

**Compassion Ministries 1**

**Running Head: INVOLVEMENT IN COMPASSION MINISTRIES**

**Factors that Impact Involvement**

**in Compassion Ministries**

**Karen Stockton-Chilson and Mike Preas**

**Walla Walla College**

Abstract

The purpose of this pilot study was to identify factors that impact the levels of commitment to compassion ministries of Seventh-day Adventist pastors, laity, and community service personnel. A purposive, convenience sample was generated by available matches ( $N = 160$ ) of Adventist Community Service leaders with pastors and laity. Findings reveal an apparent correlation between age and volunteer hours reported, an inverse correlation between age and a desire to be involved, and a significant inverse relationship between parents membership in the SDA by respondents twelveth birthday and the desire to be involved. Futher study with a modified questionnaire, purposive sample is recommended to replicate results.

## Factors That Impact Involvement in Compassion Ministries

Adventist Community Services leadership is sensitive to the need to provide relevant social services in a time of expanding social needs and shrinking available resources. It is felt by some church leaders that expansion and improved quality of compassion ministries (social justice or social action activities) is an essential element of practical Christianity.

Observations by some social workers and Adventist Community Services leaders reveals the belief that more effective and comprehensive compassion ministries are implemented by church-related laypersons when relevant clergy actively encourage and participate in the compassion ministries. A problem identified by theology and social work educators is the apparent low response to social needs by pastors and laity.

A valid empirical base had not been established in order to evaluate the level of pastoral, laity, or ACS leaders' commitment to compassion ministries or to identify factors that impacted levels of personal or professional involvement. The purpose of this study was to identify factors that impact levels of commitment by pastors and laity to compassion

ministries and to their involvement in Adventist Community Services as one approach to compassion ministry.

Winslow (1982) describes the concept of triage as it relates to social justice. Triage encompasses the debate over rationing of resources or services. Two important principles are suggested as being vital to facilitating morally justifiable triage. Winslow advocates that "in one way or another...utilitarian principles represent 'maximizing strategies' that aim to achieve the greatest amount of good (variously interpreted) or 'minimizing strategies' that seek to reduce the amount of potential harm" (p. 63). The egalitarian principles, on the other hand, are generally viewed as attempts to maintain or restore the equality of the persons in need and are generally based on the greatest good for the "greatest number." (p. 85). The egalitarian position, argued by Miller (1976) is that any distribution of resources should be based on the quality of need without regard to a person's past positions or accomplishments. Winslow discusses Childless's conclusions that a strictly utilitarian approach relegates the dignity and worth of an individual to his role and position in society (p. 85-86).

Winslow (1982) believes that John Rawls's views of social justice offers a solution to the practical dilemma of bridging the acceptable aspects of the utilitarian and

egalitarian principles. Rawls envisions a social contract based upon two rules:

...the first requires equality in the assessment of basic rights and duties, while the second holds that social and economic inequalities, for example, inequalities of wealth and authority, are just only if they result in compensating benefits for everyone and in particular for the least advantaged members of society.

(p. 115)

Rawls's theories serve to enlighten all institutions pursuing issues of social justice. In context of the sectarian use of the utilitarian approach to social justice triage, Winslow (1986), challenges the Seventh-day Adventist Church to reframe its social justice paradigm. He views the church's recent history as focusing on needs more relevant to its own interests than a commitment to human equality. He proposes that the Adventist church confront any barriers that work against the concerns of social justice. Utilitarian interests must serve the egalitarian needs of all humankind if the church is to be a system that truly promotes social and religious justice.

Organized religion has been recognized as a driving force within the social welfare state and as a human service provider (Garland, 1994; Garland & Bailey, 1990; Griffith,

1983; Meystedt, 1984; Netting, 1990; Theilen & Poole, 1986). The perceptions and use of church-related services by community leaders, providers, and clients in our changing social climate have been addressed by a few studies (Abbott, Garland, Huffman-Nevins, & Stewart, 1990; DiGiulio, 1984; Knoke, 1983; McPherson, 1983). Netting (1984) considered the way church-related agencies have been influenced by formal and informal, internal and external environmental forces. Fluctuations in the reputation and power of religious agencies, as it relates to their continued relevance as service providers in our secularized social welfare state, has been an ongoing subject of concern (Joseph, 1988; Knoke, 1983; Marty, 1980; McPherson, 1983; Stern & Gibelman, 1990).

Netting (1984) observed that church-related social outreach programs are significantly influenced by the hierarchical system of the parent religious body. More formally structured churches have increased control over the policies of affiliated social service agencies. Religious organizations are often reluctant to allow open examination of the principles that guide their decision makers (Winslow, 1982). Winslow proposes that whoever has the authority to make social justice judgements, which affect human values, must have a "principled" criteria to guide their decision. If such guidelines do not exist, the process may be viewed as

"totally capricious" despite the integrity of those making the decisions (p. 62).

Netting (1984) compares church and non-church agencies in regard to balancing policy relationships with its various constituencies. Church-related agencies, involved in social welfare, have constant tension between the changing religious community, with which it is affiliated, and the changing requirement of the secular environment. This necessitates continuous adjustment between church constituent demands and the needs of the community and society in which church agencies reside. Clifton and Dahms (1993) discuss the need of such agencies to be in tune with the shifting paradigms of various segments of society and suggest approaches to use in facilitating effective social action interventions.

The unique sectarian philosophy of a church's constituency has a definite impact upon the level and type of involvement in issues of human need. Dolgoff, Feldstein, and Skolnik (1993), in their discussion of social values and social welfare, trace the Christians' sense of responsibility for providing charity and relief to strongly held Judeo-Christian beliefs. They also referred to influence of the early Christians' deeply held commitment to the work ethic and chronicled how such religious values were incorporated into the Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601. These poor laws, with

emphasis on "worthy" poor were the precursors to the adoption of a "utilitarian emphasis" that has dominated the sectarian/nonsectarian policy and procedures regarding social justice activities.

In recent years, governmental agencies have been looking to church-based organizations "to fill in gaps left by federal cutbacks" (Dolgoff, Feldstein, & Skolnik, 1993, p. 408). The present trend of government, utilizing religious and secular agencies to meet social justice needs, has created church-state and church-agency issues. The question of church and state boundaries in resolving triage in social justice activities has created potential barriers to involvement in church-related compassion ministries.

There is a dearth of empirical data assessing the perceptions and use of church-related agencies by community leaders and service providers. Abbott, Garland, Huffman-Nevins, and Stewart (1990) have provided the only study on social workers' views of local churches as service providers found in this literature search. Their exploratory study had several limitations including: no control group, findings descriptive only of their sample, biased sample, and non-uniform interview procedures. The belief that the social workers' perception of an organization influenced decisions appeared to be substantiated. How social workers viewed



church-related agencies, impacted their willingness to refer clients and how they made their referrals. It also seemed possible that the individual social worker's values determined referrals, rather than the client's. Another variable noted, but not studied, was the churches' attitudes toward co-operative interchange with social service agencies.

This literature search revealed gaps in available research samples of assessment scales, especially as related to social justice involvement or altruism. A limited amount of related research has been done and/or reported by Brabson and Himle (1987), Brawley and Martinez-Brawley (1988), Else and Walker (1978), Kushler and Davidson (1979), and Pirs and Andrews (1982). The most applicable assessment tools appear to be those developed for congregational studies. Several background variables, examined through congregational studies, have been identified as potentially significant in measuring the level of church and community involvement. The variables that relate to this study include: gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, educational attainment, employment status, income, special skills or expertise, involvement in other voluntary organizations, length of membership in the congregation, extent of involvement in activities beyond worship, leadership roles held in the organization, number of hours spent in church-related activities, amount of financial

support, changes in level of involvement, denomination in which respondent was raised (Carroll, Dudley, & McKinney, 1986; Garland, 1994).

Carroll, Dudley, and McKinney (1986) emphasized the importance of process, the dynamic interaction between values and events, as the "link between the identity, values and commitment" (p. 81) of members and the specific programs in which they are involved. Negative dynamics in organizational process hinder inhibit the level of individual commitment and achievement group goals. They explored several significant factors that have been identified as impacting an individual's level of involvement and behavior in organizations. These factors include formal and informal processes or group structures, hidden or covert processes, task agreement, and role conflicts. Role conflicts are attributed primarily to incongruence between the task and level of authority, overall task clarity, and differences in levels of "contracts" between individuals and organizations, and types of authority relationship patterns (Carroll, Dudley, & McKinney, 1986).

Several authors discussed the implications of perceptions, religious reputations and influence, agency competition and value conflicts as they affect involvement of religion in social justice activities. A scarcity of

empirical data was found relating to factors that impact pastors' or laity's commitment to social justice as evidenced by compassion ministries.

In the context of the literature review, we formulated the following hypothesis. There is a relationship between the subject's age, gender, ethnicity, number of members in their church, size of their community, their function as an employee or volunteer, their perception of the church-sponsored appropriateness of the activity, their perception of the level of leadership-based support for social action activities and their level of commitment to compassion ministries.

### Methods

#### Subjects

Subjects ( $N = 160$ ) for this exploratory study were selected on a voluntary basis from all attenders ( $N = 140$ ) of the North American Association of Community Services Directors (NAACSD) 1994 convention in Medina, Ohio. Sampled directors ( $n = 43$ ) were matched with affiliated local or conference Seventh-day Adventist pastors ( $n = 27$ ) and laity ( $n = 90$ ). A purposive, convenience sample method, based on available matches, was used. Closed-ended questionnaires, with a few open-ended questions, were coded for each match. Attenders were asked to voluntarily participate by completing

a questionnaire while in attendance at the convention and to hand-deliver the matching questionnaire packet (see Appendix A) to their affiliated pastor and designated laity (see Appendix B). The pastors and laity were asked in a cover letter to complete the questionnaire on a voluntary basis and to return it in the enclosed, self-addressed envelop. While 800 questionnaires were distributed, only 160 had been returned had been returned by the deadline (5-1-95).

Attenders to the NAACSD convention and their affiliated pastors are located geographically throughout the United States, Canada, and Bermuda. They fulfill job responsibilities in community services on the local, conference, national, and international levels of Adventist Community Services and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Subjects were assigned to groups according to their designation of a job title.

The response rate was 20% ( $N = 800$ ,  $N = 160$ ). There were 55% ( $n = 72$ ) males, and 45% ( $n = 88$ ) female respondents. Roles represented were community service leaders 27% ( $n = 43$ ), pastors 17% ( $n = 27$ ), and laity 56% ( $n = 90$ ). Eight percent ( $n = 12$ ) of the respondents were ages 20-31, thirty-eight percent ( $n = 61$ ) were ages 32-50, and fifty-five percent ( $n = 87$ ) were ages 51-89. The median age of the sample 53.00 ( $\bar{x} = 53.790$ ,  $SD = 14.913$ ). Respondents reported

their parent's church membership status (on respondents twelveth birthday as 52.5% ( $n = 84$ ) as church members and 47.5% ( $n = 76$ ) as non-members.

### Materials

Materials used included the closed- and open-ended questionnaire used (see Appendix A), office supplies, postage stamps, a computer for tabulation of coded data, and financial resources to pay for airfare, lodging, and meals at the convention.

### Procedure

The procedure for execution of this quantitative study, with some qualitative features, was fairly simple. The self-administered questionnaire was prepared to reflect areas of interest and questions raised by leaders, educators, and service providers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Adventist Community Services, and social justice advocates.

At the convention, an introductory statement was made reflecting the information included in the introductory letter enclosed in the pastor's questionnaire packet. A sample was generated through a convenience, non-probability sampling method. Subjects were asked to participate on a voluntary basis by completing the self-administered questionnaire. They were also asked to hand-deliver the questionnaire to their affiliated pastors and designated

laity leadership for completion on a voluntary basis.

This pilot study was conducted to establish a baseline. Empirical observations are needed to establish grounded theory.

#### Results

This pilot study found no significance in the independent variables of ethnicity, role, and gender as related to the dependent variable of desire for involvement. Neither was the independent variable of ethnicity found to be significant in relationship to the dependent variable of the number of volunteer hours reported per month. Therefore, the hypotheses that there is a relationship between age and number of volunteer hours, between age and level of desire to be involved in compassion ministry activities, and that there is a relationship between parent's church membership and level of desire to be involved is accepted. Several other hypotheses were rejected.

Pearson's product-moment correlation ( $r$ ) test was calculated on the independent variable of age and the dependent variable of willingness to be involved in compassion ministries ( $r = -.262$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ,  $g = 14.913$ ) and the number of volunteer hours reported ( $r = .264$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $DF = 71.637$ ,  $g = 14.913$ ). A  $t$ -test was performed on the independent variable of parent's church membership and the

dependent variable of level of desire for additional involvement in compassion ministries. The t-test revealed that there was a significant inverse relationship

( $t = -2.930$ ,  $DF = 129.1$ ,  $p = 0.004$ . Group #1  $s = 9.044$ , Group #2  $s = 12.514$ ).

#### Discussion

We did find a significant inverse correlation ( $p < .01$ ) between the respondents age and their willingness to be involved in social outreach programs, and a significant inverse relationship ( $p < .01$ ) between the respondents parent's church membership and their level of desire for involvement in compassion ministries. A strong correlation ( $p < .01$ ) was found between the respondents' age and the number of volunteer hours that they reported per month.

#### Limitations

Potential limitations of research as indicated by Rubin and Babbie (1993) are the logical pitfalls of data analysis including provincialism, hasty conclusions, questionable causes, suppressed evidence, and false dilemmas. Given the exploratory nature of this study, systematic error needs to be considered in the way the data was collected and the dynamics of those providing the data. Data for this study was collected at a meeting on compassion ministries and from the attendee's associated pastors. It is possible that factors of

"acquiescent response set" or "social desirability bias could have impacted responses.

This pilot study was conducted without a pretest of the questionnaire. The instructions given, the complexity and lack of clarity in question design, and/or the length of the questions used to define the dependent variable led to some confusion in the kind of responses. It was necessary to assign values to some of the questions in an effort to accurately reflect the respondent's views. This created an increased possibility of unintentional bias. Random error could be involved as a result of a portion of the measurement procedure being viewed by some as too cumbersome, complex, or fatiguing. Also, measurement of the dependent variables appear to have influenced the significant number of incomplete responses ( $n = 52$ ). This was a purposive sample rather than a probability sample. As such, we cannot predict the probability of this sample being representative of the population from which it was selected.

Limitations for the qualitative portions of this study are numerous. The intention of the qualitative portion was not intended to establish any statistical significance, nor to test any theories. According to Rubin and Babbie (1993), there are several limitations of qualitative studies in general. Qualitative studies rarely yield precise descriptive



statements about large populations. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from qualitative studies should be regarded as suggestive rather than definitive. While this form of research provides for depth of observations, it is often very personal and vulnerable to subjectivity. Further, this type of research method has less reliability than quantitative research methods and less external validity.

Problems of generalizability arise in three main forms. First, the personal nature of the observations and measurements by the researcher can produce results that would not necessarily be replicated by another independent researcher. Second, while field research can yield in-depth observations that are comprehensive, its very comprehensiveness is less generalizable than rigorous sampling and standardized measurements. Third, there are often problems of generalizability even within specific subject matter being observed due to the potential for biased sampling and the danger that the sample is not "typical" for the population being sampled (Rubin & Babbie, 1993).

#### Recommendations

In conclusion, the authors recommend that (1) the self-administered questionnaire be revised to decrease the length and complexity; (2) the variables shown to be insignificant be eliminated; (3) that a random sample be selected; and (4)

a follow-up study be conducted to determine if the results can be duplicated. Further study is needed to determine the effect of parent's involvement in church and compassion ministry activities on their children, and on how to mobilize the population that indicated an apparent willingness to be involved in compassion ministries.

References

Abbott, S. D., Garland, D. R., Huffman-Nevins, A., & Stewart, J. B. (1990). Social worker's views of local churches as service providers: Impressions from an exploratory study. Social Work and Christianity: An International Journal, 17(1), 7-16.

Angrist, S. S. (1975). Evaluation research: Possibilities and limitations. The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 11, 73-91.

Brabson, H. V., & Himle, D. P. (1987). The unemployed and the poor: Differing perceptions of their needs in a community. Social Thought, 13(1), 24-33.

Brawley, E. A., & Martinez-Brawley, E. E. (1988). Social programme evaluation in the USA: Trends and issues. The British Journal of Social Work, 18(4), 391-413.

Carroll, J. W., Dudley, C. S., & McKinney, W. (Eds.). (1986). Handbook for congregational studies. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.

Clifton, R. L., & Dahms, A. M. (1993). Grassroots organizations: A resource book for directors, staff, and volunteers of small, community-based nonprofit agencies (2nd ed.). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.

DiGiulio, J. F. (1984). Marketing social services.

Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work,  
65(4), 227-234.

Dolgoff, R., Feldstein, D., & Skolnik, L. (1993).  
Understanding social welfare (3rd ed.). New York, NY:  
Longman.

Elliott, M. (1984). The church related social worker.  
Social Work and Christianity: An International Journal,  
11(2), 40-45.

Else, J. F., & Walker, S. E. (1978). Community  
assessment scales: The state of the art. Journal  
of Sociology and Social Welfare, 5(3), 299-315.

Evans, E. N. (1992). Liberation theology, empowerment  
theory and social work practice with the oppressed.  
International Social Work, 35(2), 135-147.

Garland, D. S. (1994). Church agencies: Caring for  
children and families in crisis. Washington, DC: Child  
Welfare League of America.

Garland, D. R., & Bailey, P. L. (1990). Effective work  
with religious organizations by social workers in other  
settings. Social Work and Christianity: An International  
Journal, 17(2), 79-95.

Griffith, E. E. (1983). The impact of sociocultural  
factors on a church-based healing model. American  
Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 53(2), 291-302.

Joseph, M. V. (1988). Religion and social work practice. Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work, 69(7), 443-352.

Knoke, D. (1983). Organization sponsorship and influence reputation of social influence association. Social Forces: An International Journal of Social Research, 61(4), 1065-1087.

Kushler, M. G., & Davidson, W. S. (1979). Using experimental designs to evaluate social programs. Social Work Research and Abstracts, 15(1), 27-32.

Marty, M. E. (1980). Social service: Godly and godless. Social Service Review, 54(4), 463-481).

McPherson, M. (1983). The size of voluntary organizations. Social Forces: An International Journal of Social Research, 61(4), 1044-1064.

Meystedt, D. M. (1984). Religion and the rural population: Implications for social work. Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work, 65(4), 219-226.

Mill, J. S. (1971). Utilitarianism. New York, NY: Bobbs-Merrill.

Miller, D. (1976). Social justice. Oxford: Clarendon.

Netting, F. E. (1984). Church-related social service agencies and social welfare. Social Service Review, 58(3), 404-420.

Netting, F. E. (1988). Informal influences in a system of church-related agencies. Social Work and Christianity: An International Journal, 15(2), 87-103.

Netting, F. E. (1986). The changing environment: Its effect on church-related agencies. Social Work and Christianity: An International Journal, 11(1), 16-30.

Perlmutter, F. D., & Adams, C. D. (1990). The voluntary sector and for-profit ventures: The transformation of American Social Welfare? Administration in Social Work, 14(1), 1-13.

Pirs, S., & Andrews, D. A. (1981). A questionnaire battery for the assessment of attitudes toward the correctional and mental health systems: Institutions, community programs, workers and clients. Canadian Journal of Criminology, 23(2), 163-172.

Rubin, A., & Babbie, E. (1993). Research methods for social work (2nd ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Stern, L. W., & Gibelman, M. (1990). Voluntary social welfare agencies: Trends, issues, and prospects. Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services, 71(1), 13-23.

Theilen, G. L., & Poole, D. L. (1986). Educating leadership for effecting community change through

voluntary associations. Journal of Social Work Education,  
22(2), 19-29.

Winslow, G. (1982). Triage and justice. Los Angeles:  
University of California.

Winslow, G. (1981). Renewing the Adventist social  
vision. Spectrum, 16(5), 30-33.

Appendix A



Appendix B