workers have risen to the occasion. While there is an underlying belief that conflict resolution/mediation parallels much of the skill set of social work education, additional education and training may still be required. Do social workers perceive a gap in their education? What knowledge, skills and abilities are required to include conflict resolution/mediation into their practice? If their graduate social work education did not prepare them, what do we do about it and how can this be accomplished?

While social workers have been engaged in the conflict resolution/mediation process, the social work curriculum does not routinely incorporate this training in either the baccalaureate or master level programs. Based on a national survey with a return of 222 questionnaires (Sanchirico, 2003), comments from respondents indicated that social work practitioners believe that conflict/dispute resolution needs to be an integral part of the social work curriculum. Of these social work programs, conflict theory (74%), negotiation (70%), mediation (67%), and arbitration (11%) are content areas covered but only 15% of the programs discuss the standards of practice for mediators. An inquiry regarding placement in a field practicum revealed that just over half of the programs place students in a field practicum where dispute resolution is part of everyday practice (i.e. landlord tenant programs, public schools). Results revealed that conflict resolution education is not covered in depth and social workers rely on their individual, intuitive approaches to conflict or independently tailor their professional training to meet these needs, whether by trial and

error or through enrolling in additional courses. Most social workers develop their conflict management skills on the job or through enrollment in continuing education programs.

Students need an array of tools to practice effectively and as social workers they will regularly encounter clients in conflict situations. It is suggested that emphasis on conflict theory (Bratton, 1997) should begin in policy classes so students begin to understand the root causes of conflict and possible outcomes. Understanding conflict theory provides the foundation for understanding conflict resolution methods. Helping students in social work programs deal with differences and conflict in the classroom prepares them for practice (Kurland & Salmon, 1992; Barsky & Green, 2004). Kilpatrick and Zhang (1993) stress the need to be flexible when teaching mediation in the curriculum to allow for cultural variations. They believe that family mediation is a relevant social work method for reaching vulnerable populations and those involved in the struggle for social transformation.

Curricular changes within an accredited program must go through many stages. For example, in the early 1980s the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) invited proposals for their annual meetings about collaborations with other professions using law as an example. This led to a number of articles about teaching legal content to social workers (Miller, 1980; Jankovic & Green, 1981; Lemmon, 1983; Spakes, 1987). The articles indicated that there were a number of ways to accomplish this – integrate content into the existing curriculum, offer elective courses, seminars, continuing education courses, and certificate or degree programs. Although these articles stimulated thought and presented new ideas, there was little evidence to indicate that any changes were made.

Kopels and Gustavsson (1996) undertook this challenge by conducting a survey of accredited MSW programs which showed that few schools require students to study law as the curricula have little room to expand. Their four-page questionnaire achieved a response rate of 52% that is consistent with other surveys on law-related content. Results indicated that 64% of the responding schools offer a law-related course but 79% did not require it for students. The authors believe that social work students need knowledge of the law to be effective practitioners and have identified that there is a gap between legal information and the current curriculum.

Interdisciplinary courses by fields of practice are another way to gain knowledge. A course in family law and family therapy (Riley, Hartwell, Sargent & Patterson, 1997) provides an opportunity for students in both fields to understand areas that frequently overlap – divorce, child custody, and mediation. The course was designed to promote collaboration and explored the conceptual and practical similarities and differences between the professions. Students gained an understanding of the substantive areas of expertise of and how they can develop future collaborations for the benefit of the clients.

Severson (1998) describes a divorce mediation course for law and social work students. The course was designed to accomplish the following: learn the dynamics, skills and “legal” requirements of family mediation; practice new knowledge through role plays and videotaped experiences; learn the strengths and the limitations of other professionals acting as mediators while learning their own strengths and limitations of the role, and resolve their own competitive disputes and learn to work collaboratively. The course focused on family mediation yet incorporated the basics of mediation practice.

On-going curriculum development to establish and maintain programs that are current, well integrated and relevant to the needs of social work practice is required. There does, however, exist a body of knowledge that discusses either inclusion or infusion of new content in the social work curriculum that can be used as a model for integrating conflict resolution education (Chetkow-Yanoov, 1991; Kurland & Salmon, 1992; VanSoest, 1992; Silberman, 1995; Strom-Gottfried & Green, 1995; Kopels & Gustavsson, 1996; Kropf, 1996; Maluccio, Pine & Warsh, 1996; Bratton, 1997, Liese, Clevenger & Hanley, 1999; Birnbaum & Wayne, 2000; Gutiérrez, Yeakley & Ortega, 2000; Madden, 2000; Mama, 2001).

Using the curriculum standards mandated by the Council on Social Work Education, VanSoest (1992) developed new curriculum for inclusion in main content areas: human behavior and the social environment, social work practice, social welfare policy and services, research, and field practicum. The concepts were integrated through the use of readings and exercises. This peace education curriculum approach could serve as a model for integrating conflict resolution/mediation education.

The social work curriculum has little room for expansion and few elective courses within the mandated program. Methods to provide training/education in conflict resolution/mediation beyond the core curriculum would be to offer an elective course, redesign an existing course, or run a continuing education course, a specialized seminar or workshop. These courses/seminars/workshops could spur interest and social workers would then have the foundation to take advantage of available specialized mediation training – courses in other colleges, community programs, week-long seminars, etc.

*Emerging Books in the Field*

Chetkow-Yanoov (1991) drew on personal and professional experiences within the context of the Mideast crisis to promote peace education and nonviolent social change processes. He provides a comprehensive approach for teaching conflict resolution in schools and communities and to university academics, managers and leaders. His particular focus for schools of social work is the psychological and social work insights regarding the part emotions play in conflict situations. Chetkow-Yanoov believes strongly in this idea and developed curriculum goals and proposed a series of courses that might be offered. He expanded his work by writing a textbook, *Social Work Approaches to Conflict Resolution - Making Fighting Obsolete* (1997), for use in social work courses.

Kruk's *Mediation and Conflict Resolution in Social Work and the Human Services* (1997) is another book that would provide a foundation for social workers. This edited volume examines mediation and conflict resolution in different areas of social work practice and presents a mediation model specific to that field. The chapters provide a rationale for using mediation; research, debate and trends; and a model for implementation. Included in this volume are models for: marriage and the family, divorce, post divorce, parenting, stepfamilies, parents and children, child protection, adoption, aging, mental health, health care, disabilities, community, education, workplace harassment, criminal justice, social policy, and intercultural disputes. Case examples are provided to illustrate the process.

Barsky has written a number of articles on conflict resolution in social work practice and his book *Conflict Resolution for the Helping Professions* (2000) provides theory, skills and exercises to prepare individuals for an array of conflict situations. He

presents a range of models including interest-based, transformative, therapeutic, and feminist and demonstrates how these can be applied in a range of contexts: child welfare, family counseling, education, health care, and criminal justice. The material presents case studies, class exercises, discussion questions, role-plays and conflict inventories. Barsky's book is the third text within less than five years. It would appear that there is a possibility that integration may be occurring.

### *Summary and Critique*

This chapter discussed distinct areas of the literature: a brief historical overview of the field of conflict resolution, the growth of conflict resolution as an interdisciplinary field, the movement of conflict resolution from an academic environment to community practice, and definitions of conflict resolution methods that are currently in practice. The next section focused on conflict resolution/mediation in social work practice including various social work theories and linkages to conflict resolution/mediation. Included in this section are details from the NASW Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators. This section provided the theoretical framework for the study and an overview of social work theory and methods of practice. A brief discussion on curriculum development was included since, as a result of this study, there may be a need for new or enhanced coursework.

Of particular interest in this section is the discussion that highlighted practice areas where social workers functioned as mediators, supervised mediation or suggested that mediation is a viable method of practice. These included child custody/child protection (Wilhelmus, 1998; Barsky & Trocmé, 1998; Pollard, 1999) health care (Abramson,

Donnelly, King & Malick, 1993; Kruk, Martin, & O'Callaghan, 1997; Strom-Gottfried, 1998), criminal justice (Umbreit, 1993; Nugent, Williams & Umbreit, 2004), school/education (Moriarty, Mansfield, & Leverence, 1992; Weir, 1995; Astor, Behre, Wallace, & Fravil, 1998; Klein, 1998; Fast, Fanelli & Salen, 2003) workplace (Millar, 1990; Tambor, 1995), community (Kauffman, 1995) and global settings, and marriage/divorce (Simpson, Corlyon, McCarthy & Walker, 1990; Severson & Bankston; 1995) and the family (Morrisette, 1997). Most articles were descriptive as it appears that little empirical research has been conducted within the social work literature. The focus of the research studies was primarily on satisfaction of services.

The material suggests that conflict resolution/mediation is a method of practice utilized by social workers. The growth of these processes as part of social work practice is highlighted by the publication of three textbooks is an encouraging trend. Although it is believed there is a need for adding/enhancing education and training, there is a concern about how can this be accomplished. One thing is definitive: there is no easy answer. One question that arises is that while the authors suggest the need for teaching conflict resolution, do social workers believe that their education has left them lacking the necessary knowledge/skills/abilities required for practice? Did their social work graduate programs prepare them to incorporate conflict resolution/mediation without additional education/training? That is one of the answers that this study sought to address.

### *The Current Study*

The literature review highlighted the range of social work mediation in various fields of practice such as child custody, family, divorce, and the schools. However, there

is no evidence as to whether these workers received additional training beyond their graduate education. While requirements to practice mediation vary by state, at present there is no uniform standard except for a suggested number of training hours conducted through university sponsored courses or community based programs. These requirements refer specifically to individuals engaged in the practice of mediation as either private practitioners or as a member of a larger mediation practice; they do not refer to individuals who utilize mediation skills within the context of their profession, such as the case with many social workers.

Therefore, based on the review of the existing literature and certain identified gaps related to the preparation of social workers to practice conflict resolution/mediation (Chetkow-Yanoov, 1991; Mayer, 1995; Keefe & Koch, 1999) this study explored the social workers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their graduate curriculum for conflict resolution/mediation practice and whether they believe it should be incorporated within the general body of knowledge. Schools of social work were surveyed (Sanchirico, 2000) to determine conflict resolution/mediation education in the existing curriculum. The current study's focus was to survey practitioners about their current practice area, preparation in their graduate study, and their understanding of the relevance of conflict resolution/mediation in social work practice, particularly by field and method. Concentration was on conflict resolution/mediation knowledge, skills and abilities and the field of practice.

The questions that guided this research were: 1) is there a gap between what is taught in the graduate curriculum and the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to

practice conflict resolution/mediation; 2) what additional training/education is required to achieve competency in conflict resolution/mediation; and 3) are the tasks of conflict resolution/mediation viewed as generalist social work tasks or specialist conflict resolution tasks. Based on the range of mediation in social work practice areas, this study explored the differences within practice area.

Socio-demographic variables will be used to describe the sample. The study identifies who these conflict resolution specialists are based on their demographics. The socio-demographic variables examined were age, gender, ethnicity, geographic locations of education, type of school, method of concentration, areas of specialization/practice, type of MSW program, year of completion, highest degree received, advanced training, percentage of practice, and specific fields of mediation practice. The research design, methodology, and data analysis plan are provided in the following chapter.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

This chapter provides the methodology for the current study. It presents a description of the current study and information about the research design and rationale, the sample selection, data collection procedure, data management and storage, variables investigated and data analysis.

#### *Research Design and Rationale*

The researcher begins with the question "What do I want to know in this study?" (Janesick, 1994). The CSWE mandated curriculum does not include conflict/dispute resolution as a theme of study. The generic social work curriculum is designed to prepare social workers for any area of practice and the situations they encounter. The literature documents the practice, by social workers, of mediation and other conflict resolution methods. Little research has been conducted to investigate whether the social work education includes preparation for this practice.

The purpose of this study was to examine social workers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their professional education on their knowledge, skills, and abilities to facilitate conflict resolution/mediation. Social work education must prepare the student with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to respond to various levels of concern in micro, mezzo or macro practice. This study provided an opportunity to assess social work education and the demands of practice, specifically as current education/training prepares social workers to manage conflict. The approach was largely quantitative, although some limited qualitative

data was generated. Focus was designed to assess exposure to various skills/curricular topics and the importance of these skills in current practice. The study surveyed social workers who include mediation as part of their practice; in effect, an expert opinion survey.

Knowledge about social workers' preparation for practice in the field of conflict resolution/mediation is important. Increasingly, social workers have assumed the formal role as mediator in a variety of fields of social work practice, including child and family, criminal justice, and education.

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Given what we know about the CSWE mandated curriculum and the changing demands on the practice of social work, a systematic assessment of preparation to ensure that it has relevance to current practice demands is obvious. In a broad sense, this study is a

needs assessment. A needs assessment can be described as a process for identifying the knowledge and skills necessary, and for pinpointing reasons for gaps in performance or a method for identifying new and future performance needs (Gupta, 1999).

Data gathering is the cornerstone of any needs assessment and there are many ways to collect data. Quantitative data are systematically collected, standardized and easily presented whereas qualitative findings are longer, more detailed and the open-ended responses permit one to understand the world as seen by respondents (Patton, 1990). Quantitative data can be measured and scored more easily because it is collected using surveys and questionnaires. Qualitative data is more difficult to measure because it obtains opinions and ideas collected from interviews and focus groups (Gupta, 1999). Most needs assessments use one or more of these methods. Quantitative methodologies have the strength of establishing generalities and the ability to study large numbers of participants (Fortune & Reid, 1999).

With the introduction of the internet, communication has changed dramatically. Email, websites, chats, newsgroups and listservs have provided the ability for researchers to communicate nearly instantaneously. The internet has provided a powerful new method for conducting research (Kittleson, 1997). Email surveys are nearly identical to mail surveys in that they both employ written questionnaires, but they differ in how they are transmitted and returned. Response to any form of electronic surveys depends of the level of comfort and sophistication of an individual user.

Email surveys employ the following methodology: respondents are identified, email surveys are sent to respondents, respondents answer survey and return it via email and the

survey administrator codes and analyzes the data received (Nesbary, 2000). With a web-based survey, the respondents receive an email directing them to a website address.

Mettha and Sivadas (1995) found that an email survey could be equally or more effective than regular mail surveys, both in response rate and response time. They found that the bulk of email responses arrived within three days as opposed to about three weeks for regular mail. Schaefer and Dillman (1998) found that the techniques shown to be effective in standard mail surveys were also found to be appropriate for an email survey. Overall, researchers have reported a response rate between 41% and 76% when using an email survey (Anderson & Gansnedar, 1995). Internet surveys can improve on the conventional methods by addressing surveys to specific individuals (Cho & LaRose, 1999). It has been suggested that the responses of electronic respondents reflect more openness and that respondents are often more uninhibited thereby inducing them to write longer answers to open-ended questions (Mettha & Sivadas, 1995).

The study employed quantitative methodologies utilizing a web-based, internet delivered survey instrument. A questionnaire was developed based on past research in this area. The survey instrument was a self-administered questionnaire, developed by this researcher, to investigate graduate school effectiveness in the areas of conflict resolution/mediation education. Items in the survey were based on the review of the literature, the researcher's education and experience in conflict resolution/mediation, mediation competency skills, refinement of the content analysis of the social work curriculum instrument completed by CSWE programs used previously (Sanchirico, 2000), and in consultation with practicing social work mediators. The use of a self-administered,

web-based survey provides access to a large number of participants and participant anonymity (Mitchell & Jolley, 2004).

### *Sampling*

Data was collected from a purposive sample. In purposive sampling, the sample is selected with a *purpose* in mind (Babbie, 2002). In this instance, there are one or more specific predefined groups. Purposive sampling can be very useful for situations to reach a targeted sample quickly and where sampling for proportionality is not the primary concern. It provides the opportunity to get the opinions of the target population – the sample is selected with a purpose.

Participants for this study were MSW trained social workers from different regional areas in the United States. Expert sampling was used as it involves the assembling of a sample of persons with known or demonstrable experience and expertise in some area – the field of conflict resolution/mediation. In this non-probability sampling method, the researcher uses his/her knowledge of and expertise of the topic when selecting participants (Salahu-Din, 2003).

Becker (1986) tells us, we must find people who engage in the behavior we want to study. In 2001, the National Chapter of NASW sponsored a mediation training seminar in which this researcher served as a coach/facilitator. Participants from this training provided richness in that these social workers represented diversity in age, experience, schools and major methods. An email listing of social workers who participated in this training was established at that time and maintained through periodic contact. Additional study participants were selected from the self-identified social work

mediators on membership lists of conflict resolution/mediation professional organizations on the local, state and national level, such as the Association for Conflict Resolution, the Academy of Family Mediators, Mediate.com, and several conflict resolution listservs.

Notice of this survey was sent out to identified social work mediators via email. To expand the sample population, a snowball sampling method was also utilized. Included in the email was a request for this message to be forwarded to recommend others who they may know who also meet the criteria. Snowball sampling is especially useful to reach populations that are inaccessible or hard to find (Salahu-Din, 2003). For instance, social work mediators who do not join professional organizations would not appear on any of the organizational lists. However, within specific geographic locations, you may find others who know them very well and how they can be contacted.

It was important to locate people who graduated from different schools and/or major methods. By identifying respondents from different schools and/or different methods of concentration, the opportunity to discover differences in programs also becomes available. Using a combination of sampling methods increased the validity of results. As the participants in the NASW training came from locations throughout the United States, a range of schools and methods, there is representativeness across nationwide programs. By utilizing a national database search and snowball sampling, this representativeness was expected to be duplicated. Identification of participants was an ongoing process and the desired sample size was 250. Individual emails were sent to 165 individuals and three different listservs with a conflict resolution/mediation focus. There was no way to determine the actual number of subscribers or the professional training

of the individuals on a listserv as membership information is only available to the administrator of the listserv. The sampling method was appropriate for its goodness of fit between the selected sample and the exploratory nature of this study.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

A web-based, email survey collected data from social workers regarding their perception of conflict resolution/mediation education as preparation for practice. Establishing an email address book as part of the survey was used to maximize the potential of an email survey (O'Lear, 1996). Pre-notice proved effective in increasing the response rates of the email surveys (Metha & Sivadas, 1995; Schaefer & Dillman, 1998). The additional advantage to using a pre-notice email was that if an incorrect address is written, the system alerts the researcher almost immediately (Metha & Sivadas, 1995). A number of email addresses were updated as a result of using this method. Utilizing this strategy, a pre-notice/recruitment email was sent to explain the purpose of the study and the procedures to follow if they choose to participate. Within one week of the pre-notice/recruitment email, the survey was distributed embedded in an email describing the study with a link to the consent form. An email signature identifying the researcher was included. Upon reading the consent form, participants either clicked on "I agree" which took them to the survey or if they did not consent, they either closed the window or clicked on the "I do not agree" which took them to the end of the survey, the resources page.

To maximize the potential for completed questionnaires, a follow-up email requesting participation in the study was sent twice in two-week intervals. This method is adapted from prior research in the study of social work educators (Sanchirico, 2003); the

difference being an email instead of a postcard. As IP addresses of individuals were not gathered to maximize anonymity, this resulted in duplicate links being sent to all members of the email address book. A thank you and an apology for duplication to those who completed the survey was acknowledged in the follow-up email.

There are a number of ways to collect the data from an email or web-based survey (Granello & Wheaton, 2004). To provide respondents with anonymity, data collection was managed by Survey Monkey, a site host, to ensure anonymity/confidentiality of respondents and facilitate ease of data entry. Survey Monkey is a well-known company that distributes and collects data for online survey research. In addition, the site host provides for data retrieval in a number of ways. Response data may be reviewed as a summary report or raw data at any time during data collection. A graphic engine provides results in the form of pie charts and bar graphs. The complete results of the survey were downloaded as a tab delimited text file for detailed analysis through SPSS.

#### *Data Management and Storage*

After participants responded to the survey, the data was collected electronically on an ongoing basis. The IP address of participants was not recorded and this maximized anonymity. Once all data were received, it was exported to an Excel spreadsheet and then imported into SPSS to create a paperless database of responses. The computer that was used is password protected to provide an additional level of privacy. Data was backed up to an external hard drive that is also password protected.

### *Measurement*

This section includes conceptual and operational definitions of the variables.

#### *Conceptual Definitions*

##### *Conflict Resolution*

For the purpose of this study, conflict resolution is the umbrella term that refers to the range of strategies utilized to resolve conflicts, i.e. mediation, arbitration, negotiation, and facilitation. Conflict resolution is also referred to as dispute resolution depending on the discipline of the provider. For this study, the terms will be used interchangeably. The strategies are frequently described as “ADR” or Alternatives to Dispute Resolution which refers to the alternative to litigation. ADR methods involve active participation of the parties to the conflict and often involve the assistance of a neutral third party.

##### *Mediation*

Mediation is the process in which parties to a dispute, two or more, work with a third party neutral – the mediator – to identify disputed issues, develop options, consider alternatives and work towards a mutually agreed upon solution. The mediator guides the process, advises the parties and assists in the development of a written agreement. The mediator does not have the power to impose a binding solution.

##### *Graduate School Education*

Graduate school education refers to the various programs that result in the completion of a masters program in social work. Program data will be collected to determine the type of program the participant attended.

### *Continuing Education/Certificate Program*

Continuing education and certificate programs refer to the ongoing training and education of social work professionals. The focus is on programs related to conflict resolution, in general and specifically in mediation.

### *Effectiveness of Preparation*

“Effectiveness of preparation” refers to social workers’ perceptions of how their education prepared them to practice conflict resolution/mediation. The questionnaire covers a range of curricular items that are both common to social work and conflict resolution and conflict specific. Items were included as a result of analysis of conflict/mediation coursework, a review of the literature, mediation competency skills, and through feedback from practitioners in the field.

### *Practice*

Participants were asked to identify their practice in relation to a particular population and area of concentration. These questions were asked in relationship to their practice in social work and in conflict resolution/mediation.

### *Operational Definitions*

#### *Effectiveness of Preparation*

To measure the variable “effectiveness of preparation” participants were provided with a self-administered questionnaire via an online web-based survey. Each participant was asked to respond to a series of questions. The questionnaire begins with statements about specific curricula items from their social work education and they are asked to respond on a scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” The second portion of

Part I refers to their beliefs about the need for a particular competency. Participants were asked to rate the competency for all social workers and those who practice conflict resolution/mediation.

#### *Conflict Resolution/Mediation Training*

Part II of the questionnaire asked participants to provide information about their post graduate school training and the area of practice.

#### *Graduate Social Work Education*

Part III of the questionnaire asked for information about their social work education – type of program, location, specializations and licensing. Additional data regarding availability of conflict resolution/mediation training at the school was also requested.

#### *Socio-demographic Variables*

Part IV included a set of socio-demographic variables used to describe the sample. Age, nationality, employment, primary professional identity and length of practice are elicited.

#### *Instrumentation*

The survey instrument used in this study was a self-administered questionnaire, developed by this researcher, to investigate graduate school effectiveness in the areas of conflict resolution/ mediation education. The instrument designed was based on a revised version of the survey created for the content analysis of the social work curriculum completed by CSWE programs (Sanchirico, 2003). The content of the questionnaire was

influenced partly by the researcher's views of key concepts, analysis of conflict/mediation coursework, a review of the literature, mediation competency skills, and through feedback from practitioners in the field. The instrument was validated for content through feedback received by social work mediators in academia, research, and practice. In addition, social work and conflict resolution educators who have taught a course in conflict resolution/mediation reviewed the questionnaire. See Appendix A for the study questionnaire.

These experts were asked to review the items and suggest deletions, additions and modifications of the items. An analysis of the recommendations of these experts served to reduce the original to three professional domains: 1) knowledge of conflict resolution/mediation; 2) professional skill/techniques, and 3) professional practice. A preliminary draft of the questionnaire was pre-tested and reviewed by a convenience sample of 10 social workers. Feedback from this pilot was incorporated into a final revision of the instrument.

Indicators were that the questionnaire addressed the areas of concern and accurately measures the variables under consideration (Grinnell, 1997). Participants were asked to rate the degree of preparedness and the importance of curricular items and practice skills on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. An important issue for an educational program is to identify discrepancies between graduates' preparedness for certain practices, and skills and the importance of those skills in future practice.

The second scale measured where participants believe specific curricula should be included. Participants were directed to read and classify each item on a two-point scale. If they believed a competency was a generic skill and needed by all social workers, they

are directed to click on ALL. If they believe only conflict resolution/mediation specialists need a competency, click on SPECIALIST. These categories were converted numerically in the scoring to reflect the levels of competency in the analysis.

Validity refers to the degree to which the study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure. By utilizing the data gathered from experts in the field, this study approaches success at high content, face-to-face and concurrent validity in the development of the tasks and scales. Reliability is concerned with the accuracy of the actual measuring instrument or procedure to yield the same result on repeated trials. The empirical reliability of the scales were tested in the analysis of the data.

### *Data Analysis*

The data were analyzed with univariate and bivariate analyses using SPSS software (Rubin & Babbie, 2005).

#### *Univariate Analysis*

Univariate analysis involves the examination across cases of one variable at a time. Generally there are three major characteristics of a single variable that are looked at: the distribution, central tendency and dispersion. Univariate data analysis describes the population and examines each variable for later use in bivariate and multivariate statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the basic features of the data in the study. They provided simple summaries about the sample and the measures. Along with simple graphic analysis, they formed the basis of quantitative analysis of data. Descriptive statistics provides a way to describe what the data show.

One of the first questions asked is often “how many.” Therefore, running frequency distributions helps us to know the frequency for each value for each variable (Weinbach & Grinnell, 1998). Included in this distribution will be the nominal variables of ethnicity, gender, school, etc. The central tendency of a distribution is an estimate of the "center" of a distribution of values and the three major types of estimates of central tendency are the mean, median and mode. The sample will be described with univariate analysis procedures and include measures of central tendency (Salahu-Din, 2003)

#### *Bivariate Data Analyses*

Bivariate analyses were conducted to determine the nature of the relationship between two variables. The variables used in the analysis included social worker education, location, primary field of practice, advanced level training, and length of practice both in social work and mediation. The influences of these variables in terms of value and learning about conflict resolution were examined. Results from the univariate and bivariate analyses are discussed in the following chapter.

#### *Feasibility and Human Subjects Issues*

This research was guided by the ethical principles informed by the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 1991) and the *Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research* (retrieved online at <http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/guidelines/belmont.html> on 4/1/08). Priority was given to ensure that no harm will come to research study participants.

Participants were sent an initial recruitment email notifying them about the study and asking for their participation. Within one week another email was sent with a link to the

survey. Upon clicking the link, the participants were taken to the consent page where they, once again, have the option of opting-out of the survey. The survey was a voluntary, anonymous online survey about social workers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their graduate school education for conflict resolution/mediation practice. There were no direct benefits for subjects participating in this study. However, because the survey asked about the subject's perceptions of their education, they might have been concerned about acknowledging a gap in their education. As the survey was not connected directly to any MSW program, there was no potential harm that a specific program would receive this information. Survey Monkey, a company well known for the distribution and collection of online survey research, managed the survey. Although the survey was not being run from a secure http server like those used to handle credit card transactions, there was a small possibility that unauthorized third parties, such as computer hackers, could view responses. However, the benefits in gained knowledge far outweighed any risks to any individual, and the risks were not greater than those experienced in everyday life. All subjects that opened the link to the online survey would be taken to a "Thank You" page that included resources and the email of the researcher for additional information.

As this was a voluntary, anonymous study, the informed consent and survey was emailed to subjects and returned in the aggregate through Survey Monkey without recording the IP address of the participant. In the informed consent, the method for maintaining anonymity was explained. Once the data was received, it was exported to an Excel spreadsheet and then imported into SPSS to create a paperless database of responses. Data

was not stored on the Survey Monkey server beyond completion of collection and the account has now been closed.

The survey instrument did not contain questions that would tend to identify any individual person. Both the informed consent and the questionnaire contained clear instructions not to provide identifying information. The survey employed seven point Likert scales, from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, and forced choice questions about educational backgrounds, years in practice, age, etc. While these variables would not tend to identify any individual person, subjects were able to skip any questions they did not want to answer, and the Survey Monkey program was defaulted to that option.

Approval for the current study was granted by The Institutional Review Board of Hunter College of The City University of New York. The appendix contains a copy of the approval letter.

In conclusion, this study sought to respond to the literature, gaps in the literature and called for further exploration of social work education in the preparation for conflict resolution/mediation practice. The results of the survey will contribute to ongoing discussions about the social work curriculum and the increasing needs of a demanding, changing practice.

## Chapter Four

### Results

In this chapter of the dissertation, the research findings from the statistical analyses will be reported and discussed. This study examined social workers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their professional education of their knowledge/skills/abilities to facilitate conflict resolution/mediation. Studies in mediation have found that "the knowledge and skill base of social work is compatible with and complementary to the requirements for mediation practice" (Gibelman and Demone, 1989, p. 36). Chetkow-Yanoov (1991) emphasized that conflict resolution and skills in mediation have been increasingly important for social work education and it has been suggested that social workers would be better prepared to practice mediation with formal preparation. Therefore, the study surveyed social workers who include mediation as part of their practice; in effect, an expert opinion survey.

In addition, this study explored the influence of demographic variables on perceptions of preparation for practice. The first section of the quantitative analysis and presentation of data reports the size and characteristics of the sample. The preliminary quantitative examination of the data involved compilation of data frequencies and measures of central tendency and dispersion. Section two presents the univariate descriptive analysis of the study variables. The third section covers the bivariate analysis. Data analyses were conducted by using the Windows version of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 16.0, by SPSS, Inc., 2007).

### *Sample Size*

As noted in chapter three, this study is based on a sample of social workers from across the country who include mediation in their practice. In total, 104 surveys were completed to some degree on the Survey Monkey server. The target sample for the study was MSW trained social workers. Because they did not meet the target criteria of social work education, 26 surveys were excluded from the analysis. Therefore, the results of this study are based on 78 surveys.

From October to December 2008, emails with the study information were sent to 165 individuals from association listings including the Association for Conflict Resolution, the Colorado Council of Mediators, and the NYS Council on Divorce Mediation. Many individual names appeared on duplicate membership lists thereby reducing the number of direct emails. Request emails for participation in the study were sent to three different listservs with a conflict resolution focus: Cadre-Practitioner (Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education), NYC Dispute Resolution, and Dispute-Res. There is no way to determine the actual number of subscribers or the professional training of the individuals on a listserv. Membership information is only available to the administrator of the listserv. Utilizing the snowball sample method, to extend the reach to MSW trained social workers, an email was also sent to doctoral students in the social welfare program at the Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York.

### *Sample Characteristics*

Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5 summarize the characteristics of the demographic variables for the sample. All social work mediators provided information regarding gender, 91% ( $n=71$ )

were female and 9% ( $n=7$ ) were male (see Table 2). In terms of age, there were wide variations: ages ranged from 30 to 70 years and the standard deviation was 10.48. The median age was 46.00 with a mean of 48.29 years. However, the participants could opt out of any question and 34.6% ( $n=27$ ) did not respond to this question.

The participants were not diverse in regard to ethnic/racial origin. Of the respondents who responded, 71.8% ( $n=56$ ) are White Caucasian (not Hispanic/Latino), 10.3% ( $n=8$ ) are African American/Black, 15.4% ( $n=12$ ) are Hispanic/Latino and 1.3% ( $n=1$ ) is Puerto Rican (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants – Gender/Age/Ethnic/Racial Origin  
Total Sample ( $N=78$ )*

| Variable                              | Test Statistic |              |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|--------------|
|                                       | $n$            | %            |
| Gender                                |                |              |
| Female                                | $n=71$         | 91%          |
| Male                                  | $n=7$          | 9%           |
| Age                                   | $M = 48.29$    | $SD = 10.08$ |
| Ethnic/Racial Origin                  |                |              |
| African American/Black                | $n= 8$         | 10.3%        |
| Hispanic/Latino                       | $n=12$         | 15.4%        |
| Puerto Rican                          | $n=1$          | 1.3%         |
| White Caucasian (not Hispanic/Latino) | $n=56$         | 71.8%        |

Participants were asked to self-identify the title of their current position as it was impossible to list all potential titles for a forced choice answer. There were many single answers that were combined with other similar titles. Titles were combined by either social work or mediation practice areas. Table 3 provides a range of titles of the study participants. Table 4 provides the details of employment by setting, practice area, function and auspice.

Employment data is reported for both primary and secondary employment and Table 5 provides the details of employment by location and size of population.

A majority of the participants 52.5% ( $n=41$ ) classified their titles within social work. There were a few, 6.5% ( $n=5$ ) who classified their titles as either self-employed, psychotherapists, or private practitioners. The remaining titles 16.6% ( $n=12$ ) were within the mediation field. As a large number did not respond to this question, 24.4% ( $n=19$ ), a category for missing was included in the table.

**Table 3**

*Characteristics of Study Participants – Job Titles*  
*Total Sample (N=78)*

| Variable                                                                                            | Test Statistic |       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|
|                                                                                                     | <i>n</i>       | %     |
| Social worker/case manager/group worker                                                             | $n=14$         | 17.9% |
| School social worker/Lead School social worker                                                      | $n=16$         | 20.5% |
| Supervisor: social work, direct/family/field/group services,                                        | $n=7$          | 9.0%  |
| Mediator/Collaborative Attorney/Senior Mediation Specialist/Conflict Resolution Specialist/Director | $n=12$         | 16.6% |
| Psychotherapist/private practitioner/self-employed                                                  | $n=5$          | 6.5%  |
| Director: family services/social work services/youth services                                       | $n=3$          | 3.8%  |
| Department Chair, Social Work                                                                       | $n=1$          | 1.3%  |
| Missing                                                                                             | $n=19$         | 24.4% |

*Note:* The job title was self-reported.

Study participants are primarily involved in direct practice areas (See Table 4). 67.7% ( $n=44$ ) report that their primary job function is direct service and 13.8% ( $n=9$ ) are

involved with supervision. Of those responding, 9.2% ( $n=9$ ) are involved with management/administration and 3.1% ( $n=2$ ) work in education and training. The remaining 6.2% ( $n=4$ ) selected “other” and identified their primary employment function as mediation.

There was a variety of primary employment settings represented in the study (see Table 4). Among the participants, 31.6% ( $n=24$ ) are working in social service agencies/organizations, 23.7% ( $n=18$ ) are working in either elementary or secondary school systems, 19.7% ( $n=15$ ) are in private practice/self-employed/solo and 5.5% ( $n=4$ ) are in private practice/self-employed/group. The only other setting that included more than 2 participants was in court/probation/parole/other criminal justice system with 7.9% ( $n=6$ ).

With regard to practice areas (see Table 4), 45.9% ( $n=28$ ) work in family services, 26.2% ( $n=16$ ) work in school social work, and 9.8% ( $n=6$ ) work with children and youth. Other practice areas include 4.9% ( $n=3$ ) group services, 3.3% ( $n=2$ ) occupational/EAP, and 3.3% ( $n=2$ ) education.

Participants were given 7 choices and an option to add their own category for the primary employment auspice. Of the responses received, 36.1% ( $n=22$ ) work in the local public sector, 14.3% ( $n=9$ ) work in the state public sector, 27.9% ( $n=17$ ) work for private/nonprofit/nonsectarian agencies, and 21.3% ( $n=13$ ) work in the private/for-profit (proprietary) environment.

Secondary employment data closely resembles the primary employment data. Study participants are primarily involved in direct practice areas (See Table 4). 25.0% ( $n=16$ ) report that their secondary job function is direct service, 3.1% ( $n=2$ ) are involved with policy development/ analysis, 4.7% ( $n=3$ ) work as consultants, 3.1% ( $n=2$ ) work in

education/training. Of those responding, 64.1% ( $n=41$ ) do not indicate having secondary employment.

The secondary employment setting is varied with a concentration of 15.6% ( $n=10$ ) in mediation and 10.9% ( $n=7$ ) in private practice/self-employed/solo. The other settings included small numbers, 3.1% ( $n=2$ ) in private practice-partnership/group, and 3.1% ( $n=2$ ) at a college/university.

The largest area of practice for secondary employment was in family services, 28.1% ( $n=18$ ). The remaining practice areas are 3.1% ( $n=2$ ) in education and 1.6% ( $n=1$ ) in each of the following: public assistance/welfare, school social work and other disabilities.

The private/for-profit sector and the private/nonprofit-nonsectarian sector each employed 14.1% ( $n=9$ ) participants. The private/nonprofit-sectarian and the local public sector each employed 3.1% ( $n=2$ ).

**Table 4**

*Characteristics of Selected Study Participants – Primary and Secondary Employment*  
*Total Sample (N=78)*

| Variable                                             | Test Statistic<br><i>n</i> | Valid % |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------|
| Primary Employment Function                          |                            |         |
| Direct service                                       | <i>n</i> =44               | 67.7%   |
| Supervision                                          | <i>n</i> = 9               | 13.8%   |
| Management/administration                            | <i>n</i> =6                | 9.2%    |
| Education/training                                   | <i>n</i> = 2               | 3.1%    |
| Other                                                | <i>n</i> =4                | 6.2%    |
| Primary Employment Setting                           |                            |         |
| Social service agency/organization                   | <i>n</i> =24               | 31.6%   |
| Elementary/secondary school system                   | <i>n</i> =18               | 23.7%   |
| Private practice-Self employed/solo                  | <i>n</i> =15               | 19.7%   |
| Court/probation/parole/other criminal justice system | <i>n</i> =6                | 7.9%    |
| Private practice-Partnership/group                   | <i>n</i> =4                | 5.3%    |
| Primary Employment Practice Area                     |                            |         |
| Family services                                      | <i>n</i> =28               | 45.9%   |
| School social work                                   | <i>n</i> =16               | 26.2%   |
| Children and youth                                   | <i>n</i> =6                | 9.8%    |
| Current Primary Employment Auspice                   |                            |         |
| Public sector – local                                | <i>n</i> =22               | 36.1%   |
| Private/nonprofit (nonsectarian)                     | <i>n</i> =17               | 27.9%   |
| Private/for-profit (proprietary)                     | <i>n</i> =13               | 21.3%   |
| Public sector – state                                | <i>n</i> =9                | 14.3%   |
| Secondary Employment Function                        |                            |         |
| Direct service                                       | <i>n</i> =16               | 25.0%   |
| Consultant                                           | <i>n</i> =3                | 4.7%    |
| None                                                 | <i>n</i> =41               | 64.1%   |
| Secondary Employment Setting                         |                            |         |
| Mediation                                            | <i>n</i> =10               | 15.6%   |
| Private practice-Self employed/solo                  | <i>n</i> =7                | 10.9%   |
| Secondary Employment Practice Area                   |                            |         |
| Family services                                      | <i>n</i> =18               | 28.1%   |
| Education                                            | <i>n</i> =2                | 3.1%    |
| Current Secondary Employment Auspice                 |                            |         |
| Private/for-profit (proprietary)                     | <i>n</i> =9                | 14.1%   |
| Private/nonprofit (nonsectarian)                     | <i>n</i> =9                | 14.1%   |

Table 5 represents the location where participants are employed and the population of the community in which they work. The majority of the participants work in various locations in the state of New York. Only five states have more than three workers. There are 55.5% ( $n=43$ ) located in New York, 6.4% ( $n=5$ ) in the state of California, and 5.1% ( $n=4$ ) in Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. The District of Columbia accounts for 3.8% ( $n=3$ ), 2.6% ( $n=2$ ) in Arizona, Florida, Missouri, and Texas. A small percentage 1.3% ( $n=1$ ) work in the states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, North Carolina, North Dakota, Nevada, Rhode Island and Vermont.

Most participants work in large communities. A majority 65.4% ( $n=51$ ) work in communities of more than 500,000 people, 21.8% ( $n=17$ ) in communities of 100,001 to 500,000 people, 6.4% ( $n=5$ ) in communities of 10,001 to 50,000 people, 5.1% ( $n=4$ ) in communities of 50,001 to 100,000 people, and only 1.3% ( $n=1$ ) in a community of fewer than 10,000 people.

**Table 5**

*Characteristics of Study Participants – Employment by location and population of community*

*Total Sample (N=78)*

| Variable                               | Test Statistic<br><i>n</i> | Valid % |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------|
| Location of Current Job by State       |                            |         |
| New York                               | $n=43$                     | 55.1%   |
| Other                                  | $n=35$                     | 45.0%   |
| Population of Community where employed |                            |         |
| 100,001 to 500,000 people              | $n=17$                     | 21.8%   |
| more than 500,000 people               | $n= 51$                    | 65.4%   |

The description and background demographics of the sample were presented. The following discussion presents the univariate and bivariate analyses for the remaining independent and dependent variables in this study such as education and training, professional identity, social work curricula, and conflict resolution competency for practicing social workers.

### *Univariate and Bivariate Analyses*

#### *Graduate Social Work Education*

Both public and private schools, regardless of location, offered participants a variety of program options. More than half of the study participants (64.1%,  $n=50$ ) completed a traditional two-year full time MSW program. Of the remaining participants, 23.2%,  $n=18$ , completed their graduate social work education on a part-time basis. A small number completed the combined BSW/MSW program or advanced placement programs, (6.4%,  $n=5$  and 3.8%,  $n=3$  respectively). Only two participants (2.6%,  $n=2$ ) completed a degree beyond the masters level. There are 49.4% ( $n=38$ ) of the participants who completed their social work education within the past twelve years (1996-2008), 32.5% ( $n=25$ ) between 1986-1995 and 13.0% ( $n=10$ ) who completed their education between 1965 and 1985.

Close to half of the participants (48.9%,  $n=38$ ) responded that their major method of concentration was casework and 32.1%,  $n=25$  responded their method as group work. Of the remaining responses, 16.6%,  $n=13$  responded that their major method of concentration was clinical. Areas of specialization were concentrated in three areas: family (25.6%,  $n=20$ ), children and youth (12.8%,  $n=10$ ), and school (7.7%,  $n=6$ ). More than half of the

respondents indicated that they held either the LCSW (34.7%,  $n=27$ ) or the LMSW (28.2%,  $n=22$ ) in their respective states.

Location of the schools varied. Of the participants who responded, 61.5% ( $n=48$ ) attended school in an urban area, 9.5% ( $n=23$ ) attended in a suburban area, and a small percentage 6.4% ( $n=6$ ) attended in a rural area. The majority of the participants 67.9% ( $n=53$ ) attended publicly funded institutions and 32.1% ( $n=25$ ) attended private colleges/universities.

Participants were asked to indicate whether their program offered a specific course in either conflict/dispute resolution or mediation. The majority, 79.5% ( $n=62$ ), responded that no course was available within their program. All participants responded to this question and 20.5% ( $n=16$ ) reported that a course did exist at their institution. Of the schools that offered these courses, 6.4% ( $n=5$ ) offer a certificate and 5.1% ( $n=4$ ) or a degree in conflict/dispute resolution. See Table 6 for a summary of conflict resolution/mediation offerings by schools. Table 7 provides details of graduate school education.

Many institutions offer additional opportunities for training outside of a credit-bearing course and participants were asked to identify whether other opportunities were available. Of those responding, 74.4% ( $n=58$ ) indicated there were no additional opportunities for conflict/dispute resolution or mediation education. The remaining 25.6% ( $n=20$ ) indicated the range of available training as 11.5% ( $n=9$ ) in seminars, 9.0% ( $n=7$ ) in professional development workshops, and 3.8% ( $n=3$ ) in continuing education classes. Participants were asked to check all that apply.

**Table 6**

*Opportunities Available for Conflict Resolution/Mediation Education by School –  
Location and Type  
Total Sample (N=78)*

| Variable | Test Statistic |         |
|----------|----------------|---------|
|          | <i>n</i>       | Valid % |
| Rural    | <i>n</i> =1    | 1.3%    |
| Suburban | <i>n</i> =9    | 11.8%   |
| Urban    | <i>n</i> =6    | 7.9%    |
| Public   | <i>n</i> =10   | 12.8%   |
| Private  | <i>n</i> =6    | 7.7%    |

**Table 7**

*Graduate Social Work Education  
Total Sample (N=78)*

| Variable                                      | Test Statistic |       |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|
|                                               | <i>n</i>       | %     |
| Type of MSW Program                           |                |       |
| Two year/full time                            | <i>n</i> =50   | 64.1% |
| Part-time                                     | <i>n</i> =18   | 23.1% |
| Combined BSW/MSW                              | <i>n</i> =5    | 6.4%  |
| Advanced Placement                            | <i>n</i> =3    | 3.8%  |
| Highest Degree Received                       |                |       |
| MSW/MSSW                                      | <i>n</i> =71   | 91.0% |
| MS                                            | <i>n</i> =3    | 3.8%  |
| Ph.D.                                         | <i>n</i> =2    | 2.6%  |
| Date of completion-highest social work degree |                |       |
| 1965-1985                                     | <i>n</i> =10   | 13.0% |
| 1986-1995                                     | <i>n</i> =25   | 32.5% |
| 1996-2008                                     | <i>n</i> =38   | 49.4% |
| Major Method of Concentration                 |                |       |
| Casework                                      | <i>n</i> =38   | 48.9% |
| Group work                                    | <i>n</i> =25   | 32.1% |
| Clinical                                      | <i>n</i> =13   | 16.6% |
| Area of Specialization                        |                |       |
| Family                                        | <i>n</i> =20   | 25.6% |
| Children/Youth                                | <i>n</i> =10   | 12.8% |
| School                                        | <i>n</i> =6    | 7.7%  |
| Current licenses held                         |                |       |
| LCSW                                          | <i>n</i> =27   | 34.7% |
| LMSW                                          | <i>n</i> =22   | 28.2% |

**Table 7 - Graduate Social Work Education - continued**

|                                                                   |              |  |       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--|-------|
| Location of School                                                |              |  |       |
| Urban                                                             | <i>n</i> =48 |  | 61.5% |
| Suburban                                                          | <i>n</i> =23 |  | 29.5% |
| Rural                                                             | <i>n</i> =5  |  | 6.4%  |
| School by Type                                                    |              |  |       |
| Public                                                            | <i>n</i> =53 |  | 67.9% |
| Private                                                           | <i>n</i> =25 |  | 32.1% |
| Offer specific course in conflict/dispute resolution or mediation |              |  |       |
| Yes                                                               | <i>n</i> =16 |  | 20.5% |
| No                                                                | <i>n</i> =62 |  | 79.5% |
| Offer certificate or degree                                       |              |  |       |
| Certificate                                                       | <i>n</i> =5  |  | 6.4%  |
| Degree                                                            | <i>n</i> =4  |  | 5.1%  |
| Other opportunities for training at institution                   |              |  |       |
| Yes                                                               | <i>n</i> =20 |  | 25.6% |
| No                                                                | <i>n</i> =58 |  | 74.4% |
| Continuing Education Classes                                      | <i>n</i> =3  |  | 3.8%  |
| Professional Development Workshops                                | <i>n</i> =7  |  | 9.0%  |
| Seminars                                                          | <i>n</i> =9  |  | 11.5% |

*\*Note: Major method and area of specialization are self-reported*

### *The Social Work Mediator*

Knowledge about conflict resolution/mediation education was an important variable in the study. Table 8 provides details about the training that social workers completed to enhance their practice of conflict resolution/mediation.

The training/education was conducted in a variety of settings. A majority of the social worker, 48.1% (*n*=37), completed their conflict resolution/mediation training/education with community mediation centers, 28.6% (*n*=22) completed training with private organizations, and 23.4% (*n*=18) participated in training/education that was sponsored by colleges or universities. Of the participants, 62.8% (*n*=49) completed basic training between 1999 and 2008. The remaining 35.9% (*n*=27) completed their basic training between 1983 and 1998. A large percentage 85.8% (*n*=66) continued their training

with advanced specialties. Similar to basic training, 51.5% ( $n=34$ ) were trained at community mediation centers, 34.8% ( $n=23$ ) in private organization and a small number were trained at government (9.1% ( $n=6$ )) or colleges/university (4.5% ( $n=3$ )) sponsored programs. Of the participants, 75.5% ( $n=58$ ) completed basic training between 1999 and 2008. The remaining 9.0% ( $n=7$ ) completed their basic training between 1988 and 1998. Most of the programs, 91.0% ( $n=71$ ), offered certified training classes for the participants. Of these programs, 73.1% ( $n=57$ ), presented certificates and/or degrees upon completion.

Advanced training specializations reflect similar areas of social work practice. The areas that social work mediators received advanced training in were divorce/child custody, 53.2% ( $n=41$ ); family, 51.9% ( $n=40$ ); and children and youth, 50.6% ( $n=39$ ). Additional areas of advanced training included education/school, 23.1% ( $n=18$ ); workplace including union and labor issues, 20.5% ( $n=16$ ); and victim-offender, 10.3% ( $n=8$ ).

In addition to basic and advanced specialty training, 19.2% ( $n=15$ ), became certified as trainers. The number of training sessions they have conducted varies greatly. The largest percentage 7.8% ( $n=6$ ) have conducted 226-300 training sessions, followed by 6.5% ( $n=5$ ) who have conducted 1-75 sessions.

In regard to preparation for practice as a mediator, 76.9% ( $n=60$ ) believed that individuals who completed 25-50 hours of training had sufficient training. Another 16.7% ( $n=13$ ) believed that 51-75 hours of training should be completed before conducting a mediation session. Traditionally, upon completion of a training program to gain experience, individuals co-mediate a number of sessions (specified by each program or state) before they conduct independent sessions. A majority of the participants 62.8% ( $n=49$ ) indicated

that 0-six months was the minimum amount of time before independent practice. The remaining participants 34.6% ( $n=27$ ) indicated that the minimum experience for a mediator before practice should be one year.

As in social work, a number of mediators view themselves as generalists and mediate cases in multiple areas. Others specialize, primarily in the areas where they received advanced training. A large percentage 37.2% ( $n=27$ ) concentrate their practice working with families, 26.9% ( $n=21$ ) practice in education/school settings, 19.2% ( $n=15$ ) concentrate their practice on divorce and child custody conflicts, and 16.7% ( $n=13$ ) work to resolve conflicts with children and youth permanency. Other practice areas include the community, victim-offender, mental health and disabilities conflicts.

**Table 8**

*The Social Work Mediator–Conflict Resolution/Mediation Education/Training and Experience*

*Total Sample (N=78)*

| Variable                                                   | Test Statistic<br><i>n</i> | Valid % |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------|
| Completion of Conflict Resolution/Mediation Basic Training |                            |         |
| Community Mediation Center                                 | <i>n</i> =37               | 48.1%   |
| Private Organization                                       | <i>n</i> =22               | 28.6%   |
| College/University Sponsored                               | <i>n</i> =18               | 23.4%   |
| Completion of Basic Training                               |                            |         |
| 1983-1998                                                  | <i>n</i> =27               | 35.9%   |
| 1999-2008                                                  | <i>n</i> =49               | 62.8%   |
| Advanced Training                                          |                            |         |
| Community Mediation Center                                 | <i>n</i> =34               | 51.5%   |
| Private Organization                                       | <i>n</i> =23               | 34.8%   |
| Local/state/federal Government Sponsored                   | <i>n</i> =6                | 9.1%    |
| College/University Sponsored                               | <i>n</i> =3                | 4.5%    |
| Advanced Training Specialization*                          |                            |         |
| Divorce/child custody                                      | <i>n</i> =41               | 53.2%   |
| Family                                                     | <i>n</i> =40               | 51.9%   |
| Children and youth                                         | <i>n</i> =39               | 50.6%   |
| Education/school                                           | <i>n</i> =18               | 23.1%   |
| Workplace/union/labor                                      | <i>n</i> =16               | 20.5%   |
| Victim-offender                                            | <i>n</i> =8                | 10.3%   |
| Completion of Advanced Training                            |                            |         |
| 1988-1998                                                  | <i>n</i> =7                | 9.0%    |
| 1999-2008                                                  | <i>n</i> =58               | 75.5%   |
| Certified Training Class                                   |                            |         |
| Yes                                                        | <i>n</i> =71               | 91.0%   |
| No                                                         | <i>n</i> =6                | 7.7%    |
| Receive Certificate and/or degree                          |                            |         |
| Yes                                                        | <i>n</i> =57               | 73.1%   |
| No                                                         | <i>n</i> =16               | 20.5%   |
| Currently enrolled                                         | <i>n</i> =2                | 2.6%    |
| Are you certified as a trainer                             |                            |         |
| Yes                                                        | <i>n</i> =15               | 19.2%   |
| No                                                         | <i>n</i> =63               | 80.8%   |
| Training sessions conducted                                |                            |         |
| 1-75                                                       | <i>n</i> =5                | 6.5%    |
| 76-150                                                     | <i>n</i> =3                | 3.9%    |
| 151-225                                                    | <i>n</i> =2                | 2.6%    |
| 226-300                                                    | <i>n</i> =1                | 1.3%    |

**Table 8 - The Social Work Mediator – Conflict Resolution/Mediation Education/Training and Experience - continued**

|                                                                         |      |       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------|
| more than 300                                                           | n=6  | 7.8%  |
| Minimum number of training hours before conducting a mediation session  |      |       |
| 0-25                                                                    | n=3  | 3.9%  |
| 26-50                                                                   | n=60 | 76.9% |
| 51-75                                                                   | n=13 | 16.7% |
| Requirement for mediator experience before practice – minimum suggested |      |       |
| 0-six months                                                            | n=49 | 62.8% |
| One year                                                                | n=27 | 34.6% |
| Area of Practice Specialty**                                            |      |       |
| Family                                                                  | n=27 | 37.2% |
| Education/School                                                        | n=21 | 26.9% |
| Divorce/Child Custody                                                   | n=15 | 19.2% |
| Children and Youth/Permanency                                           | n=13 | 16.7% |
| Community/Victim-Offender                                               | n=6  | 7.7%  |
| Mental Health/Disabilities                                              | n=4  | 5.1%  |
| *more than one area of advanced training                                |      |       |
| **more than one specialty may be listed                                 |      |       |

### *Professional Identity and Length of Practice*

Participants were asked to reflect on their professional identity and indicate whether they identify more as a social worker or a mediator. The majority of the participants 69.2% (n=54) maintain their professional identity as that of a social worker. The remaining 26.9% (n=21) identify as a mediator. A small percentage, 3.8% (n=3) identified as conflict management specialist/consultant or both. One participant made the statement that social workers are mediators and therefore did not select either choice. See Table 9 for details of responses.

Years of practice varied for both fields. More than half (57.5%) of the participants have more than 10 years practice as social workers whereas 75.6% have 10 years or less as

mediators. Each in field, the category of 6-10 years had the largest number of participant responses: 34.6% ( $n=27$ ) for social work and 42.3% ( $n=33$ ) for mediation.

As many social workers include conflict resolution/mediation as a part of their professional practice, it was important to inquire as to the amount of time spent in each field of practice. The majority of the participants spend more than 70% of their working hours in the practice of social work. Only 15.4% ( $n=12$ ) spend 5% or less of their time in the practice of social work. As for time spent in conflict resolution/mediation practice, 65.4% of the participants spend 20% or less of their time in this field.

**Table 9**

*Characteristics of Study Participants – Primary Professional Identity and Years of Practice in Each Field — Total Sample (N=78)*

| Variable                                                                                 | Test Statistic<br><i>n</i> | Valid % |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------|
| Professional Identity                                                                    |                            |         |
| Social Worker                                                                            | <i>n</i> =54               | 69.2%   |
| Mediator                                                                                 | <i>n</i> =21               | 26.9%   |
| Other: Conflict Management Specialist/<br>Consultant, Both, Social workers are mediators | <i>n</i> =3                | 3.8%    |
| Practice Years in Social Work                                                            |                            |         |
| 0-5 years                                                                                | <i>n</i> =6                | 7.7%    |
| 6-10 years                                                                               | <i>n</i> =27               | 34.6%   |
| 11-15 years                                                                              | <i>n</i> =17               | 21.8%   |
| 16-20 years                                                                              | <i>n</i> =12               | 15.4%   |
| more than 20 years                                                                       | <i>n</i> =16               | 20.5%   |
| Practice Years as a Mediator                                                             |                            |         |
| 0-5                                                                                      | <i>n</i> =26               | 33.3%   |
| 6-10                                                                                     | <i>n</i> =33               | 42.3%   |
| 11-15                                                                                    | <i>n</i> =11               | 14.2%   |
| 16-20                                                                                    | <i>n</i> =5                | 6.4%    |
| more than 20 years                                                                       | <i>n</i> =3                | 3.9%    |
| Percentage of Time in Social Work Setting                                                |                            |         |
| 0-5%                                                                                     | <i>n</i> =12               | 15.4%   |
| 11-50%                                                                                   | <i>n</i> =7                | 9.1%    |
| 51-70%                                                                                   | <i>n</i> =4                | 5.2%    |
| 71-80%                                                                                   | <i>n</i> =10               | 12.8%   |
| 81-90%                                                                                   | <i>n</i> =14               | 17.9%   |
| 91-100%                                                                                  | <i>n</i> =31               | 39.7%   |
| Percentage of Time in Conflict<br>Resolution/Mediation Setting                           |                            |         |
| 0-5%                                                                                     | <i>n</i> =30               | 38.5%   |
| 6-10%                                                                                    | <i>n</i> =11               | 14.1%   |
| 11-20%                                                                                   | <i>n</i> =10               | 12.8%   |
| 21-80%                                                                                   | <i>n</i> =15               | 19.2%   |
| 91-100%                                                                                  | <i>n</i> =12               | 15.4%   |

### *Preparation for Practice*

The “effectiveness of preparation” refers to the social workers’

perceptions of how their graduate education prepared them to practice conflict resolution/

mediation. The following section provides the details and Tables 10-12 provide the frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation of the responses for variables in Part I #1, the curricula section, of the questionnaire. These items cover a range of curricula items that are both common to social work and conflict resolution and some that are more conflict specific.

In consultation with practicing social work mediators, variables were divided into three categories: those traditionally associated with social work, common to both fields, and those more closely identified with conflict resolution/mediation. Using this framework, ten variables were items that are more traditionally associated with social work practice/education and presented in the first section and Table 10. Twenty-four of the variables were viewed as common to both fields and presented in section two and Table 11. The remaining twenty variables were generally identified more specifically with conflict resolution/mediation practice and presented in section three and Table 12.

The scores for each item were on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 7. The response categories for the items were as follows: 1=“Strongly Disagree”; 2=“Disagree”; 3=“Slightly Disagree”; 4=“Neither Disagree or Agree”; 5=“Slightly Agree”; 6=“Agree”; and 7= “Strongly Agree.” Items in the survey were based on the review of the literature, the researcher’s education and experience in conflict resolution/mediation, mediation competency skills, and refinement of the content analysis of the social work curriculum used previously (Sanchirico, 2000).

This first section will focus on selected variables that are associated with social work. Since the study was focused on the preparation of social workers to practice

conflict resolution/mediation, the following section will then describe selected findings for the variables that are common to both fields. The final section will describe the findings for selected variables more specifically identified with conflict resolution/mediation practice.

*Perceptions of Preparation in Social Work Practice – Variables Common to Social Work*

The ten variables that were associated more traditionally with social work practice are presented in the order they were rated from the highest to the lowest based on the mean score.

Variables are presented in clusters that ranged from 5.73 to 5.43 between “strongly agree” and “agree,” then 5.22 to 5.05 around “agree” and “slightly agree” and then 4.92 to 4.63 around “slightly agree” and “lower than slightly agree.”

The analysis of responses for variable *My coursework provided a comprehensive range of social work theories* had the highest mean score of 5.73 (SD=1.01). The analysis reveals that 16.0% ( $n=12$ ) of study participants selected “strongly agree;” 57.3% ( $n=43$ ) selected “agree;” and 17.3% ( $n=13$ ) selected “slightly agree.” Very few of the participants, 9.3% ( $n=7$ ), selected any of the “lower than slightly agree” categories.

Advocacy is an important role in social work. The advocate’s focus is to listen and assist with the development of a plan to solve a problem. The focus is on the individual and the advocate does not try to ‘see both sides of the argument.’ *Advocacy on the behalf of the clients was of primary importance* had the second highest mean of 5.48 (SD=1.44). The analysis reveals that 24.7% ( $n=19$ ) of study participants selected “strongly agree;” 37.7% ( $n=29$ ) selected “agree;” and 16.9% ( $n=13$ ) selected “slightly

agree.” These ratings indicate that social work mediators believed that their graduate education prepared them to advocate for clients. Of the responses, 20.8% ( $n=16$ ) selected one of the “lower than slightly agree” categories.

Social work mediators also indicated that upon completion of their education, they were *able to understand basic motivational theories*. This variable had the third highest mean of 5.43 ( $SD=1.25$ ). The analysis reveals that 12.0% ( $n=9$ ) of study participants selected “strongly agree;” 52.0% ( $n=39$ ) selected “agree;” and 18.7% ( $n=14$ ) selected “slightly agree.” These findings reveal that a majority of the participants are in agreement with the statement. Of the remaining participants, 17.7% ( $n=13$ ), selected one of the “lower than slightly agree” categories.

The next cluster of variables ranged from 5.22 to 5.05 around “agree” and “slightly agree.” The variable *Possessing good oral and written communication skills was important* had the highest mean of 5.22 ( $SD=1.13$ ). The analysis reveals that 21.8% ( $n=17$ ) of study participants selected “agree” and 33.3% ( $n=26$ ) selected “slightly agree.” Of the remaining responses, 28.2% ( $n=22$ ) selected one of the “lower than slightly agree” categories.

Within this cluster, the variable *I developed the ability not to personalize the process* had the second highest mean of 5.11 ( $SD=1.12$ ). The analysis reveals that 35.5% ( $n=27$ ) of study participants selected “agree” and 36.8% ( $n=28$ ) selected “slightly agree.” Of the remaining responses, 22.4% ( $n=17$ ) selected one of the “lower than slightly agree” categories.

The variable *Facilitation and problem-solving skills were important in the curriculum* had the next highest mean of 5.09 (SD=1.32). The analysis reveals that 18.4% ( $n=14$ ) of study participants selected “agree” and 36.8% ( $n=28$ ) selected “slightly agree” with 27.6% ( $n=21$ ) of the participants selecting either the “neutral” or one of the “disagree” categories.

The next variable in this cluster, *I was encouraged to try new and different intervention strategies* had a mean of 5.06 (SD=1.43). The analysis reveals that 31.2% ( $n=24$ ) of study participants selected “agree” and 29.9% ( $n=23$ ) selected “slightly agree.” The remaining responses reveal 26% ( $n=20$ ) in one of the “lower than slightly agree” categories.

The last variable in this cluster, *Guidance was provided on how to access the various community resources* had a mean of 5.05 (SD=1.08). The responses reveal that 32.4% ( $n=24$ ) of study participants selected “agree” and 35.1% ( $n=26$ ) selected “slightly agree.” The remaining responses reveal 27.1% ( $n=20$ ) in one of the “lower than slightly agree” categories.

The next cluster of variables ranged from 4.92 to 4.63 around “slightly agree” to “lower than slightly agree” The variable *Coursework covered how to develop empathy so as to avoid the appearance of bias* had a mean of 4.92 (SD=1.33). The analysis reveals that 34.6% ( $n=27$ ) selected “slightly agree;” 14.1% ( $n=11$ ) selected “neither disagree or agree;” and 17.9% ( $n=14$ ) selected one of the “disagree” categories. One-third of the participants, 33.3% ( $n=26$ ) selected one of higher than “slightly agree” categories.

The last variable was rated significantly lower than the others. It is directly related to conflict resolution/mediation practice but has been included within social work education as it relates to the generic fieldwork component in the graduate programs. *I encountered a sufficient range of client issues in fieldwork to enable me to improve my conflict resolution skills* had a mean of 4.63 (SD=1.63). The analysis reveals that 31.6% ( $n=24$ ) selected “slightly agree;” 15.8% ( $n=12$ ) selected “neither disagree or agree;” and 22.3% ( $n=17$ ) selected one of the “disagree” categories. Of the remaining participants, 30.3 ( $n=23$ ) selected one of higher than “slightly agree” categories.

The reliability for the social work variables in this scale was computed for the sample of participants used in the study. Cronbach’s alpha, a measure of internal consistency, was utilized. The original alpha for the 10 items was 0.69. An alpha of 0.71, a slight increase, was obtained when 3 items were removed from the scale. These three items were *client issues in fieldwork to improve conflict resolution skills*, *new and different intervention strategies*, and *advocacy on behalf of the clients*.

Although the variables were assigned one of three categories – social work, both social work and conflict resolution, or conflict resolution specific, the reliability indicates that these three variables might not be considered by the participants as items of preparation for generic social work practice. The variable regarding *issues in fieldwork* is identified as being directly related to conflict resolution/mediation practice but was included within the social work category as fieldwork is a core component of graduate education. However, mediation training programs also include a form of fieldwork – a number of co-mediation sessions prior to individual practice – and participants may have

decided that this is not generic practice but a component of advanced training. Conflict resolution/mediation practice is regarded as one of the new and different intervention strategies. The goal was to identify whether participants felt they were encouraged to try new and different intervention strategies *not only* conflict resolution/mediation. The participants, as conflict resolution/mediation practitioners may not have considered other strategy options when responding to this item. It was interesting to note that removal of the variable *advocacy for clients* resulted in a higher alpha. Advocacy is a critical component of social work practice but may not distinguish perceptions of education perhaps it is too general for evaluation of education. The alpha for the 7-item scale was 0.71, and the 7 item scale will be used as a measure of generic social work education.

The next section will present the variables common to both social work and conflict resolution.

**Table 10**

*Frequencies, Percentages and Means of Survey Response Items – Preparation for Practice – Part I: Curricula Items – Variables Associated with Social Work – Total Sample (N=78)*

| <b>Variable</b>                                                                                                            | <b>Strongly Disagree<br/>1</b> | <b>Disagree<br/>2</b> | <b>Slightly Disagree<br/>3</b> | <b>Neither Disagree or Agree<br/>4</b> | <b>Slightly Agree<br/>5</b> | <b>Agree<br/>6</b> | <b>Strongly Agree<br/>7</b> | <b>Response Count</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|-----------|
|                                                                                                                            | %(n)                           | %(n)                  | %(n)                           | %(n)                                   | %(n)                        | %(n)               | %(n)                        | n=                    | %           |           |
| My coursework provided a comprehensive range of social work theories.                                                      | .0% (0)                        | 2.7% (2)              | 1.3% (1)                       | 5.3% (4)                               | 17.3% (13)                  | 57.3% (43)         | 16.0% (12)                  | 75                    | 5.73        | 1.01      |
| Advocacy on the behalf of clients was of primary importance.                                                               | 1.3% (1)                       | 5.2% (4)              | 3.9% (3)                       | 10.4% (8)                              | 16.9% (13)                  | 37.7% (29)         | 24.7% (19)                  | 77                    | 5.48        | 1.44      |
| I was able to understand basic motivational theories.                                                                      | .0% (0)                        | 4.0% (3)              | 8.0% (6)                       | 5.3% (4)                               | 18.7% (14)                  | 52.0% (39)         | 12.0% (9)                   | 75                    | 5.43        | 1.25      |
| Throughout the program, persuasion and presentation – possessing good oral and written communication skills–was important. | .0% (0)                        | .0% (0)               | 5.1% (4)                       | 23.1% (18)                             | 33.3% (26)                  | 21.8% (17)         | 16.7% (13)                  | 78                    | 5.22        | 1.13      |
| I developed the ability not to personalize the process.                                                                    | .0% (0)                        | 3.9% (3)              | 5.3% (4)                       | 13.2% (10)                             | 36.8% (28)                  | 35.5% (27)         | 5.3% (4)                    | 76                    | 5.11        | 1.12      |
| Facilitation and problem-solving skills were important in the curriculum.                                                  | .0% (0)                        | 6.6% (5)              | 2.6% (2)                       | 18.4% (14)                             | 36.8% (28)                  | 18.4% (14)         | 17.1% (13)                  | 76                    | 5.09        | 1.32      |
| I was encouraged to try new and different intervention strategies.                                                         | 1.3% (1)                       | 6.5% (5)              | 7.8% (6)                       | 10.4% (8)                              | 29.9% (23)                  | 31.2% (24)         | 13.0% (10)                  | 77                    | 5.06        | 1.43      |
| Guidance was provided on how to access the various community resources available for clients.                              | .0% (0)                        | 1.4% (1)              | 8.1% (6)                       | 17.6% (13)                             | 35.1% (26)                  | 32.4% (24)         | 5.4% (4)                    | 74                    | 5.05        | 1.08      |
| Coursework covered how to develop empathy so as to avoid the appearance of bias.                                           | .0% (0)                        | 3.8% (3)              | 14.1% (11)                     | 14.1% (11)                             | 34.6% (27)                  | 20.5% (16)         | 12.8% (10)                  | 78                    | 4.92        | 1.33      |
| I encountered a sufficient range of client issues in fieldwork to enable me to improve my conflict resolution skills.      | 1.3% (1)                       | 17.1% (13)            | 3.9% (3)                       | 15.8% (12)                             | 31.6% (24)                  | 17.1% (13)         | 13.2% (10)                  | 76                    | 4.63        | 1.63      |

*Perceptions of Preparation for Social Work and Conflict Resolution/Mediation -  
Variables Common to Both Fields*

The twenty four variables that were common to both fields – social work and conflict resolution – are presented in the order they were rated from the highest to the lowest based on the mean score.

Variables are presented in clusters that ranged from 6.05 to 5.86 between “strongly agree” and “agree,” then 5.68 to 5.53 around “agree” and “slightly agree,” then 5.35 to 5.03 around “slightly agree,” then 4.96 to 4.13 below “slightly agree,” and 3.61 to 3.51 between “neither disagree or agree” and “slightly disagree.”

The analysis of responses for variable *I learned to respect differences* and *My program provided me with the ability to understand cross-cultural considerations* are important in today’s global environment. These variables are common to both the field of social work and conflict resolution/mediation. The analysis of responses for variable *I learned to respect differences* had the highest mean score of 6.05 (SD=1.07). The analysis reveals that 46.8% (n=36) of study participants selected “strongly agree” and 24.7% (n=19) selected “agree.” Of the remaining responses, 28.% (n=22) selected one of the “lower than agree” categories.

*My program provided me with the ability to understand cross-cultural considerations* had the second highest mean of 5.86 (SD=1.18). The analysis reveals that 35.9% (n=28) of study participants selected “strongly agree” and 28.2% (n=22) selected “agree.” Of the responses, 36.0% (n=28) selected one of the “lower than agree” categories. These ratings indicate that social work mediators believed that their graduate education prepared them to understand cross-cultural issues and respect differences.

The next cluster of variables ranged from 5.68 to 5.53 around “agree” and “slightly agree.” The variable *My program provided the guidance to maintain confidentiality* had the highest mean of 5.68 (SD=1.27). The analysis reveals that 48.1% ( $n=37$ ) of study participants selected “agree” and 11.7% ( $n=9$ ) selected “slightly agree.” These findings reveal that over half of the participants are in agreement with the statement. Of the remaining responses, 16.9% ( $n=13$ ) selected one of the “lower than slightly agree” categories. This item is important in both fields as clients are more willing to reveal information when there is a level of trust and acknowledged confidentiality.

The variable *Guidelines were provided in how to use both open and closed questions* had the next highest mean of 5.64 (SD=1.27). Social work mediators need to know what types of question to ask to achieve their goals whether it is social work practice or to move the mediation forward. According to the findings close to all participants felt that they were prepared. The responses indicate that 57.7% ( $n=45$ ) of study participants selected “agree” and 23.1% ( $n=18$ ) selected “slightly agree.” Very few of the participants, 9.0% ( $n=7$ ), selected any of the “lower than slightly agree” categories.

Conflict resolution also places emphasis on problem solving (Rahim, 1986; Thomas, 1976; Walton, 1987) and the variable *I received preparation in problem-solving* had a mean of 5.55 (SD=1.32). The analysis reveals that most study participants felt their education prepared them in this area; 39.7% ( $n=29$ ) selected “agree” and 20.5% ( $n=15$ ) selected “slightly agree.” Similarly, the participants felt they *developed the ability to listen actively to facilitate understanding and to prevent conflict*, the last variable in this

cluster, with a mean of 5.53 (SD=.95). The analysis reveals that 39.0% ( $n=30$ ) selected “agree” and 36.4% ( $n=28$ ) selected “slightly agree.”

The next cluster of variables ranged from 5.35 to 5.03 around “slightly agree.” There are many reasons that conflicts surface. An effective resolution frequently involves generating options for clients. The variable *I was able to develop and analyze options for clients* had the highest mean of 5.35 (SD=.87). The analysis reveals that 40.0% ( $n=30$ ) of the participants selected “slightly agree.”

One factor that impedes resolution is an imbalance of power. The responses for the variable *My program provided the knowledge to understand basic theories of individual and organizational power dynamics, i.e., the imbalance of power and impact on parties* had a mean of 5.19 (SD=1.40) with 32.0% ( $n=24$ ) of the participants selected “slightly agree.”

Learning negotiation skills is often necessary to work effectively with clients. The variable with the lowest mean in this cluster, 5.03 (SD=1.35), was *I was taught how to listen to or negotiate with dissatisfied clients*. The analysis reveals 36.4% ( $n=28$ ) of the participants selected “slightly agree.”

The next cluster of variables ranged from 4.96 to 4.13 below “slightly agree.” The variable *I received preparation in how to achieve neutrality and objectivity* had the highest mean of 4.96 (SD=1.70) and is the first variable with a mean below 5.0. This is important to note since the participants now move into the choices of “neither disagree or agree” or some level of “disagreement.” The analysis reveals that 27.5% ( $n=21$ ) of study participants selected one of the categories below “slightly agree.”

Conflict is not a topic that everyone is comfortable discussing. The responses for the variable *Faculty were comfortable discussing conflict* had a mean of 4.87 (SD=1.54). The analysis reveals that 34.7% (n=26) of study participants selected one of the categories below “slightly agree.”

Working with clients involves generating options to improve their living situation. In mediation, this results in the generation of an agreement. The mediator works with the parties until they reach an agreement they believe they can uphold. The variable *Material was covered to provide instruction in how to identify the elements of a sustainable agreement* had a mean of 4.26 (SD=1.61). The analysis reveals that 48.1% (n=37) of the responses were in one of the categories below “slightly agree.” Close to half of the participants did not believe that they received effective preparation in their graduate program to identify elements of a sustainable agreement.

The last variable in this cluster, *My program reviewed the Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators*, had a mean of 4.13 (SD=2.02). The analysis reveals that 45.5% (n=35) of study participants selected one of the categories below “slightly agree.”

The last cluster of variables for this section is in the range 3.61 to 3.51 between “neither disagree or agree” and “slightly disagree.” Graduate social work education prepares social workers for practice in the current environment. To address new emerging areas, curriculum content is revised. The survey asked participants to reflect on the changes in the field and whether *Conflict in the field was increasing and therefore preparation for conflict management was viewed as important*. This variable had a mean of 3.61 (SD=1.14). The analysis reveals that 30.3% (n=23) selected “neither disagree or

agree” and 34.2% ( $n=26$ ) selected “slightly disagree.” Participants did not believe that conflict management was viewed as important in their program.

Another question was whether or not the faculty agreed that conflict resolution/mediation was part of social work practice. The variable *Faculty in my program agreed that conflict resolution/mediation techniques are a part of professional social work practice* had a mean of 3.58 ( $SD=1.15$ ). The analysis for this variable reveals that 36.2% ( $n=25$ ) selected “neither disagree or agree” and 21.7% ( $n=15$ ) selected “slightly disagree.” Only 23.2% ( $n=16$ ) selected “slightly agree” and none of the participants selected “agree” or “strongly agree.”

The reliability for variables common to both social work and conflict resolution/mediation in this scale was computed for the sample of participants used in the study. Cronbach’s alpha, a measure of internal consistency, was utilized. The alpha for the 24 items was 0.79. An alpha of 0.81, a slight increase, was obtained when 2 items were removed from the scale. These two items were *My social work education prepared me to manage conflict with staff/supervisors* and *My social work education prepared me to manage conflict with agencies*.

The reliability indicates that these two variables might not be considered by the participants as items of common to both areas of practice. As the variables include words common to conflict resolution/mediation, particularly the word “conflict,” the mean tends to be lower and perhaps should have been placed in the section of variables more closely aligned with conflict resolution/mediation practice.

The next section will present the variables more specifically identified with conflict resolution/mediation practice.

**Table 11**

*Frequencies, Percentages and Means of Survey Response Items –  
Preparation for Practice – Part I: Curricula Items – Variables Common to Both Fields  
Total Sample (N=78)*

| <b>Variable</b>                                                                                 | <b>Strongly<br/>Disagree<br/>1</b> | <b>Disagree<br/>2</b> | <b>Slightly<br/>Disagree<br/>3</b> | <b>Neither<br/>Disagree or<br/>Agree<br/>4</b> | <b>Slightly<br/>Agree<br/>5</b> | <b>Agree<br/>6</b> | <b>Strongly<br/>Agree<br/>7</b> | <b>Response<br/>Count</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|-----------|
|                                                                                                 | %(n)                               | %(n)                  | %(n)                               | %(n)                                           | %(n)                            | %(n)               | %(n)                            | n=                        | %           |           |
| I learned to respect differences.                                                               | .0% (0)                            | .0% (0)               | .0% (0)                            | 13.0% (10)                                     | 15.6% (12)                      | 24.7% (19)         | 46.8% (36)                      | 77                        | 6.05        | 1.07      |
| My program provided me with the ability to understand cross-cultural considerations.            | 1.3% (1)                           | 1.3% (1)              | 1.3% (1)                           | 2.6% (2)                                       | 29.5% (23)                      | 28.2% (22)         | 35.9% (28)                      | 78                        | 5.86        | 1.18      |
| My program provided the guidance to maintain confidentiality.                                   | 2.6% (2)                           | .0% (0)               | 2.6% (2)                           | 11.7% (9)                                      | 11.7% (9)                       | 48.1% (37)         | 23.4% (18)                      | 77                        | 5.68        | 1.27      |
| Guidelines were provided in how to use both open and closed questions.                          | .0% (0)                            | 2.6% (2)              | .0% (0)                            | 6.4% (5)                                       | 23.1% (18)                      | 57.7% (45)         | 10.3% (8)                       | 78                        | 5.64        | .93       |
| I learned to value the importance of honesty, long term credibility and trust.                  | .0% (0)                            | .0% (0)               | .0% (0)                            | 10.5% (8)                                      | 34.2% (26)                      | 35.5% (27)         | 19.7% (15)                      | 76                        | 5.64        | .91       |
| I received preparation in problem-solving.                                                      | .0% (0)                            | 4.1% (3)              | 6.8% (5)                           | 5.5% (4)                                       | 20.5% (15)                      | 39.7% (29)         | 23.3% (17)                      | 73                        | 5.55        | 1.32      |
| I developed the ability to listen actively to facilitate understanding and to prevent conflict. | .0% (0)                            | .0% (0)               | 3.9% (3)                           | 6.5% (5)                                       | 36.4% (28)                      | 39.0% (30)         | 14.3% (11)                      | 77                        | 5.53        | .95       |
| I was able to develop and analyze options for clients.                                          | .0% (0)                            | .0% (0)               | .0% (0)                            | 17.3% (13)                                     | 40.0% (30)                      | 33.3% (25)         | 9.3% (7)                        | 75                        | 5.35        | .87       |
| I learned professional accountability.                                                          | .0% (0)                            | 7.7% (6)              | .0% (0)                            | 16.7% (13)                                     | 19.2% (15)                      | 38.5% (30)         | 17.9% (14)                      | 78                        | 5.35        | 1.36      |

**Table 11**

*Frequencies, Percentages and Means of Survey Response Items –  
Preparation for Practice – Part I: Curricula Items – Variables Common to Both Fields - continued*

|                                                                                                                                                                     |          |            |            |            |            |            |            |    |      |      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|----|------|------|
| My program provided the knowledge to understand basic theories of individual and organizational power dynamics, i.e., the imbalance of power and impact on parties. | .0% (0)  | 10.7% (8)  | 5.3% (4)   | .0% (0)    | 32.0% (24) | 42.7% (32) | 9.3% (7)   | 75 | 5.19 | 1.40 |
| I was taught how to listen to or negotiate with dissatisfied clients.                                                                                               | .0% (0)  | 6.5% (5)   | 10.4% (8)  | 7.8% (6)   | 36.4% (28) | 27.3% (21) | 11.7% (9)  | 77 | 5.03 | 1.35 |
| I received preparation in how to achieve neutrality and objectivity.                                                                                                | 3.9% (3) | 7.9% (6)   | 11.8% (9)  | 3.9% (3)   | 27.6% (21) | 26.3% (20) | 18.4% (14) | 76 | 4.96 | 1.70 |
| Faculty were comfortable discussing conflict.                                                                                                                       | 4.0% (3) | 4.0% (3)   | 10.7% (8)  | 16.0% (12) | 26.7% (20) | 25.3% (19) | 13.3% (10) | 75 | 4.87 | 1.54 |
| Faculty were interested in new practice areas.                                                                                                                      | 1.3% (1) | 11.5% (9)  | 3.8% (3)   | 15.4% (12) | 34.6% (27) | 28.2% (22) | 5.1% (4)   | 78 | 4.76 | 1.41 |
| I learned how to assess and manage interpersonal conflict in the professional realm.                                                                                | .0% (0)  | 5.2% (4)   | 15.6% (12) | 19.5% (19) | 29.9% (23) | 27.3% (21) | 2.6% (2)   | 77 | 4.66 | 1.25 |
| I received adequate help from faculty in filling gaps in my knowledge.                                                                                              | 1.3% (1) | 7.8% (6)   | 9.1% (7)   | 23.4% (18) | 32.5% (25) | 18.2% (14) | 7.8% (6)   | 77 | 4.64 | 1.37 |
| Advocacy on behalf of a staff member was important.                                                                                                                 | 1.3% (1) | 10.5% (8)  | 7.9% (6)   | 19.7% (15) | 30.3% (23) | 27.6% (21) | 2.6% (2)   | 76 | 4.61 | 1.38 |
| Instruction was provided to prepare me not to use self-defensiveness as a tactic in negotiation.                                                                    | 1.4% (1) | 13.5% (10) | 10.8% (8)  | 14.9% (11) | 27.0% (20) | 25.7% (19) | 6.8% (5)   | 74 | 4.57 | 1.54 |
| My social work education prepared me to manage conflict with staff/supervisors.                                                                                     | 1.3% (1) | 6.7% (5)   | 10.7% (8)  | 38.7% (29) | 26.7% (20) | 8.0% (6)   | 8.0% (6)   | 75 | 4.39 | 1.29 |
| My social work education prepared me to manage conflict with agencies.                                                                                              | 1.3% (1) | 8.0% (6)   | 12.0% (9)  | 30.7% (23) | 33.3% (25) | 8.0% (6)   | 6.7% (5)   | 75 | 4.37 | 1.30 |
| Material was covered to provide instruction in how to identify the elements of a sustainable agreement.                                                             | 2.6% (2) | 18.2% (14) | 13.0% (10) | 14.3% (11) | 26.0% (20) | 20.8% (16) | 5.2% (4)   | 77 | 4.26 | 1.61 |

**Table 11**

*Frequencies, Percentages and Means of Survey Response Items –  
Preparation for Practice – Part I: Curricula Items – Variables Common to Both Fields - continued*

|                                                                                                                              |               |              |               |            |               |               |              |    |      |      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|----|------|------|
| My program reviewed the Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators.                                                     | 16.9%<br>(13) | 11.7%<br>(9) | 9.1% (7)      | 7.8% (6)   | 23.4%<br>(18) | 20.8%<br>(16) | 10.4%<br>(8) | 77 | 4.13 | 2.02 |
| Conflict in the field was increasing and therefore preparation for conflict management was viewed as important.              | 2.6% (2)      | 11.8%<br>(9) | 34.2%<br>(26) | 30.3% (23) | 17.1%<br>(13) | 2.6%<br>(2)   | 1.3% (1)     | 76 | 3.61 | 1.14 |
| Faculty in my program agreed that conflict resolution/ mediation techniques are a part of professional social work practice. | 5.8% (4)      | 13.0%<br>(9) | 21.7%<br>(15) | 36.2% (25) | 23.2%<br>(16) | .0% (0)       | .0% (0)      | 69 | 3.58 | 1.15 |

*Perceptions of Preparation for Conflict Resolution/Mediation Practice –  
Variables Common to Conflict Resolution*

The twenty variables that are more specifically identified with conflict resolution/mediation practice are presented in the order they were rated from the highest to the lowest based on the mean score. A general finding is that the means are a lot lower for the conflict resolution/mediation variables.

Variables are presented in clusters that ranged from 5.33 to 5.01 between “agree” and “slightly agree,” then 4.95 to 4.64 just below “slightly agree,” then 4.41 to 4.10 close to “neither disagree or agree,” and then 3.91 to 3.40 between “slightly disagree and “disagree.” The last cluster in this section scored at 2.16 between “disagree” and “strongly disagree.”

Effective social work mediators must be knowledgeable in generating options for clients to resolve conflict. The analysis of responses for the variable *I developed the ability to demonstrate and identify different courses of action and analyze the consequences of each* had the highest mean score of 5.33 (SD=.93) in this cluster. The analysis reveals that 46.2% (n=36) of study participants selected “agree” and 34.6% (n=27) selected “slightly agree.” There were only two participants who selected “disagree” indicating that social work mediators felt their graduate education prepared them in this area. The next variable was *My education provided the knowledge to identify underlying interests* with the second highest mean of 5.13 (SD=1.09). Mediators need to explore all issues when assisting clients to resolve conflicts so the ability to identify underlying interests is important. The analysis of the responses reveal that 25.6% (n=20) of study participants selected “agree” and 55.1% (n=43) selected “slightly agree.”

Although more than half of the participants selected “slightly agree,” it still is an indication that preparation was evident.

Conflict is generally viewed in a negative context. Therefore, participants were asked to respond as to whether *Faculty discussed the positive opportunities that can be presented by conflict*. Results indicate that a majority were in agreement: the variable had a mean of 5.01 (SD=1.34) with 29.9% ( $n=23$ ) of study participants selecting “agree” and 20.8% ( $n=16$ ) selecting “slightly agree.”

The next cluster of variables ranged from 4.95 to 4.64 just below “slightly agree. The variable *I received the necessary preparation to reframe issues* had the highest mean of 4.95 (SD=1.34). The analysis reveals 28.4% ( $n=21$ ) of the student participants selected “slightly agree.” Of the remaining responses, 35.2% ( $n=26$ ) selected one of the “lower than slightly agree” categories. Reframing is one of the key strategies when working with clients in mediation and it is necessary that mediators receive training in this area.

The variable *My courses provided the knowledge to understand the dynamics of human negotiation among conflicting interest groups* had a mean of 4.67 (SD=1.69). The analysis reveals 7.7% ( $n=6$ ) of the participants selected “slightly agree” and of the remaining respondents, 44.8% ( $n=35$ ) selected one of the “lower than slightly agree” categories.

The next highest mean in this cluster was 4.64 (SD=1.36) for the variable *I was able to understand the “casualties” of conflict – loss of morale, productivity, etc.* The

analysis reveals that 21.8% ( $n=17$ ) selected “slightly agree.” An understanding of “loss” can assist the social work mediator in the resolution of the conflict.

The last variable in this cluster, *My social work education prepared me to manage conflict with clients*, also had a mean of 4.64 ( $SD=1.36$ ). The analysis reveals that 24.0% ( $n=18$ ) of the study participants selected “slightly agree.” Close to half, 44.5% ( $n=36$ ), of the remaining participants did not believe that their graduate social work education prepared them to manage conflict with clients.

The next cluster of variables ranged from 4.41 to 4.10 close to “neither disagree or agree.” Knowledge of conflict management styles assist in the resolution of a conflict. The variable, *I was given the tools to identify personality and conflict management styles, strengths and challenges*, had a mean of 4.41 ( $SD=1.67$ ). The analysis reveals that 20.0% ( $n=15$ ) of the participants selected “neither disagree or agree” and 32% ( $n=24$ ) selected one of the “disagree” categories. Conflicts are often perplexing to participants and outsiders and are often viewed as the result of failures of communication or of personality clashes. Personality types are frequently classified into sixteen types based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Bayne, 2005) and there are five different conflict styles: competing, collaborating, accommodating, compromising and avoiding (Wilmot and Hocker, 2001). Individuals develop typical ways of responding to conflict based on their personality and conflict style although they can learn new patterns. With many options/combinations, it is highly unlikely that the amount of time necessary to cover these areas can be incorporated in the graduate social work curriculum.

To effectively resolve a conflict, the social work mediator facilitates an agreement among conflicting parties. The variable *I was confident in my ability to achieve mutual agreement among conflicting parties* had a mean of 4.37 (SD=1.78). The analysis reveals 19.7% ( $n=15$ ) of the participants selected “neither disagree or agree.” Of the remaining participants, 24.7% ( $n=21$ ) selected one of the “disagree” categories.

The variable *I felt comfortable with my level of knowledge concerning conflict resolution and mediation* had a mean of 4.36 (SD=1.83). The analysis reveals 17.1% ( $n=15$ ) of the participants selected “neither disagree or agree.” Another variable in this cluster, *I was able to demonstrate knowledge of ethics of collaborative conflict resolution* had a mean of 4.29 (SD=1.59). The analysis reveals 22.2% ( $n=16$ ) of the study participants selected “neither disagree or agree.”

*Coursework covered material so that I could understand the conflict cycle, i.e., how it begins and escalates* had a mean of 4.10 (SD=1.54). The analysis reveals 11.3% ( $n=8$ ) of the participants selected “neither disagree or agree.” Of the remaining participants, 43.7% ( $n=31$ ) selected one of the “disagree” categories. These ratings show that as the variables become more conflict specific, study participants have more of a tendency to disagree with the statement.

The next cluster of variables ranged from 3.91 to 3.40 between “slightly disagree and “disagree.” The variable *I understood the differences between compromise, cooperation, collaboration, and consensus building* had a mean of 3.91 (SD=1.70). The analysis reveals 10.4% ( $n=8$ ) of the participants selected “slightly disagree” and 23.4% ( $n=18$ ) selected “disagree.” The variable with the next highest mean in this cluster, *I*

*understood how to advise clients about mediation*, had a mean of 3.74 (SD=1.86). The analysis reveals 20.8% ( $n=16$ ) of the study participants selected “slightly disagree” and 19.5% ( $n=15$ ) selected “disagree.” Another 11.7% ( $n=9$ ) selected “strongly disagree.” A majority of the respondents, 52% ( $n=40$ ) did not believe that their graduate education prepared them to advise clients about mediation.

The variable *I knew how to conduct a mediation session* had a mean of 3.45 (SD=1.73). The analysis of this direct practice variable reveals 14.5% ( $n=11$ ) of study participants selected “slightly disagree;” 23.7% ( $n=18$ ) selected “disagree;” and 13.2% ( $n=10$ ) selected “strongly disagree.” Over half, 51.4% ( $n=39$ ), of the social work mediators did not believe they were prepared to conduct a mediation session upon completion of their graduate social work education. The variable *I had the ability to understand the differences between the roles, responsibilities, processes and expected outcomes of mediation, arbitration, and negation* had a mean of 3.40 (SD=1.60). The analysis reveals 15.6% ( $n=12$ ) of the participants selected “slightly disagree and 26.0% ( $n=20$ ) selected “disagree.” The variables that are more conflict specific have resulted in lower means.

The last variable that will be described here speaks to the participants’ feeling about the lack of preparation in their graduate program to prepare them for conflict resolution/mediation practice. The variable *When I completed my social work education, I was prepared to practice conflict resolution/mediation without additional training* was also the last in the list on the questionnaire and had the lowest mean, 2.16 (SD=1.22). This clearly indicates that participants did not feel prepared for practice without

additional training. The analysis reveals 2.6% ( $n=2$ ) of study participants selected “strongly agree;” .0% ( $n=0$ ) selected “agree;” and 1.3% ( $n=1$ ) selected “slightly agree;” 6.5% ( $n=5$ ) selected “neither disagree or agree;” 16.9% ( $n=13$ ) “slightly disagree;” 41.6% ( $n=32$ ) selected “disagree;” and 31.2% ( $n=24$ ) selected “strongly disagree.” These findings reveal that most participants are in disagreement with the statement (89.7%).

The reliability for variables more specifically identified with conflict resolution/mediation in this scale was computed for the sample of participants used in the study. Cronbach’s alpha, a measure of internal consistency, was utilized. The alpha for the 20 items was 0.89 which is much higher than the .80 criterion generally thought to be a reliable scale in the social sciences.

The next section provides the results for the second scale that referred to participants’ beliefs about the need for a particular competency and whether participants believed it was *knowledge/skill/ability* for all social workers or only for those practicing in the conflict resolution/mediation field.

**Table 12**

*Frequencies, Percentages and Means of Survey Response Items – Preparation for Practice – Part I: Curricula Items – Variables Identified with Conflict Resolution/Mediation Practice*  
*Total Sample (N=78)*

| Variable                                                                                                              | <b>Strongly Disagree<br/>1</b> | <b>Disagree<br/>2</b> | <b>Slightly Disagree<br/>3</b> | <b>Neither Disagree<br/>or Agree<br/>4</b> | <b>Slightly Agree<br/>5</b> | <b>Agree<br/>6</b> | <b>Strongly Agree<br/>7</b> | <b>Response<br/>Count</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|-----------|
|                                                                                                                       | %(n)                           | %(n)                  | %(n)                           | %(n)                                       | %(n)                        | %(n)               | %(n)                        | n=                        | %           |           |
| I developed the ability to demonstrate and identify different courses of action and analyze the consequences of each. | .0% (0)                        | 2.6% (2)              | .0% (0)                        | 12.8% (10)                                 | 34.6% (27)                  | 46.2% (36)         | 3.8% (3)                    | 78                        | 5.33        | .93       |
| My education provided the knowledge to identify underlying interests                                                  | 2.6% (2)                       | 1.3% (1)              | 2.6% (2)                       | 6.4% (5)                                   | 55.1% (43)                  | 25.6% (20)         | 6.4% (5)                    | 78                        | 5.13        | 1.09      |
| Faculty discussed the positive opportunities that can be presented by conflict.                                       | .0% (0)                        | 2.6% (2)              | 13.0% (10)                     | 20.8% (16)                                 | 20.8% (16)                  | 29.9% (23)         | 13.0% (10)                  | 77                        | 5.01        | 1.34      |
| I received the necessary preparation to reframe issues.                                                               | .0% (0)                        | 6.8% (5)              | 5.4% (4)                       | 23.0% (17)                                 | 28.4% (21)                  | 24.3% (18)         | 12.2% (9)                   | 74                        | 4.95        | 1.34      |
| My courses provided the knowledge to understand the dynamics of human negotiation among conflicting interest groups.  | 3.8% (3)                       | 5.1% (4)              | 24.4% (19)                     | 11.5% (9)                                  | 7.7% (6)                    | 37.2% (29)         | 10.3% (8)                   | 78                        | 4.67        | 1.69      |
| I was able to understand the “casualties” of conflict – loss of morale, productivity, etc.                            | 1.3% (1)                       | 7.7% (6)              | 9.0% (7)                       | 26.9% (21)                                 | 21.8% (17)                  | 29.5% (23)         | 3.8% (3)                    | 78                        | 4.64        | 1.36      |
| My social work education prepared me to manage conflict with clients.                                                 | 1.3% (1)                       | 4.0% (3)              | 13.3% (10)                     | 29.3% (22)                                 | 24.0% (18)                  | 18.7% (14)         | 9.3% (7)                    | 75                        | 4.64        | 1.36      |
| I was given the tools to identify personality and conflict management styles, strengths and challenges.               | 4.0% (3)                       | 10.7% (8)             | 17.3% (13)                     | 20.0% (15)                                 | 13.3% (10)                  | 25.3% (19)         | 9.3% (7)                    | 75                        | 4.41        | 1.67      |
| My course syllabi reflected important topics related to conflict resolution.                                          | 4.2% (3)                       | 11.3% (8)             | 19.7% (14)                     | 14.1% (10)                                 | 22.5% (16)                  | 14.1% (10)         | 14.1% (10)                  | 71                        | 4.38        | 1.72      |

**Table 12***Preparation for Practice – Part I: Curricula Items – Variables Identified with Conflict Resolution/Mediation Practice - continued*

|                                                                                                                                                                  |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |    |      |      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|----|------|------|
| I was confident in my ability to achieve mutual agreement among conflicting parties.                                                                             | 7.9% (6)   | 14.5% (11) | 5.3% (4)   | 19.7% (15) | 17.1% (13) | 28.9% (22) | 6.6% (5)   | 76 | 4.37 | 1.78 |
| I felt comfortable with my level of knowledge concerning conflict resolution and mediation.                                                                      | 6.6% (5)   | 14.5% (11) | 10.5% (8)  | 17.1% (13) | 25.0% (19) | 9.2% (7)   | 17.1% (13) | 76 | 4.36 | 1.83 |
| I was able to understand conflict theory.                                                                                                                        | 3.9% (3)   | 11.8% (9)  | 23.7% (18) | 7.9% (6)   | 17.1% (13) | 30.3% (23) | 5.3% (4)   | 76 | 4.34 | 1.68 |
| I was able to demonstrate knowledge of ethics of collaborative conflict resolution.                                                                              | 4.2% (3)   | 11.1% (8)  | 16.7% (12) | 22.2% (16) | 16.7% (12) | 23.6% (17) | 5.6% (4)   | 72 | 4.29 | 1.59 |
| Coursework covered material so that I could understand the conflict cycle, i.e., how it begins and escalates.                                                    | 4.2% (3)   | 8.5% (6)   | 31.0% (22) | 11.3% (8)  | 25.4% (18) | 14.1% (10) | 5.6% (4)   | 71 | 4.10 | 1.54 |
| I understood the differences between compromise, cooperation, collaboration, and consensus building.                                                             | 5.2% (4)   | 23.4% (18) | 10.4% (8)  | 26.0% (20) | 14.3% (11) | 13.0% (10) | 7.8% (6)   | 77 | 3.91 | 1.70 |
| I understood how to advise clients about mediation.                                                                                                              | 11.7% (9)  | 19.5% (15) | 20.8% (16) | 10.4% (8)  | 14.3% (11) | 15.6% (12) | 7.8% (6)   | 77 | 3.74 | 1.86 |
| I had the knowledge to understand “positional vs. principled” negotiating concepts and demonstrate the appropriate skills.                                       | 14.1% (11) | 20.5% (16) | 23.1% (18) | 5.1% (4)   | 21.8% (17) | 12.8% (10) | 2.6% (2)   | 78 | 3.49 | 1.74 |
| I knew how to conduct a mediation session.                                                                                                                       | 13.2% (10) | 23.7% (18) | 14.5% (11) | 22.4% (17) | 14.5% (11) | 3.9% (3)   | 7.9% (6)   | 76 | 3.45 | 1.73 |
| I had the ability to understand the differences between the roles, responsibilities, processes and expected outcomes of mediation, arbitration, and negotiation. | 11.7% (9)  | 26.0% (20) | 15.6% (12) | 13.0% (10) | 27.3% (21) | 3.9% (3)   | 2.6% (2)   | 77 | 3.40 | 1.60 |
| When I completed my social work education, I was prepared to practice conflict resolution/mediation without additional training.                                 | 31.2% (24) | 41.6% (32) | 16.9% (13) | 6.5% (5)   | 1.3% (1)   | .0% (0)    | 2.6% (2)   | 77 | 2.16 | 1.22 |

*Competencies: Knowledge/Skills/Abilities (KSA)*

A separate scale on participants' beliefs about the need for a particular competency measured participants' beliefs about who should have this knowledge/skill/ability. Each item was measured on a two-point scale which asked participants if the competency was generic or needed for all social workers or specialized and needed only for those who practice conflict resolution/mediation. Tables 13a and 13b provide details of the items on the questionnaire. Table 13a lists the variables that were designated as necessary for ALL social workers at the 100% level. Table 13b highlights the variables that were identified as necessary for social workers who include conflict resolution/mediation in their practice.

The variables selected were based on the review of the literature and experience in conflict resolution/mediation. As in the previous section, many of the skills and abilities can be viewed as traditional social work skills and others are more closely identified with conflict resolution/mediation.

Participant responses to 15 of the 38 variables reveal that 100% ( $n=78$ ) of the social workers should possess these competencies. Among those scoring at 100% are: *problem identification and problem solving strategies; gathering facts and information; reality testing; experiential skill development - concrete experience/reflective observation/active experimentation; active listening skills; range of questioning and response styles; knowledge of cross cultural, ethnic and gender issues; importance of honesty; empathy; relationship-building and facilitating communication; integrity and ethics; skills and tools for establishing trust, securing disclosure, facilitating resolution,*

*and handling sensitive and emotional people and issues; and impartiality.* It should be noted here that a number of these variables – *securing disclosure, facilitating resolution, and impartiality* are concepts related to conflict resolution/mediation yet were viewed by most as generic skills needed for all social workers. See Table 13a for all variables at the 100% level.

**Table 13a**

*Frequencies and Percentages: Survey Response Items – Preparation for Practice – Part I: Competencies – Knowledge/Skills/Abilities (KSAs) –ALL Social Workers @ 100% Total Sample (N=78)*

|                                                                                                                                                     | All Social Workers |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Problem identification and problem solving strategies                                                                                               | n=78               |
| Gathering facts and information                                                                                                                     | n=78               |
| Reality testing                                                                                                                                     | n=78               |
| Experiential skill development - concrete experience/<br>reflective observation/ active experimentation                                             | n=78               |
| Active listening skills                                                                                                                             | n=78               |
| Range of questioning and response styles                                                                                                            | n=78               |
| Knowledge of cross cultural, ethnic and gender issues                                                                                               | n=78               |
| Importance of honesty (long term personal credibility and trust)                                                                                    | n=78               |
| Empathy                                                                                                                                             | n=78               |
| Relationship-building and facilitating communication                                                                                                | n=78               |
| Integrity and Ethics                                                                                                                                | n=78               |
| Skills and tools for establishing trust, securing disclosure,<br>facilitating resolution, and handling sensitive and emotional<br>people and issues | n=78               |
| Impartiality                                                                                                                                        | n=77               |

As the variables become more conflict specific, the response percentages for “Only Conflict Resolution/Mediation Specialist” increase. The variable that received the highest percentage for “Only Conflict Resolution/Mediation Specialist” with 47.4% (n=37) was *summarizing agreements* which is a core component of a mediation session.

The remaining 52.6% ( $n=41$ ) believed that “ALL” social workers should possess this knowledge. Examples for summarizing agreements as a generic skill would be seen in foster care review conferences and group work practice.

Social workers who include conflict resolution/mediation in their practice utilize various strategies. The analysis of the variable, *Understanding of different conflict resolution strategies i.e., arbitration (binding and non-binding), mediation, negotiation* reveal that 38.5% ( $n=29$ ) selected “Only Conflict Resolution/Mediation Specialist” and 60.3% ( $n=47$ ) selected “ALL.”

Similar results were indicated for the variable *Knowledge of different conflict styles: accommodation, avoidance, collaboration, compromise, and competition/confrontation*. An analysis of the variable reveals that 37.2% ( $n=29$ ) selected “Only Conflict Resolution/Mediation Specialist” and 61.5% ( $n=48$ ) selected “ALL.”

The analysis of the variable *patterns of dispute behavior that are common across cultures* reveals that 34.6% ( $n=27$ ) of the participants indicate that it is necessary for “Only Conflict Resolution/Mediation Specialist” and 64.1% ( $n=50$ ) indicate this is a skill for “ALL” social workers. Although cultural issues are a component of graduate school social work education, patterns of dispute behavior are not necessarily included.

*Reframing statements and issues* is a significant part of conflict resolution/mediation training. This is a skill that is useful across disciplines. However, the analysis of this variable reveals that 33.3% ( $n=26$ ) of the participants believe this is required for “Only Conflict Resolution/Mediation Specialist” and 66.7% ( $n=52$ ) indicate this is a skill for “ALL” social workers. Once again, this is a terminology that is affiliated in the field

of conflict resolution/mediation but a concept utilized by social workers in their practice which may account for the selection of *reframing* as a generic skill.

*Knowledge of the Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators* was considered necessary for “Only Conflict Resolution/Mediation Specialist” by 30.8% ( $n=24$ ) and by 69.2% ( $n=54$ ) for “ALL.” The analysis of the variable *Management of deadlock* reveals that 28.2% ( $n=22$ ) of the participants believe this is necessary for “Only Conflict Resolution/Mediation Specialist” and 71.82% ( $n=56$ ) for “ALL.”

For the variable *escalation and de-escalation of conflict* the analysis reveals that 25.6% ( $n=20$ ) selected “Only Conflict Resolution/Mediation Specialist” and 74.4% ( $n=58$ ) selected “ALL.” Similarly for the variable *destructive and constructive conflict* the analysis reveals that 24.4% ( $n=19$ ) selected “Only Conflict Resolution/Mediation Specialist” and 75.6% ( $n=59$ ) selected “ALL.”

At this point, the percentages of participants selecting “Only Conflict Resolution/Mediation Specialist” decreases below 25%. Among those scoring below 25% are: *destructive and constructive conflict* (24.4%); *knowledge of individual and organizational power dynamics, i.e., the imbalance of power and impact on parties* (20.5%); *use of role playing/role reversal* (19.2%); *practice exercises and/or role-plays* (17.9%); *freedom from bias/objectivity* (17.9%); *achieving closure* (16.7%); *persuasion and consensus generation* (16.7%); *ability to understand the psycho-physiological and behavioral aspects of conflict* (14.1%); *knowledge of systems theory* (9.0%); and *relationship management* (7.7%). Similar to the variables above, these are concepts/phrases that are used in the field of conflict resolution/mediation yet have been

identified by the participants as a generic social work skill more often needed by all social workers. See Table 13b for complete details of the variables that were selected for “Only Conflict Resolution/Mediation Specialist.” The following section will provide further analysis on these variables.

**Table 13b**

*Frequencies and Percentages: Survey Response Items –Preparation for Practice–Part I: Competencies–Knowledge/Skills/Abilities (KSAs)–Conflict Resolution/Mediation Specific Total Sample (N=78)*

| Variable                                                                                                                                            | Only Conflict Resolution/<br>Mediation Specialist |         | All Social Workers |         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------|--------------------|---------|
|                                                                                                                                                     | <i>n</i>                                          | Valid % | <i>n</i>           | Valid % |
| Summarizing agreements                                                                                                                              | <i>n</i> =37                                      | 47.4%   | <i>n</i> =41       | 52.6%   |
| Understanding of different conflict resolution strategies i.e., arbitration (binding and non-binding), mediation, negotiation                       | <i>n</i> =29                                      | 38.5%   | <i>n</i> =47       | 60.3%   |
| Knowledge of different conflict styles: accommodation, avoidance, collaboration, compromise, and competition/ confrontation                         | <i>n</i> =29                                      | 37.2%   | <i>n</i> =48       | 61.5%   |
| Patterns of dispute behavior that are common across cultures                                                                                        | <i>n</i> =27                                      | 34.6%   | <i>n</i> =50       | 64.1%   |
| Reframing statements and issues                                                                                                                     | <i>n</i> =26                                      | 33.3%   | <i>n</i> =52       | 66.7%   |
| Legal issues related to practice - including confidentiality, immunity, liability, enforceability of agreements and any other relevant legal issues | <i>n</i> =25                                      | 32.1%   | <i>n</i> =53       | 67.9%   |
| Knowledge of the Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators                                                                                    | <i>n</i> = 4                                      | 30.8%   | <i>n</i> =54       | 69.2%   |
| Use of metaphors (frame events in a way that gives meaning in their own worldview)                                                                  | <i>n</i> =24                                      | 30.8%   | <i>n</i> =52       | 66.7%   |
| Inventiveness and option generation                                                                                                                 | <i>n</i> =22                                      | 28.2%   | <i>n</i> =56       | 71.8%   |
| Management of deadlock                                                                                                                              | <i>n</i> =22                                      | 28.2%   | <i>n</i> =56       | 71.8%   |
| Negotiation management                                                                                                                              | <i>n</i> =20                                      | 25.6%   | <i>n</i> =58       | 74.4%   |
| Escalation and de-escalation of conflict                                                                                                            | <i>n</i> =20                                      | 25.6%   | <i>n</i> =58       | 74.4%   |
| Assertive communication skills                                                                                                                      | <i>n</i> =20                                      | 25.6%   | <i>n</i> =58       | 74.4%   |
| Destructive and constructive conflict                                                                                                               | <i>n</i> =19                                      | 24.4%   | <i>n</i> =59       | 75.6%   |

**Table 13b**

*Preparation for Practice–Part I Competencies – Knowledge/Skills/Abilities (KSAs) – Conflict Resolution/Mediation Specific - continued*

|                                                                                                                |              |       |              |       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------|--------------|-------|
| Knowledge of individual and organizational power dynamics, i.e., the imbalance of power and impact on parties. | <i>n</i> =16 | 20.5% | <i>n</i> =62 | 79.5% |
| Use of role playing/role reversal                                                                              | <i>n</i> =15 | 19.2% | <i>n</i> =62 | 79.5% |
| Practice exercises and/or role-plays                                                                           | <i>n</i> =14 | 17.9% | <i>n</i> =64 | 82.1% |
| Freedom from bias (objectivity)                                                                                | <i>n</i> =14 | 17.9% | <i>n</i> =64 | 82.1% |
| Achieving closure                                                                                              | <i>n</i> =13 | 16.7% | <i>n</i> =65 | 83.3% |
| Persuasion and consensus generation                                                                            | <i>n</i> =13 | 16.7% | <i>n</i> =64 | 82.1% |
| Ability to understand the psycho-physiological and behavioral aspects of conflict                              | <i>n</i> =11 | 14.1% | <i>n</i> =67 | 85.9% |
| Knowledge of systems theory                                                                                    | <i>n</i> =7  | 9.0%  | <i>n</i> =71 | 91.0% |
| Relationship management                                                                                        | <i>n</i> =6  | 7.7%  | <i>n</i> =72 | 92.3% |

The conflict resolution/mediation specialization variables were recoded to create a 23 item summated index. Participants were given one point for each time they checked “only specialist” for these 23 items. Scores could range from 23 if a person thought all competencies were conflict resolution/mediation specific to 0 if a person thought all competencies were generic and needed by all social workers.

The analysis of the data showed a mean score of 6.17 (SD=4.07), median of 5.0 and mode of 4.0 (Table 14). Only 14% of the sample thought 10 or more competencies were conflict resolution/mediation specific. Typically these social workers said only about 5 or 6 competencies were conflict resolution/mediation specific. Considering that all 15 of the first competencies were thought to be generic to all social workers, this indicates that 32 of 38 competencies were thought to be generic skills for all social workers for a total of 86%.

**Table 14**

*Competencies–Knowledge/Skills/Abilities (KSAs)–Conflict Resolution/Mediation Specific*  
*N= 78*

|  |                |      |  |  |
|--|----------------|------|--|--|
|  | Mean           | 6.17 |  |  |
|  | Median         | 5.0  |  |  |
|  | Mode           | 4.0  |  |  |
|  | Std. Deviation | 4.07 |  |  |

  

|       | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| .00   | 2         | 2.6     | 2.6           | 2.6                |
| 1.00  | 3         | 3.8     | 3.8           | 6.4                |
| 2.00  | 7         | 9.0     | 9.0           | 15.4               |
| 3.00  | 10        | 12.8    | 12.8          | 28.2               |
| 4.00  | 11        | 14.1    | 14.1          | 42.3               |
| 5.00  | 7         | 9.0     | 9.0           | 51.3               |
| 6.00  | 6         | 7.7     | 7.7           | 59.0               |
| 7.00  | 7         | 9.0     | 9.0           | 67.9               |
| 8.00  | 8         | 10.3    | 10.3          | 78.2               |
| 9.00  | 3         | 3.8     | 3.8           | 82.1               |
| 10.00 | 3         | 3.8     | 3.8           | 85.9               |
| 11.00 | 3         | 3.8     | 3.8           | 89.7               |
| 12.00 | 3         | 3.8     | 3.8           | 93.6               |
| 13.00 | 2         | 2.6     | 2.6           | 96.2               |
| 14.00 | 1         | 1.3     | 1.3           | 97.4               |
| 19.00 | 1         | 1.3     | 1.3           | 98.7               |
| 22.00 | 1         | 1.3     | 1.3           | 100.0              |
| Total | 78        | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

The results of Part 1, #2 reveal that many variables are viewed as knowledge/skills/abilities that “ALL” social workers require for practice. We begin seeing a small shift after half the variables are scored that there are specific areas that are only required for those practicing in the conflict resolution/mediation field. These are also written in language that is common in the conflict field and that may have influenced results.

### *Bivariate Analysis*

Bivariate analyses were conducted to review relationships and associations between the independent variables of professional identity, length of practice time in each field, extent of conflict resolution training and geographic areas and the dependent variable – curricula variables, the KSA scale – knowledge, skills, and abilities required for practice. The independent variables used in the analysis were: social work education completion; location of schools; preparation for conflict resolution practice in social work program; length of practice time in social work and conflict resolution/mediation; professional identity; and extent of conflict resolution training

### *Guiding Questions*

To answer the question whether there is a relationship between graduate school education and the preparation for conflict resolution/mediation practice, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between whether participants were prepared to practice conflict resolution/mediation without additional training beyond their graduate education and when they completed their degree. The correlation yielded no statistically significant relationship ( $r=.002$ ,  $p=.987$ ). This finding demonstrates that there is no relationship between the variables – preparation and when they completed their education so that learning conflict resolution practice was not related to being a recent or a former graduate. The participants' level of preparation was also not related to their professional identity ( $r=.010$ ,  $p=.933$ ). Professional identity is the individual's self-concept associated with their career role – the

education and entrance requirements for the profession and on the attitudinal level, the sense of “a calling” to the field (McGowen & Hart, 1990).

The Pearson correlation coefficient calculated between adequate preparation and how many years participants were practicing mediation yielded no statistically significant relationship ( $r=-.128$ ,  $p=.267$ ). However, there was a positive correlation between preparation and how many years the participants were practicing social work ( $r=.240$ ,  $p=.03$ ). The findings demonstrate that those practicing social work longer reflected more positively on their graduate school preparation for practicing conflict resolution/mediation.

To address the question about the relationship of conflict resolution/mediation tasks as generalist social work tasks or specialist, correlations were computed utilizing the KSA scale.

#### *Analyses and the KSA Scale*

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) scale and professional identity. The correlation yielded no statistically significant relationship ( $r=.073$ ,  $p=.524$ ). This finding demonstrates that there is no relationship between the KSA scale and whether they identified themselves as social workers or mediators. Another correlation was calculated to review whether there was a correlation based on years of practice in the field. The Pearson correlations between years of practice and the KSA scale was not significant for the social workers in the study ( $r=-.075$ ,  $p=.512$ ) and the mediators ( $r=.141$ ,  $p=.219$ ) in the study were not statistically significant. The findings revealed that

there was no relationship between the KSA scale and how long study participants were practicing in the field as social workers or mediators. Other variables of interest, social work programs, also resulted in no relationship with the KSA. The findings demonstrate that the location – suburban, rural, suburban – ( $r = -.033, p = .774$ ) and type – public or private – ( $r = -.010, p = .930$ ) of the social work program also had no relationship.

The KSA scale was also not related to the total number of hours of conflict resolution/mediation training ( $r = .126, p = .283$ ). Additional correlations demonstrated no relationship between the KSA scale and gender ( $r = .030, p = .792$ ), age ( $r = .206, p = .070$ ), completion of social work degree ( $r = -.099, p = .387$ ), and ethnicity ( $r = -.030, p = .794$ ). However, interestingly the total hours of mediation training was positively correlated with the study participants perceived knowledge of the Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators ( $r = .31, p = .006$ ) so that mediation training does seem to enhance knowledge of the conflict resolution/mediation field.

There were a number of positive correlations between *Knowledge of Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators* and selected variables. The participant responses indicate that the *Knowledge of Standards for Social Work Mediators* correlate to the importance of knowledge of other conflict resolution/mediation strategies. See Table 15 for details.

**Table 15**

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Knowledge of Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators and Selected Variables*

|          | <b>kspswm</b> | <b>edeconf</b> | <b>rprrr</b> | <b>negman</b> | <b>undcrs</b> | <b>mangdead</b> |
|----------|---------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| kspswm   | 1.00          |                |              |               |               |                 |
| edeconf  | .24*          | 1.00           |              |               |               |                 |
| rprrr    | .23*          | .23*           | 1.00         |               |               |                 |
| negman   | .24*          | .59            | .25*         | 1.00          |               |                 |
| undcrs   | .26*          | .49**          | .34**        | .25*          | 1.00          |                 |
| mangdead | .69**         | .15            | .41**        | .41**         | .25*          | 1.00            |

*Note:* kspswm = knowledge of Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators; edeconf = escalation and de-escalation of conflict; undcrs = understanding of different conflict resolution strategies; rprrr= use of role playing/role reversal; negman= negotiation management; mangdead = management of deadlock

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

*Understanding of different conflict resolution strategies* was positively correlated to a number of other variables. Of particular interest was the relationship between this variable and the *knowledge of different conflict styles* ( $r=.862, p<.001$ ), *patterns of dispute behavior that are common across cultures* ( $r=.382, p<.001$ ) *escalation and de-escalation of conflict* ( $r=.498, p<.001$ ), *reframing statements and issues* ( $r=.274, p<.001$ ), and *destructive and constructive conflict* ( $r=.346, p<.001$ ). Once again, patterns were established with variables that are phrased more specifically in conflict resolution/mediation terminology and represent conflict resolution/mediation practice resulting in positive correlations, indicating some essential elements of conflict resolution/mediation practice.

To demonstrate the positive correlations of essential conflict resolution/mediation, correlations were computed between *negotiation management* and selected variables on

the KSA scale. Positive correlations were noted between *negotiation management* and *reframing statements and issues* ( $r=.332, p=.003$ ), *achieving closure* ( $r=.368, p=.001$ ), and *management of deadlock* ( $r=.415, p<.001$ ). See Table 16 for details and additional correlations.

**Table 16**

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Negotiation Management and Selected Variables*

|          | <b>negman</b> | <b>relman</b> | <b>powdyn</b> | <b>reframe</b> | <b>achclos</b> | <b>mangdead</b> | <b>percon</b> |
|----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| negman   | 1.00          |               |               |                |                |                 |               |
| relman   | .49**         | 1.00          |               |                |                |                 |               |
| powdyn   | .35**         | .09           | 1.00          |                |                |                 |               |
| reframe  | .33**         | .20           | .25*          | 1.00           |                |                 |               |
| achclos  | .36**         | .25*          | .34**         | .26*           | 1.00           |                 |               |
| mangdead | .41**         | .14           | .41**         | .22            | .10            | 1.00            |               |
| percon   | .52**         | .64**         | .11           | .41**          | .35**          | .34**           | 1.00          |

*Note:* negman= negotiation management; relman= relationship management; powdyn= knowledge of individual and organizational power dynamics; reframe = reframing statements and issues; achclos = achieving closure; mangdead = management of deadlock; percon= persuasion and consensus generation

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

Although there were limited correlations between the primary areas of interest, the correlation matrix of variables provided insight into connections with specific curricula items and knowledge, skills and abilities required to practice conflict resolution/mediation. Essential conflict resolution/mediation practice seems related to the practice areas named above.

### *Summary of Findings*

More women than men participated in this study. Ages ranged from 30 to 70 years. The median age was 46.00 with a mean of 48.29 years. The participants were not diverse in regard to ethnic/racial origin. Of the respondents who responded, the largest representation, was White Caucasian (not Hispanic/Latino) (71.8%,  $n=56$ ). Hispanic/Latino was the next largest group (15.4%,  $n=12$ ). Regarding the social work mediators, African American/Black were the least represented in this study sample (10.3%,  $n=8$ ).

A majority of the participants, (52.5%,  $n=41$ ) classified their titles within social work and 16.6% ( $n=12$ ) were within the mediation field. Close to half of the respondents work in family services (45.9%,  $n=28$ ). Other practice areas included school social work (26.2%,  $n=16$ ), children and youth (9.8%,  $n=6$ ), and group services (4.9%,  $n=3$ ). Half of the participants work in the public sector (50.4%,  $n=31$ ) while the remaining half (49.2%, 30) work in either the private nonprofit or for-profit (proprietary) environment. A large number of participants (35.9%,  $n=23$ ) have secondary employment. Of those with a second position, 15.6% ( $n=10$ ) are working in mediation. An important finding of this study was that one-third of the participants clearly identified working in the field of mediation whether as their primary or secondary employment.

Regarding professional identity, a majority of the participants identified (69.2%,  $n=54$ ) as social workers and the remaining participants identified as mediators (30.7%,  $n=24$ ). There was a wide range in the both the number of practice years and the time spent in each setting.

Participants were asked to reflect on their graduate social work education. The responses for variables that were classified as associated with social work, the majority of the responses indicated that participants believed their programs provided an effective education. For the variables that were classified as common to both social work and conflict resolution/mediation, there is a wide range of agreement/disagreement. When the variables reflected more on conflict resolution/mediation, particularly including the word “conflict,” the respondents were more critical of their learning about conflict resolution. This pattern of lower ratings continued with all of the variables that were classified as more specifically identified with conflict resolution/mediation practice. The most important finding is that 89.7% of the participants ( $n=69$ ) did not feel they were prepared to practice conflict resolution/mediation without additional training after they completed their social work education.

The competency scale asked participants to assess who should possess specific competencies – generic social workers *or* conflict resolution/mediation specialists. Participant responses to 15 of the 38 variables revealed that 100% ( $n=78$ ) of the respondents thought that all social workers should possess these competencies. As the variables became more conflict specific, the response percentages for “Only Conflict Resolution/Mediation Specialist” increased. These are concepts/phrases that are used in the field of conflict resolution/mediation yet have been identified by the participants as a generic social work skill more often needed by all social workers. However, overall, the final results indicated that 32 of 38 competencies, at some level, were thought to be generic skills for all social workers for a total of 86%.

Correlation data revealed that there is no relationship between the variables – preparation for practice and when participants completed their education. The participants' level of preparation was also not related to their professional identity. Although the Pearson correlation coefficient calculated between preparation and how many years participants were practicing mediation did not yield a statistically significant relationship, there was a positive correlation between preparation and how many years the participants were practicing social work; an indication that participants may reflect more positively on their graduate school preparation for practicing conflict resolution/mediation depending on the length of time they practice.

A correlation matrix of curricula and KSA variables resulted in a number of positive correlations. One of these positive results was the correlation of the Knowledge of the Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators with other specific conflict resolution/mediation strategies including: knowledge of the concepts of conflict escalation and de-escalation, managing deadlock, use of role plays/role reversal understanding different conflict resolution strategies, and the effective use of negotiation management

A discussion about the conclusions of this study is presented next in Chapter 5. The limitations of this study and the study's implications for social work practice, policy and research are also discussed.

## Chapter Five

### Discussion

#### *Introduction*

This research has tried to capture social workers' perceptions of their professional education and their conflict resolution/mediation practice. In Chapter One, the issues to be explored were presented. The purpose of the study and the guiding research questions were provided as well as the significance of the study to the field of social work. Chapter Two, a review of the literature, provided the reader with a brief overview of the history of the field of conflict resolution, definitions of conflict resolution strategies as the context for this study, and then situated it in the field of social work. Chapter Three presented the research methodology, the design of the project, and discussion of the sample selection techniques, data collection procedures, management and storage. The results of the study were presented in Chapter Four. This final chapter, Chapter Five, provides a discussion of the results, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future practice and research.

This study examined social workers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their professional education on their knowledge, skills, and abilities to practice conflict resolution/mediation. Based on a review of the existing literature, the following questions guided this study. Is there a gap between what is taught in the graduate curriculum and the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to practice conflict resolution/mediation? What additional training/education is required to achieve competency in conflict

resolution/mediation? Are the tasks of conflict resolution/mediation viewed as generalist social work tasks or specialist conflict resolution tasks?

A quantitative analysis informed the results of this study. The study also explored the influences of socio-demographic variables. The socio-demographic variables examined were age, gender, ethnicity, geographic locations of education, type of school, method of concentration, areas of specialization/practice, type of MSW program, year of completion, and highest degree received.

The study conducted an assessment of participant exposure to various skills and curricular topics. The study was designed to survey social workers who included conflict resolution/mediation as part of their practice; in effect, an expert opinion survey. Areas of exploration included practice, training, and specific fields of practice.

The literature review highlighted the range of social work mediation in various fields of practice. Social work mediators are involved in a broad range of practice such as divorce/child custody, families and youth, education/schools, family, healthcare management, and forensics. The existing literature identified gaps related to the preparation of social workers to practice conflict resolution/mediation (Chetkow-Yanoov, 1991; Mayer, 1995; Keefe & Koch, 1999). This study intended to add knowledge to previously examined literature on social work education and conflict resolution/mediation practice by exploring the social workers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their graduate curriculum for conflict resolution/mediation practice. This research can inform the education and training of practitioners as they develop curricula, intervention approaches, and training designs related to managing conflict with clients.

### *Interpretation of Findings*

The study uncovered some interesting results including some new findings. It provides new insights into the gaps between practice and theory and the importance of understanding the needs of the practitioners in the field. One important finding, concerning whether social workers were prepared to practice conflict resolution/mediation upon completion of their graduate education, addressed the first question about the gap between what is taught in the graduate curriculum and the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to practice conflict resolution/mediation. The majority of the participants (89.7%,  $n=69$ ) did not feel they were prepared to practice conflict resolution/mediation without additional training after they completed their social work education.

Another important finding addressed the second question about training. Participants completed basic mediation training in a variety of settings and then continued their training in advanced specialty areas. The majority of the training was conducted in community mediation centers. Other training settings included private organizations and those sponsored by colleges and universities. Advanced training specializations reflect similar areas of social work practice: divorce, child custody, family, children and youth, education/school, workplace and forensics. This training provided the knowledge and skills participants believed were necessary for mediation practice. As in social work, a number of mediators view themselves as generalists and mediate cases in multiple areas. Others specialize, primarily in the areas where they received advanced training. Limited training was offered specifically for social workers and perhaps this could be an area for review by CSWE.

The competency scale addressed the knowledge/skills/ abilities issue of generalist vs. specialist. An unexpected finding was that 86% of the listed competencies were thought to be generic skills for all social workers suggesting that an MSW education can integrate a great deal of this from their perspective. Socio-demographic factors described the participant. Socio-demographic factors did not reveal any influence on preparation for practice.

A generalized conclusion from the study results was that there are less significant relationships between variables than was thought prior to the study being conducted. Prior to the study, there was a belief that there would be a relationship between a number of the socio-demographic variables such as graduate school education completion, geographic area, and professional identity with the preparation for conflict resolution/mediation practice. However, some relationships were found with specific curricula and competency areas.

Conducting a study on this topic was important because there was a lack of information from social workers regarding their perceptions of, and preparation for, their next stage in practice. These findings contribute new information about the preparation of social workers for conflict resolution/mediation practice.

As stated earlier, more women than men participated in this study. This is not unusual in a profession that is largely female. While there was a wide range in ages of participant, the median age of 46 put participants in an era when conflict resolution/mediation became more commonplace and a growing area of practice for social work practitioners. The mediation field evolved in the late 1970's and early 1980's, as much

social movement as professional development, into dozens of practice areas. There was little diversity represented in the responding population.

A majority of the participants (52.5%,  $n=41$ ) classified their titles within social work and 16.6% ( $n=12$ ) were within the mediation field. Secondary employment data closely resembled the primary employment data. Of the participants with secondary employment (35.9%), 15.6% work in the mediation field. Mediation is often an adjunct service in both social work and the legal field. Unless working as a staff member in an organization whose primary purpose is mediation, it is rare for a mediator to work 100% of the time in this field. Only 12 participants indicated that they spent 91-100% of their professional time as a mediator.

Although there was a wide range in the both the number of practice years and the time spent in each setting, a majority of the participants identified (69.2%,  $n=54$ ) as social workers and the remaining participants identified as mediators (30.7%,  $n=24$ ). Social work education provides a professional identity while mediation education and training is still struggling with its professional identity. Social workers have a range of licenses and certifications available to document their professional status/skills and while states require education and training for mediation practice, the field has yet to be recognized as a profession.

The most important findings to examine were the responses to curricula items and the competency scale. This speaks to the participants' perceptions of whether they felt their graduate program was effective in preparing them for conflict resolution/mediation practice. It also addresses whether there is a need for additional curriculum development.

Views and understanding of events are shaped by our experiences. Learning occurs from accumulated life experiences and through formal education and training and is shaped by values and attitudes. This knowledge is then used to solve problems, and there is a need for a standard body of evidence to prove or show that strategies are effective. However, this way of looking at things can result in a professional bias. Based on professional training and experience, the mediator or the social worker, in each situation may define the problem differently (Haynes & Charlesworth, 1996). It is important to keep professional bias separate from the issues. The mediator's role is to assist with problem-solving advice for both parties in the mediation not to serve as an advocate for an individual client. The mediator is to maintain their neutrality. On the other hand, the social worker is interested in the individual client and will advocate for the needs of their client, not to necessarily come to an agreement where both parties are in agreement. This separation of roles continues to be unclear for many practitioners.

Participants reflected on their graduate social work education. It is important to consider the mindset of participants as they responded to the survey questions. A question that surfaces when answering these questions is whether they were using a social work lens or a mediation lens. Did their mediation experience and conflict resolution education/training have any influence on how they "recall" their social work educational experience? In addition to a possible professional bias, there is the issue of recall bias, and the possibility that with fieldwork and a few years of experience, social workers (and social work mediators) feel more confident about the level of knowledge and the skills they acquired

during their training. The answer to this question is not available so interpretations of the data are based on the numbers and some comments.

Variables that were classified as associated with social work resulted in a majority of positive responses indicating that participants believed their programs provided an effective social work education. Variables that were classified as common to both social work and conflict resolution/mediation resulted in a wider range of agreement/disagreement. When the variables included words common to conflict resolution/mediation, particularly the word “conflict,” the mean tended to be lower. This also suggests the core of conflict resolution is related to the conflict process and how to handle it. This contribution of the field adds a new dimension to the social work curriculum beyond just preparing people for supportive casework. This pattern of lower means continued with variables that were classified as more specifically identified with conflict resolution/mediation practice. However, there were a number of conflict resolution/mediation practice variables that were related to one another indicating that mediation training enhances knowledge of the conflict resolution/mediation field suggesting the concepts and skills that are compatible for practice.

Comments received from participants were also generally positive: “it was a good program, I would recommend it;” “the program was solid with good opportunities for fieldwork;” “I would do it again if I had to start over;” and “I do believe that my social work education gave me a strong foundation to do my conflict management work.” There were also comments that reflect some dissatisfaction: “I thought they did a good job until I practiced for a few years;” “program was good but after I began to practice I saw what else I

needed – more practical experience than textbook;” “needed to be more experiential, more theory about conflict at all levels;” “field instructors should work closer with the curriculum;” and “it was not enough to have the MSW, I also needed the JD.” The comments suggest that while their MSW education was a good base for conflict resolution/mediation practice, it was not enough – they needed more training in the specifics.

The most important knowledge and skills participants listed as gained in their social work education included: the ability to listen deeply and not be judgmental, accept small signs of change as progress – a sign of growth, use of multi-method practice, practice active listening skills, basic understanding of human functioning, principles of self-determination, clinical components, development of core competencies, dissecting a problem and working with individual’s strengths, focus on the positives, holistic approach, and range of practice options and appropriate skills for each.

Participants also listed the most important knowledge and skills gained in their mediation training. Many of these skills parallel those mentioned above and these high correlations suggest a core of conflict resolution/mediation practice. The following skills were listed: remaining neutral, listening and reframing statements, ability to facilitate dialogue, generating options, the use of powerful questions, understanding different conflict resolution theories, getting to interests vs. positions, integrating social work and mediation skills – the training built on a strong, but old social work base, remaining impartial, identifying conflict styles and the underlying motivations, dealing with impasse, and becoming focused on the communication between the two parties.

Reviewing the comments about knowledge and skills reported in the survey, it is practically indistinguishable to know which skill would/should be on which list. This speaks to Parsons' (1991) discussion that the framework and skills of a mediator are indigenous to social workers.

The data speaks to a large percentage (89.7%) of the participants reporting that they did not feel they were prepared to practice conflict resolution/mediation without additional training. However, the competency scale indicated that 86% of the competencies listed, at some level, were thought to be generic skills for all social workers. These findings could be a result of professional or recall bias. What becomes evident is that many skills viewed as conflict related are seen as needed by all. There were few competency areas that were identified as "specialist" so it raises the question as to whether there is a need within social work programs for additional conflict resolution/mediation training. For example, summarizing agreements is common terminology in mediation and is a generic group work skill that is frequently used in group work at the conclusion of a group session. Therefore, this is an important skill for all social workers. Another skill that has a conflict context is reframing issues. This may be conflict specific and also a generic skill used in many social work practice areas. It should be noted that conflict – identifying it, understanding it, utilizing the theories and strategies of conflict management are key areas for all social workers. There was a positive correlation between specific curricula items and knowledge, skills and abilities required to practice conflict resolution/mediation demonstrating that as social workers are engaged in the practice of conflict resolution/mediation there is a need for a more specific

set of skills. Providing the tools to recognize conflict, power and value differences, and the strategies to manage conflict would be a practice benefit for new social workers.

The growth of conflict resolution/mediation has been documented and while it has been demonstrated that the skills required parallel many of the skill sets of social work education, there is little indication that major curriculum development is required at this time. The practice of mediation has evolved and is so broad and differentiated in its applications that education/training simply cannot be managed in one way. There are dozens of practice areas, each with its own culture, organization, qualifications, standards and market.

Although some of the skills/strategies for effective conflict resolution/mediation practice are not covered in depth in the generalist MSW program, there are a number of ways to address this. Social workers could also gain from addressing conflict on a more specific basis otherwise conflict resolution may not be addressed in social worker training. Formerly, the material could have been infused into the CSWE content areas for both required and elective courses. This would have required developing curricula to integrate into existing courses. An elective course could focus on strategies of mediation practice that could be paired with appropriate fieldwork assignments. Another option would be to offer an elective focusing on mediation in specific practice areas. Modules could be developed to address common practice areas such divorce, children and youth, education/schools and forensics. These modules could be supported by available material and assignments that focus on mediation in the social work field (Chetkow-Yanoov, 1991; Kruk, 1997; and Barsky, 2000). Additionally, there could be a continuing

education course or a specialized post-masters program. Developing practice modules would be an important step in the development of conflict resolution practice to develop the central core of practice and also specialization in current fields.

With the shifting perspective of the CSWE focusing on ten competency areas, there is more flexibility for masters programs in how they organize their curriculum. Generalist practice provides a foundation focused upon all competencies and associated practice behaviors and concentration. Advanced practice incorporates all the core competencies with additional knowledge and practice behaviors specific to a concentration. These are not advanced competencies but advanced practice behaviors, a refinement of practice method/specialization (Holloway, Black, Hoffman & Pierce, 2009). Individual programs decide on their mission and goals and how best to address the competency. Numerous curriculum matrices and rubrics are available to assist with curricular restructuring on how to organize a competency-based curriculum. The newly developed assignments would provide a framework for social work students to learn to apply knowledge and demonstrate skills that could be used immediately or in future practice. The competency-based approach is important in fieldwork because it focuses on what social workers do in practice. Developing conflict resolution/mediation competencies would be important in a number of practice areas.

The study results indicate that most of the conflict resolution/mediation competencies identified should be part of the generalist social work graduate program. However, with a small shift in current coursework these competencies could be developed further. Therefore, individual programs would need to determine whether

conflict resolution/mediation fits their mission and goals in order to fully integrate this into their coursework. Without additional research to document a need, this is unrealistic.

### *Limitations of the Study*

This study used a survey design with a self-administered, web-based, internet delivered survey instrument to investigate graduate school effectiveness in the areas of conflict resolution/mediation education. A self-administered, email survey could be equally or more effective than regular mail surveys in both response rate and time (Metha & Sivadas, 1995). A web-based survey provides access to a large number of participants and provides the ability to ensure participant anonymity through collection by a site host without gathering IP addresses.

In an effort to gather data, items in the survey were based on the review of the literature, the researcher's education and experience in conflict resolution/mediation, mediation competency skills, refinement of the content analysis of the social work curriculum instrument completed by CSWE programs used previously (Sanchirico, 2000), and in consultation with practicing social work mediators. This resulted in a long questionnaire and may have resulted in a large number of invitees not participating. The questionnaire was designed so that participants had an option to leave questions unanswered; there were no forced choice responses required. This design also would provide the opportunity for non-completion or merely exiting out of the survey at any point.

The study employed a purposive sample strategy (Babbie, 2002). Becker (1986) tells us that we must find the people who engage in the behavior we want to study. Therefore, the email invitations were sent to selected individuals who participated in

mediation training and to members of professional conflict resolution/mediation organizations. A review of membership lists revealed duplication of names. This limited the pool of participants available to those who paid training or membership fees. Therefore, to widen the pool of potential participants, conflict resolution/mediation listservs were utilized. This pool was selected to identify people who are either interested or engage in the practice of conflict resolution/ mediation and may not be members of any professional organization. Experts provide an accessible source of information and can provide knowledge when more traditional research has not been undertaken. This ensures high content, face-to-face and concurrent validity (Beech, 2001). As the study targeted “expert” opinions, generalizations for all social workers cannot be made.

In order to obtain a large sample, an initial email was sent in an effort to correct and/or delete incorrect addresses. The second email was the actual invitation to participate in the study. Many email addresses were undeliverable and were corrected whenever possible. This resulted in a loss of potential respondents. In addition, it is believed that the initial email, the Pre-notice/Recruitment email, screened out potential respondents – the self-selection process. Those who decided to participate in the study were motivated when they received the actual survey link and less motivated invitees selected out of the study resulting in a study that is not as robust as targeted. It is also possible that the number of responses could have been improved if the link to the actual survey was sent in the initial email. The follow-up reminder emails for completion would still have been sent although by excluding the initial Pre-notice/ Recruitment email; potential

participants would have made a decision based on the actual survey if they received the link without a time lag.

An important limitation to identify is the relatively low response rate from social work mediators – a total of 78 useable surveys. The fact that some of the invitees would be evaluating their educational experiences, which they may have completed many years ago, may have lessened the desire to participate. The time gap between education and training may have influenced their ratings. In total, 104 surveys were returned and completed to some degree on the Survey Monkey server. The desired target sample for the study, 250 MSW trained social workers, was not obtained. Because they did not meet the target criteria of social work education, 26 surveys were excluded from the analysis. Therefore, the results of this study are based on 78 surveys. If data had been collected from the non-respondents, a different interpretation of the findings may have resulted.

Obtaining data through a web-based questionnaire has limitations in that one is never sure of the conditions in which it was answered. The developed questionnaire had content validity in that the items were selected from the literature and previously designed instruments and tested by social work mediators. The reliability was computed for the sample of the participants actually used in the study. Self-report surveys are valid to the extent that the information provided by the participants is accurate.

A mixed methodology may have added value and insight. Adding a qualitative component could enhance future research. A qualitative study would provide the opportunity to explore responses thoroughly to gain a better understanding of the preparation for practice and the gaps identified in the knowledge base. In addition, it

would assist with exploring various methods to infuse conflict resolution/mediation into the curriculum.

Another limitation of the study was the relative homogeneity of the sample. The majority of the sample was White Caucasian women (median age = 46). Additionally, most of the participants were located in the New York area. A more diverse sample may be more indicative of the general population of social work mediators.

### *Implications of Findings*

#### *Implications for Social Work Practice*

This study makes a contribution to social work education, practice and research by demonstrating the interdisciplinary nature of conflict resolution/mediation. In light of the findings of this study, social work practice and policy formulation about conflict resolution/mediation education warrant further attention.

The social work profession needs to pay attention to new and growing practice areas and the literature shows that the use of conflict resolution techniques, particularly mediation, has been increasing in social work practice. Social work programs need to expand the array of tools required to practice effectively as social workers regularly encounter clients in conflict situations. Whether this is through the development of new curriculum or providing resources to existing programs depends on the individual school and the expressed interest of students and faculty. This study also concurred with previous findings that social workers would be better prepared to practice mediation with formal preparation (Chetkow-Yanoov, 1991). Schools of social work should inform

students of all social work standards, those for generalist practice (i.e. ethics) and those for specialized practice (i.e. Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators).

The data presented in this study are relevant for all schools of social work, but especially for those that continue to base their teaching on traditionally oriented curricula, and emphasize the need for change. Attention should be given to a process of curriculum renewal. While the focus in this study was on conflict resolution/mediation, curriculum review provides an opportunity to respond to various levels of concern and adjust to the demands of a changing practice. In addition to the need for reliable and valid assessment techniques to monitor the performance of social work students, periodic surveys of both students and graduates regarding their perceptions of, and preparation for, their next stage in training may reveal persistent curricular weaknesses, recognize successful adaptations, and validate traditional strengths.

#### *Implications for Further Study*

This study expanded the knowledge about the relationship between social work graduate education and the preparation for conflict resolution/mediation practice. An interesting finding is that while social workers are engaged in mediation practice, they did not perceive their graduate social work program as adequate preparation. Based on the findings, the relationship between social work and mediation could be much stronger. There are many opportunities for social workers to use mediation as a way of improving the lives of their clients and the communities in which they work. Social work brings the perspective of self-determination and providing the individual with a forum for making decisions. For this to be accomplished, a broader perspective and more attention to the

interdisciplinary approach would be required. Targeted data collection in different regional areas would provide a range of information for analysis. Further research should be conducted to replicate the current study, with modifications, with generalist social workers. Differences in perceptions, programs, curriculum and fields of practices, as compared to the social work mediators, are worthy of study.

Socio-demographic factors did not appear to have any significance on the findings. Further research needs to be conducted to reach a more diverse population. This may result in different findings.

While the survey questionnaire provided a wealth of information, it should also be streamlined to attract more participants. The use of a web-based, internet survey continues to be appropriate for an exploratory study. However, a qualitative component, either through follow-up interviews or focus groups, would provide depth to the data or focus the analysis. Focus groups would provide a setting for social work mediators to reflect on their mediation knowledge and practice. Incorporating a setting to explore practice wisdom would provide an opportunity to discuss the limitations of their knowledge and encourage practitioners to be committed to reflective development. Focus groups arranged according to practice areas may influence results and provide direction for additional research.

To conclude, the current study revealed that social workers' perceptions of their graduate school curriculum did not prepare them for conflict resolution/mediation practice. Although they received the foundation for conflict resolution/mediation practice in their social work program, they gained the specific knowledge, skills and

abilities through a variety of conflict resolution/mediation training programs over a period of time. Social work mediators selected a large number of competencies that are identified as more conflict resolution/mediation specific as skills required for generalist social workers. Therefore, additional research is necessary to understand whether this is professional bias of social work mediators or consistent with the perceptions of a generalist social worker.

## Appendices

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| Appendix A..... | Study Questionnaire: Preparation for Practice                    |
| Appendix B..... | Letter of IRB Approval from Hunter College/CUNY                  |
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## Appendix A

### Study Questionnaire: Preparation for Practice

## Preparation for Practice

### About this survey

#### Informed consent

You are invited to participate in a survey conducted by Susan M. Sanchirico, a doctoral student in the Social Welfare program at the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York. This research studies the perceptions of social workers regarding the effectiveness of their graduate school curriculum to prepare them for conflict resolution/mediation practice. You have been asked to participate because you have been identified as a social worker interested in conflict resolution and involved with mediation practice. If you decide to participate in this study you will be asked to complete an online survey. It includes questions about your education, your perception of preparation, and your attitudes about the inclusion of conflict resolution/mediation education in the social work curriculum, and your education/training and experience as a mediator. The survey should take about 20 minutes to complete, and it is anticipated that 250 social work mediations from across the United States will agree to participate in the study.

There will be no direct benefits to you for participating and no known risks to your participation. The anticipated risks are no more than that encountered in every day life. But your participation may contribute to the knowledge that helps social work educators make better decisions about what to cover in their courses.

Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary. If you do not want to complete the questionnaire, simply ignore it or check the "I do not agree" below. If you agree to participate, check the button that says "I agree". You may skip any questions you do not want to answer. When you are finished, simply click "Done" at the end of the survey.

The survey is anonymous. The results of the survey will be delivered to Susan M. Sanchirico by Survey Monkey taken together without your email address so that no individual can be identified. However, you should be aware that the study is not being run from a secure http server like those used to handle credit card transactions, so there is a small possibility that responses could be viewed by unauthorized third parties, such as computer hackers. To safeguard against that happening, Survey Monkey utilizes "Hacker Safe" which scans the site for security vulnerabilities on a daily basis and prevents over 99% of hacker crime.

The researcher will use the data for quantitative analysis for the dissertation study.

You may contact Susan M. Sanchirico at [REDACTED] ssanchirico@gc.cuny.edu if you have any questions about the study. Additional questions may be directed to the dissertation chairperson, Prof. Michael Smith at (212) 452-7029 or mismith@hunter.cuny.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject or feel you have experienced a research-related injury, you should contact Kay Powell, IRB Administrator at The Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York Institutional Review Board at (212) 817-7525 or kpowell@gc.cuny.edu or the Office of Research Administration at Hunter College/CUNY at (212) 650-3053.

Protocol #: HC-070812427

#### 1. Do you agree to continue?

- ☐ I agree
- ☐ I do not agree

## Preparation for Practice

### I. Preparation for Practice

The following questions ask you to reflect on your social work education, particularly specific curricula items. To do this, you will be asked to make two ratings – the first scale is a 7-point Likert scale that measures “how well” you feel your education prepared you to manage conflict/practice mediation. The second scale is a 2-point scale that measures competencies – the KSAs (knowledge/skills/abilities) that you believe should be included for either all social workers or only for conflict resolution/mediation specialists.

Please be assured that all answers will be kept confidential and that results will be reported in the aggregate.

**1. For each of the following statements check the rating category that most indicates how you currently feel about the effectiveness of your graduate school education to prepare you for conflict resolution/mediation practice.**

|                                                                                                                                                                     | Strongly Disagree     | Disagree              | Slightly Disagree     | Neither Disagree or Agree | Slightly Agree        | Agree                 | Strongly Agree        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| My coursework provided a comprehensive range of social work theories.                                                                                               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I was able to understand basic motivational theories.                                                                                                               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| My program provided the knowledge to understand basic theories of individual and organizational power dynamics, i.e., the imbalance of power and impact on parties. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I received preparation in problem-solving.                                                                                                                          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| My course syllabi reflected important topics related to conflict resolution.                                                                                        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I was able to understand conflict theory.                                                                                                                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I was given the tools to identify personality and conflict management styles, strengths and challenges.                                                             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Coursework covered material so that I could understand the conflict cycle, i.e., how it begins and escalates.                                                       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| My courses provided the knowledge to understand the dynamics of human negotiation among conflicting interest groups.                                                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I had the knowledge to understand “positional vs. principled” negotiating concepts and demonstrate the appropriate skills.                                          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I had the ability to understand the differences between the roles,                                                                                                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

[illegible]

### Preparation for Practice

|                                                                                                                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| sustainable agreement.                                                                                                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I learned professional accountability.                                                                                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Advocacy on the behalf of clients was of primary importance.                                                          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Advocacy on behalf of a staff member was important.                                                                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I was taught how to listen to or negotiate with dissatisfied clients.                                                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Instruction was provided to prepare me not to use self-defensiveness as a tactic in negotiation.                      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I learned to value the importance of honesty, long term credibility and trust.                                        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Facilitation and problem-solving skills were important in the curriculum.                                             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I developed the ability not to personalize the process.                                                               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| My program reviewed the Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators.                                              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I received the necessary preparation to reframe issues.                                                               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Faculty were comfortable discussing conflict.                                                                         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I received adequate help from faculty in filling gaps in my knowledge.                                                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I encountered a sufficient range of client issues in fieldwork to enable me to improve my conflict resolution skills. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Faculty were interested in new practice areas.                                                                        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I was encouraged to try new and different intervention strategies.                                                    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I felt comfortable with my level of knowledge concerning conflict resolution and mediation.                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I knew how to conduct a mediation session.                                                                            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I understood how to advise clients about mediation.                                                                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Guidance was provided on how to access the various community resources available for clients.                         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Coursework covered how to develop empathy so as to avoid the appearance of                                            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

### Preparation for Practice

|                                                                                                                                  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| bias.                                                                                                                            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Throughout the program, persuasion and presentation – possessing good oral and written communication skills – was important.     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| My social work education prepared me to manage conflict with clients.                                                            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| My social work education prepared me to manage conflict with staff/supervisors.                                                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| My social work education prepared me to manage conflict with agencies.                                                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Faculty in my program agreed that conflict resolution/mediation techniques are a part of professional social work practice.      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Conflict in the field was increasing and therefore preparation for management was viewed as important.                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| When I completed my social work education, I was prepared to practice conflict resolution/mediation without additional training. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Comments:

## Preparation for Practice

**2. Below is a listing of competencies - the KSAs (knowledge/skills/abilities) that you believe should be included for either all social workers or only for conflict resolution/mediation specialists. If you believe a competency is needed by all social workers, click on ALL. If you believe only conflict resolution/mediation specialists need the competency, click on SPECIALIST.**

**For each of the following check the category that best indicates who should possess the competency/KSA.**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | ALL                   | Specialist            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Knowledge of conflict theory - including sources and causes of conflict and approaches to conflict resolution                                                                                                                                                                                          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Problem identification and problem-solving strategies                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Gathering facts and information                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Reality testing                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Experiential skill development - concrete experience/reflective observation/active experimentation                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Active listening skills                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Range of questioning and response styles                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Summarizing agreements                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Freedom from bias (objectivity)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Inventiveness and option generation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Practice exercises and/or roleplays                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Assertive communication skills                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Knowledge of cross cultural, ethnic and gender issues                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Knowledge of systems theory                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Knowledge of individual and organizational power dynamics, i.e., the imbalance of power and impact on parties.                                                                                                                                                                                         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Reframing statements and issues                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Destructive and constructive conflict                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Escalation and de-escalation of conflict                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Knowledge of different conflict styles: accommodation, avoidance, collaboration, compromise, and competition/confrontation                                                                                                                                                                             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Understanding of different conflict resolution strategies i.e., arbitration (binding and non-binding), mediation, negotiation                                                                                                                                                                          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Patterns of dispute behavior that are common across cultures                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Use of role playing/role reversal                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Use of metaphors (frame events in a way that gives meaning in their own worldview - i.e. Conflict as a struggle - on a sinking ship with no lifeboat; conflict as a game - toss[ing] the ball into his court; conflict as a dance - dancing with partners to create something beautiful and inspiring) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Legal issues related to practice - including confidentiality, immunity, liability, enforceability of agreements and any other relevant legal issues                                                                                                                                                    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Skills and tools for establishing trust, securing disclosure, facilitating resolution, and handling sensitive and emotional people and issues                                                                                                                                                          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ability to understand the psycho-physiological and behavioral aspects of conflict                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Impartiality                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Importance of honesty (long term personal credibility and trust)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

## Preparation for Practice

|                                                                  |                       |                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Empathy                                                          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Relationship-building and facilitating communication             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Persuasion and consensus generation                              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Relationship management                                          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Negotiation management                                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Achieving closure                                                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Integrity and Ethics                                             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Time management skills                                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Management of confidentiality                                    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Management of emotion                                            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Management of deadlock                                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Knowledge of the Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

## Preparation for Practice

### II. Preparation for Practice – The social work mediator

In this section I would like to ask about your conflict resolution/mediation training and experience as a practitioner. Please complete these questions about your conflict resolution/mediation training and experience. Please be assured that all answers will be kept confidential and that results will be reported in the aggregate.

**1. The most common qualification is the completion of a specified number of training hours in mediation and related services. The number of training hours required ranges from 16 to 40 hours, with the average being 25 hours.**

**How many TOTAL hours of mediation training have you completed? (Please enter a numeric response)**

|                                                                            |                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Total hours                                                                | <input type="text"/> |
| Basic training - minimum required training to practice                     | <input type="text"/> |
| Advanced training - training in specific areas or for specific populations | <input type="text"/> |
| Other                                                                      | <input type="text"/> |

**2. Who conducted your basic training?**

- |                                                    |                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> community mediation center   | <input type="radio"/> Private organization                     |
| <input type="radio"/> college/university sponsored | <input type="radio"/> local/state/federal government sponsored |
- Other (please specify)

**3. When did you complete your basic mediation training?**

**4. Who conducted your advanced training?**

- |                                                    |                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> community mediation center   | <input type="radio"/> Private organization                     |
| <input type="radio"/> college/university sponsored | <input type="radio"/> local/state/federal government sponsored |
- Other (please specify)

**5. When did you complete your advanced training?**

## Preparation for Practice

### 6. Please respond to the following regarding your mediation training/education

|                                                   | Yes                   | No                    |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Did you complete a certified training class?      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Did you receive a certificate and/or a degree?    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Are you currently enrolled in a training program? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

If yes, please specify

### 7. Have you been certified as a trainer?

☐ Yes  
☐ No

If yes, how many training sessions have you conducted?

### 8. What do you think the minimum number of training hours should be before conducting a mediation session? (Enter a numeric response)

### 9. If there is a requirement for mediator experience before practice, what do you believe the minimum requirement should be?

☐ 0-Six months      ☐ Two years  
☐ One year      ☐ Three years

Other (please specify)

### 10. Please identify if you had any specialized training in the following practice areas: Check all that apply:

|                                                |                                           |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> children and youth    | <input type="checkbox"/> education/school |
| <input type="checkbox"/> family                | <input type="checkbox"/> victim-offender  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> medical/health care   | <input type="checkbox"/> workplace        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> gerontology           | <input type="checkbox"/> union/labor      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> divorce/child custody |                                           |

Other (please specify)

**Preparation for Practice**

**11. Please identify the most important knowledge and skill gained in your mediation training:**

**12. Please indicate your area of practice.**

What is your practice specialty? (i.e. family, school, community)

What is your geographic practice location by Zip code?

**13. How many years experience do you have as a mediator?**

☐ 0-1

☐ 10-14

☐ 2-4

☐ 15-19

☐ 5-9

☐ 20 years or more

**14. Please indicate why you decided to complete mediation training.**

**15. Additional comments you would like to share about your conflict resolution/mediation education/training:**

**16. Additional comments you would like to share about your conflict resolution/mediation practice:**

## Preparation for Practice

### III. Graduate Social Work Education

Please complete these questions about your graduate school social work education. Please be assured that all answers will be kept confidential and that results will be reported in the aggregate.

#### 1. What type of MSW program did you attend?

☐ Two year/full time

☐ Combined BSW/MSW

☐ Part-time

☐ Advanced Placement Program

Other (please specify)

#### 2. If were admitted as an Advanced Placement student, please specify if this was by experience or degree.

☐ Degree

☐ Experience

Other (please specify)

#### 3. Please check the highest degree you have received:

☐ MS

☐ Ph.D.

☐ MSW/MSSW

☐ Ed.D

☐ DSW

Other (please specify)

#### 4. What year did you complete your highest social work degree?

#### 5. Please indicate details of your social work education/licensing.

Major method of concentration: (i.e. casework, group work, community organization)

Area of specialization: (i.e. youth, family, gerontology, forensic)

Current licenses held: (i.e. state, clinical)

## Preparation for Practice

### III. Graduate Social Work Education

Please complete these questions about your graduate school social work education. Please be assured that all answers will be kept confidential and that results will be reported in the aggregate.

#### 1. What type of MSW program did you attend?

☐ Two year/full time

☐ Combined BSW/MSW

☐ Part-time

☐ Advanced Placement Program

Other (please specify)

#### 2. If were admitted as an Advanced Placement student, please specify if this was by experience or degree.

☐ Degree

☐ Experience

Other (please specify)

#### 3. Please check the highest degree you have received:

☐ MS

☐ Ph.D.

☐ MSW/MSSW

☐ Ed.D

☐ DSW

Other (please specify)

#### 4. What year did you complete your highest social work degree?

#### 5. Please indicate details of your social work education/licensing.

Major method of concentration: (i.e. casework, group work, community organization)

Area of specialization: (i.e. youth, family, gerontology, forensic)

Current licenses held: (i.e. state, clinical)

**Preparation for Practice****6. Please indicate details about your school by location.**

- ☐ Rural  
☐ Suburban  
☐ Urban

In what state was your school located?

**7. Please indicate details about your school by type.**

- ☐ Public  
☐ Private

Other (please specify)

**8. Did your program offer a specific course in conflict/dispute resolution or mediation?**

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

Other (please specify)

**9. If yes, was it required or an elective?**

- ☐ Elective  
☐ Required

Other (please specify)

**10. If yes, did they offer a certificate or degree in conflict/dispute resolution?**

- ☐ Certificate  
☐ Degree

Other (please specify)

**11. Were there other opportunities to receive conflict resolution/mediation training in at your institution?**

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

**Preparation for Practice****12. If yes, what types of opportunities for training were available?**☐ Community workshops☐ Professional development workshops☐ Continuing education classes☐ Seminars

Other (please specify)

**13. Are you currently enrolled in a degree program?**☐ Yes☐ No

If yes, type of program

**14. Please identify the most important knowledge and skills gained in your social work education****15. Additional comments you would like to share about your graduate school social work program:**

**Preparation for Practice****IV. Demographics**

Please complete these questions about your Personal History, Professional Identity, and Current Work Status. Please be assured that all answers will be kept confidential and that results will be reported in the aggregate.

**1. Gender**☐ Female☐ Transgender Female☐ Male☐ Transgender Male

Year of birth

**2. Primary Ethnic/Racial Origin:**☐ African American/Black (not Hispanic/Latino in origin)☐ Mixed heritage☐ Alaskan Native☐ Native American☐ Asian or Pacific Islander☐ Puerto Rican☐ Chicano/Mexican American☐ White Caucasian (not Hispanic/Latino in origin)☐ Hispanic/Latino

Other (please specify)

**3. Please identify your primary cultural identity.****4. Please identify your current position and location.**

Job Title:

In what state is your  
current job located?**5. Population size of community in which currently employed:**☐ fewer than 10,000 people☐ 100,001 to 500,000 people☐ 10,001 to 50,000 people☐ more than 500,000 people☐ 50,001 to 100,000 people

## Preparation for Practice

### 6. Current primary employment setting:

- |                                                                                  |                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Social service agency/organization                         | <input type="radio"/> Group home/residence                                                                           |
| <input type="radio"/> Membership organization                                    | <input type="radio"/> Nursing home/hospice                                                                           |
| <input type="radio"/> Private practice-Self employed/solo                        | <input type="radio"/> Court/probation/parole/other criminal justice system                                           |
| <input type="radio"/> Private practice-Partnership/group                         | <input type="radio"/> Elementary/secondary school system                                                             |
| <input type="radio"/> Hospital                                                   | <input type="radio"/> College/university                                                                             |
| <input type="radio"/> Institution (non-hospital)                                 | <input type="radio"/> Non-social service organization (e.g. business, manufacturing, consulting/research firm, etc.) |
| <input type="radio"/> Outpatient facility: Clinic/health or mental health center |                                                                                                                      |

Other (please specify)

### 7. Current primary employment function:

- |                                                   |                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Direct Service              | <input type="radio"/> Consultant         |
| <input type="radio"/> Supervision                 | <input type="radio"/> Research           |
| <input type="radio"/> Management/administration   | <input type="radio"/> Planning           |
| <input type="radio"/> Policy development/analysis | <input type="radio"/> Education/training |

Other (please specify)

### 8. Current primary employment practice area:

- |                                                     |                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> children and youth            | <input type="radio"/> school social work                            |
| <input type="radio"/> community organizing/planning | <input type="radio"/> services to the aged                          |
| <input type="radio"/> family services               | <input type="radio"/> alcohol/drug/substance abuse                  |
| <input type="radio"/> corrections/criminal justice  | <input type="radio"/> developmental disabilities/mental retardation |
| <input type="radio"/> group services                | <input type="radio"/> other disabilities                            |
| <input type="radio"/> medical/health care           | <input type="radio"/> occupational/EAP                              |
| <input type="radio"/> public assistance/welfare     | <input type="radio"/> education                                     |

Other (please specify)

## Preparation for Practice

### 9. Current primary employment auspice:

- |                                                        |                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Private/for-profit (proprietary) | <input type="radio"/> Public sector – state   |
| <input type="radio"/> Private/nonprofit (sectarian)    | <input type="radio"/> Public sector – Federal |
| <input type="radio"/> Private/nonprofit (nonsectarian) | <input type="radio"/> Military                |
| <input type="radio"/> Public sector – local            |                                               |

Other (please specify)

### 10. If you have secondary employment, please indicate below utilizing the same choices as in the "Current Primary" section above.

- |                                                                                  |                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Social service agency/organization                         | <input type="radio"/> Group home/residence                                                                           |
| <input type="radio"/> Membership organization                                    | <input type="radio"/> Nursing home/hospice                                                                           |
| <input type="radio"/> Private practice-Self employed/solo                        | <input type="radio"/> Court/probation/parole/other criminal justice system                                           |
| <input type="radio"/> Private practice-Partnership/group                         | <input type="radio"/> Elementary/secondary school system                                                             |
| <input type="radio"/> Hospital                                                   | <input type="radio"/> College/university                                                                             |
| <input type="radio"/> Institution (non-hospital)                                 | <input type="radio"/> Non-social service organization (e.g. business, manufacturing, consulting/research firm, etc.) |
| <input type="radio"/> Outpatient facility: Clinic/health or mental health center |                                                                                                                      |

Other (please specify)

### 11. Current Secondary employment function:

- |                                                   |                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Direct Service              | <input type="radio"/> Consultant         |
| <input type="radio"/> Supervision                 | <input type="radio"/> Research           |
| <input type="radio"/> Management/administration   | <input type="radio"/> Planning           |
| <input type="radio"/> Policy development/analysis | <input type="radio"/> Education/training |

Other (please specify)

## Preparation for Practice

### 12. Current secondary employment practice area:

- |                                                     |                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> children and youth            | <input type="radio"/> school social work                            |
| <input type="radio"/> community organizing/planning | <input type="radio"/> services to the aged                          |
| <input type="radio"/> family services               | <input type="radio"/> alcohol/drug/substance abuse                  |
| <input type="radio"/> corrections/criminal justice  | <input type="radio"/> developmental disabilities/mental retardation |
| <input type="radio"/> group services                | <input type="radio"/> other disabilities                            |
| <input type="radio"/> medical/health care           | <input type="radio"/> occupational/EAP                              |
| <input type="radio"/> public assistance/welfare     | <input type="radio"/> education                                     |

Other (please specify)

### 13. Current secondary employment auspice:

- |                                                        |                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Private/for-profit (proprietary) | <input type="radio"/> Public sector – state   |
| <input type="radio"/> Private/nonprofit (sectarian)    | <input type="radio"/> Public sector – Federal |
| <input type="radio"/> Private/nonprofit (nonsectarian) | <input type="radio"/> Military                |
| <input type="radio"/> Public sector – local            |                                               |

Other (please specify)

### 14. At this point in my career, my primary professional identity is:

- ☐ social worker
- ☐ mediator

Other (please specify)

### 15. Please indicate how long you have been practicing in each field.

How many years have you been employed in social work? (Please enter a numeric response.)

How many years have you been engaged in conflict resolution/mediation practice? (Please enter a numeric response.)

### 16. Please indicate the percentage of time you currently work in each area of practice. (Enter a numeric response.)

Percentage of work in social work setting:

Percentage of work in conflict resolution/mediation setting:

**Preparation for Practice****17. Any additional comments you would like to share:**

## Preparation for Practice

### Preparation for Practice

Thank You!

**Thank you for your time and participation in this study!**

You may contact Susan M. Sanchirico at [ssanchirico@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:ssanchirico@gc.cuny.edu) if you have any further questions about the study or would like a summary of the results.

Below is a listing of websites that you may be interested in viewing:

**Conflict Resolution & Mediation:**

The Association for Conflict Resolution - <http://www.acrnet.org>  
 Mediate.com – Mediator listings, articles about mediation and dispute resolution - <http://mediate.com/>  
 The International Mediation Resource – Mediation World - <http://www.mediationworld.net/>  
 Campus Conflict Resolution Resources Main Quad - <http://www.campus-adr.org/>  
 Conflict Resolution for the Helping Professions - <http://www.barsky.org/conf-res/ConfRes.htm>  
 Conflict 911 – conflict management and conflict resolution - <http://conflict911.com/resources/>  
 Personal Conflict Style Inventory - <http://peace.mennolink.org/cgi-bin/conflictstyle/inventory.cgi>  
 Conflict Information Consortium - <http://conflict.colorado.edu/>  
 The Conflict Resolution Information Source - <http://www.crinfo.org/>  
 Beyond Intractability - <http://www.beyondintractability.org/>

**Social Work:**

National Association of Social Workers - <http://www.naswdc.org/>  
 Social Work Portal - <https://www.socialworkers.org/swportal/>  
 Social Workers - Help Starts Here - <http://www.helpstartshere.org/Home.html>

## Appendix B

Letter of IRB Approval from Hunter College/CUNY

**HUNTER COLLEGE**

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
695 PARK AVENUE, ROOM E1426  
NEW YORK, NY 10021  
PHONE (212) 650-3053 ♦ FAX (212) 650-3055  
<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/irb>

To: Susan Sanchirico  
Michael Smith  
Social Work

From: Sherryl Browne Graves, Chair *SB*  
Harriet Goodman, Chair *HG*  
Roseanne Flores, Chair *RF*

Date: 8/19/2008

Re: Human Subjects Review      Type of Review: Full Review

Protocol #: HC-070812427

Federalwide Assurance Number: FWA00003623      IRB Registration Numbers: IRB00004471 and IRB00000136

Project: "Preparation for Practice: A Survey of Social Workers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Their Graduate Curriculum for Conflict Resolution/Mediation Practice"

The Hunter College Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects has approved your project with the following provisions:

- a. This approval is for the period 8/19/2008 through 8/18/2009. You will receive a renewal notice approximately eight weeks before the expiration of this project's approval. This notice will be sent to the faculty advisor for student projects. However, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have an approved protocol at all times during your research. Please note that if there is a lapse, the work of the protocol must stop, as the protocol is no longer protected by the CUNY-wide assurance of compliance. The IRB will notify you of the lapse by certified mail. Work connected to the protocol may not be resumed until the IRB has given approval.
- b. Approved and stamped consent form(s) must be used by all participants. You are responsible for maintaining signed consent form(s) for a period of at least three years.  
☐ Consent form(s) attached.    ☒ Consent form(s) not attached.    ☐ Flyer Attached.
- c. All modifications and/or changes to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
- d. All adverse events or unanticipated problems as a result of this research, must be reported to the IRB within 10 business days. Please refer to website for the Adverse Event and Unanticipated Problem Form that should be used when reporting.
- e. All key personnel must have CITI training certificates on file at the IRB Office. It is your responsibility to submit an updated Key Personnel form should there be a change in the key personnel on this project.

Good luck with your work!

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have received this letter and am aware of and agree to abide by all of its stipulations in order to maintain active approval status, including prompt reporting of adverse events/serious problems and annual continuing review. I am aware that it is my responsibility to be knowledgeable of all federal and state regulations including CUNY's Federalwide Assurance (FWA) with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Susan Sanchirico  
Michael Smith  
Social Work

PLEASE SIGN AND RETURN ONE COPY OF THIS MEMO TO CAROLYNN JULIEN  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD, 695 PARK AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021.

YOUR PROJECT WILL NOT BE APPROVED UNTIL WE RECEIVE THE SIGNED COPY.

## Appendix C

### Pre-notice/Recruitment Email inviting Participation in the Study

## Pre-notice/Recruitment Email inviting Participation in the Study



To:

Subject: Invitation for Participation in a Dissertation Study Survey about Conflict Resolution/Mediation and Social Work Practice

Dear Social Work Mediator:

You are receiving this email because you have identified yourself on membership and referral listings as providing mediation services. I am requesting your support in completing a study about your perceptions of the effectiveness of your graduate curriculum for conflict resolution/mediation practice. This research is being conducted as part of the requirements for my doctoral degree at The Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York. Upon review of the literature, conflict resolution as a field of practice has been identified as underdeveloped in social work. Therefore, I am interested in your perception about your graduate social work education, your interest in conflict resolution/mediation and your advanced training and practice.

Here is what is involved in this study: Within one week, you will receive another email. The email will contain a link to an online survey hosted by Survey Monkey, a well known company that distributes and collects data for online survey research. If you click on the link, it will take you to the survey that will take you about 15-20 minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary, and it is anonymous – there are no questions that can identify you, and since I am sending the survey to approximately 250 social workers around the country, I am confident responses will remain anonymous based on the policies and procedures in place at Survey Monkey.

If you are aware of any social workers who may not have been identified and include conflict resolution/mediation in their practice, please feel free to forward this AND the second email that contains the link to the study.

If you have any questions about this study before next week, please email me at [ssanchirico@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:ssanchirico@gc.cuny.edu) or telephone me at [REDACTED] and I will be happy to answer your questions.

Thank you for your time.

Susan M. Sanchirico, MSW, LMSW  
 Doctoral Candidate, Social Welfare  
 The Graduate School and University Center/The City University of New York

## Appendix D

### Email Invitation for Participation in the Study

# Email Invitation for Participation in the Study



To:

Subject: Invitation for Participation in a Dissertation Study Survey about Conflict Resolution/Mediation and Social Work Practice

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Dear Social Work Mediator:

Last week I sent you an email inviting you to participate in an online survey about your perceptions of the effectiveness of your graduate curriculum for conflict resolution/mediation practice.

This email contains a link to the survey hosted by Survey Monkey. If you click on the link, it will take you to a consent form, so you can decide whether or not you want to participate. If you agree, it will take you about 15-20 minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary, and is anonymous – there are no questions that can identify you and since I am sending the survey to approximately 250 social workers around the country, I am confident responses will remain anonymous based on the policies and procedures in place at Survey Monkey.

If you are aware of any social workers who may not have been identified and include conflict resolution/mediation in their practice, please forward this email.

If you are interested in the results of the study, whether you participate or not, please contact me at [ssanchirico@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:ssanchirico@gc.cuny.edu).

Thank you for your valuable time!

Sincerely,

Susan M. Sanchirico, MSW, LMSW  
 Doctoral Candidate, Social Welfare  
 The Graduate School and University Center/The City University of New York

Click on the link to begin the survey:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/> [REDACTED]

## Appendix E

### Second Wave Email Invitation for Participation in the Study

## Second Wave Email Invitation for Participation in the Study



To:

Subject: Invitation for Participation in a Dissertation Study Survey about Conflict Resolution/Mediation and Social Work Practice

Dear Social Work Mediator:

Two weeks ago I sent you an email inviting you to participate in an online survey about your perceptions of the effectiveness of your graduate curriculum for conflict resolution/mediation practice. As I am trying to maximize the responses, I am resending the email with the link to the online survey. You may have decided you do not wish to complete the survey or you may have completed the survey already. If you have completed the survey, please do not complete it again. As this survey is completely anonymous, there is no way to simply send an email to those of you who have not completed the survey. Thank you in advance if you have completed the survey and please accept my apologies for the duplicate emails.

This email contains a link to the survey hosted by Survey Monkey. If you click on the link, it will take you to a consent form, so you can decide whether or not you want to participate. If you agree, it will take you about 15-20 minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary, and is anonymous – there are no questions that can identify you and since I am sending the survey to approximately 250 social workers around the country, I am confident responses will remain anonymous based on the policies and procedures in place at Survey Monkey.

If you are aware of any social workers who may not have been identified and include conflict resolution/mediation in their practice, please forward this email.

If you are interested in the results of the study, whether you participate or not, please contact me at [ssanchirico@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:ssanchirico@gc.cuny.edu).

Thank you for your valuable time!

Sincerely,

Susan M. Sanchirico, MSW, LMSW  
Doctoral Candidate, Social Welfare

The Graduate School and University Center/The City University of New York

Click on the link to begin the survey:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>

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