

Advancing Social Work Education: Preparing Students to Work in the Health Reform Environment



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Abstract

- Objectives:** This study attempts to answer two questions: (1) what do Social Work students know about the components and potential impacts of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), and (2) are there any characteristics of students associated with their level of knowledge or attitudes of about the Act?
- Methods:** A 53-item survey questionnaire inquiring knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions related to health reform and the ACA was given to a convenience sample of 105 undergraduate and graduate social work students from the University of Central Florida School of Social Work in January-February 2014.
- Results:** Students had favorable views on how the health reform will be funded and how health reform could support specific social issues such as acknowledging the need for reform and believing health care should be a basic right. There were fewer clear trends in students' attitudes about reform implementation and knowledge of specific ACA provisions. There were no significant associations between student's knowledge of the ACA and their insurance status or political affiliation.
- Conclusions:** Students' beliefs on health reform are inconsistent. Ethnicity was the only demographic characteristic that affected students' views. This study highlights the need for more in-depth health policy education within the social work program curriculum.

Background

- In March 2010, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) was signed into law. The ACA's impact on access to care and health services included changes in general insurance coverage, affordability, health promotion and disease prevention, and controlling costs.
- As of March 2013, the majority of Americans have an overall unfavorable view of the Act. Those opposing the reform did not favor the individual mandate and expressed reservations of government participation in health care. Political party affiliation was also a contributing factor in Americans' beliefs, with Democratic-leaning individuals favoring Medicaid expansion and the individual mandate the most (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2013).
- The professional social worker is often the first point of contact for individuals seeking health care access. As more medical and mental health services will be provided through the health reform, it is estimated that through 2020, there will be a 34% increase in health care social work positions and a 31% increase in mental health social work positions, meaning there will be a need for over 90,000 social workers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

Objectives

- Professional social workers' level of training in the various features and types of health care coverage and processes of roll out of the ACA provisions will have an impact on how U.S. citizens gain access to the various parts of the reform measure. Social work student opinions about the ACA and their political leanings may be important in how much they choose to learn about the reform measure and how much they promote client access of the reform components
- The purpose of this study is to explore and analyze social work students' perceptions of the Affordable Care Act and demographic factors that influence perception. Specific research questions include:
 - (1) What do social work students know about the components and potential impacts of the Affordable Care Act?
 - (2) Are there any characteristics of social work students associated with their level of knowledge about and their attitudes about the ACA?

Methods

- UCF IRB approval granted an "exempt" status on December 11, 2013
- Data Collection:** Cross-sectional self-administered surveys
 - Researchers created a 53-item survey with a combination of 5 point Likert scale and "Yes", "No", "I Don't Know" responses
 - Data collection began January 21, 2014 and ended February 4, 2014
- Sample:**
 - Convenience sampling: Survey was distributed in one undergraduate social work classes (Health Care in Social Work) and three graduate social work classes (one in Health Care in Social Work and two in Social Policy).
 - Final number of respondents: N=105

Respondent Characteristics

	N	%
1 st Year BSW	18	17.1
2 nd Year BSW	11	10.5
1 st Year MSW	14	13.3
2 nd Year MSW	62	59.0
Democrat	57	54.8
Republican	15	14.4
Independent	24	23.1
Other	8	7.7
Experience working health care	50	47.6

Results

- Which of the following are potential impacts of the ACA?

Item	%Yes	%No	% Don't know
Expanded access for prescription medications	53.3	13.3	33.3
Expanded access for individuals with pre-existing conditions	66.7	14.3	19.0
Expanded access for individuals with mental illnesses/disorders	47.6	15.2	37.1
Expanded access for individuals living 100-300% of the FPL	33.3	33.3	33.3
Expanded access for children and young adults	68.6	9.5	21.9
Expanded access for immigrants and undocumented individuals	18.3	33.7	48.1

Results

Knowledge and Beliefs about the Affordable Care Act & Health Reform

Item	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Unsure		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Health reform needed	3	2.9	1	1.0	9	8.7	34	32.7	57	54.8
Will not improve health care quality	5	4.9	24	23.3	53	51.5	16	15.5	5	4.9
Will expand access to care	2	1.9	4	3.8	36	34.6	48	46.2	14	13.5
Will not reduce health costs	1	1.0	19	18.3	50	48.1	21	20.2	13	12.5
Government funds will be provided for ACA-related programs	4	3.8	16	15.4	39	37.5	36	34.6	9	8.7
General support about the ACA	3	2.9	11	10.6	39	37.5	38	36.5	13	12.5
Believe health care is a basic right	1	1.0	3	2.9	0	0	33	31.7	67	64.4

Ethnicity & Perception that Health Reform is Needed

Ethnicity	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Unsure		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Caucasian	2	4.4	0	0.0	5	11.1	13	28.9	25	55.6
Asian	0	0.0	1	20.0	0	0.0	2	40.0	2	40.0
African-American	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	25.0	4	33.3	5	41.7
Black	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0	3	27.3	8	72.7
Multi-Racial	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	63.6	4	36.4
Latino	1	5.6	0	0.0	1	5.6	5	27.8	11	61.1
Total	3	2.9	1	1.0	9	8.8	34	33.3	55	53.9

Conclusions

- Students were unsure of their knowledge on Florida's decision not to expand Medicaid and whether Medicare qualifications will be increased
- Students feel it is important to provide support, through taxes, for individuals who cannot afford health care, yet they do not want to be mandated to do so
- There was no impact of party affiliation, insurance coverage, or career interest on students' knowledge of the ACA