

Women's attainment of leadership positions in social work academia: The impact of region

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Abstract

The focus of this project was to examine regional differences in the percentage of women attaining the two highest levels of administration within social work academia. The regions examined were the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West of the United States. The results show an increasing percentage of women achieving directorship and deanship positions with some regions excelling in the representation of women.

Purpose

The purpose of our research is to determine what progress, if any, has been made by women in attaining the two highest level positions within social work higher education, that of Director of Baccalaureate in Social Work (B.S.W.) program and Dean of Master's in Social Work (M.S.W.) program.

We report here on one aspect of our larger study which looks at the attainment of higher levels of faculty rank as well as the movement of women into Director and Dean positions in the United States between 1985 and 1996, the years for which we reviewed national data. This paper focuses on the impact of geographic region on women's attainment of these two positions. We also examine whether individual regions (Northeast, Midwest, South, and West) have made significant improvement in the representation of women in these positions over the time period studied.

Background

Until quite recently, leadership positions in Social Work academia were almost exclusively the province of white males. In this respect, the over-representation of males mirrored the higher education scene across disciplines in this country. What

made it particularly unsettling for fair-minded, egalitarian men and women is the fact that this profession, unlike other professional fields, has long been numerically dominated by women. Unlike most other disciplines, social work has long espoused the values of equality, self-actualization for all, and affirmative action for those who had formerly been disenfranchised, particularly ethnic minorities and women.

The social work literature is filled with articles which decry the continued discrimination against women both in the practice arena and in academia. Gibelman and Schervish (1993), Gibelman and Schervish (1995), and Huber and Orlando (1995) find consistent evidence of discrimination against women both in salary and in the attainment of higher level positions within the practice arena. In the academic arena, researchers have examined women's attainment of higher faculty rank in graduate and joint programs (Petchers, 1996), the attainment of directorships in baccalaureate programs (Harper, 1991), and issues related to women's advancement in both (Krysik and Nichols-Cosebolt, 1994; Trolander, 1997).

Until we did our larger research project, however, there had been no national study of women's attainment of the two highest positions within social work academia, Director of B.S.W. program and Dean of M.S.W. program. Unlike other authors who looked at one aspect of women's status in the field, we found that significant progress has indeed been made between 1985 and 1996 for women in both of these leadership positions in social work academia.

Although regional differences have not been studied in the area of academia, there is significant research into gender differences by region in the areas of political attainment, employment, earnings, and economic autonomy. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research (1996), the states with the highest number of women in elected office tend to be in the West. In general, women in the West and Northeast tend to fare better than in other regions in regards to earnings, employment, and the attainment of managerial and professional level occupations. In addition, women's business ownership is also concentrated in the West. Because we found these differences in the status of women by region, we thought it reasonable to examine the impact of region on the attainment of leadership positions for women in Social Work academia.

Methods

An original database was created in order to ascertain the gender of Directors of B.S.W. programs and Deans of M.S.W. programs, by region, in the United States. To do so, we used the Directory of Colleges and Universities with Accredited Social Work Degree Programs, published annually by the Council of Social Work Education. Data were compiled for the years of 1985, 1990, and 1996, spanning an eleven-year period. In addition to year studied, we looked at the level of accreditation

status, including candidacy status for each degree level, and the gender of the administrator. The individual's gender was determined by the person's name. If the gender of the person was not discernible from the name, it was not reported (46 out of a total of 1397 cases). Regional data were also used in this analysis. We used the four major regions as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau --- Northeast, Midwest, South, and West.

Results

Hypotheses 1:

For each of the four regions studied, there is not a significant difference in the percentage of women in Director positions at B.S.W. programs over the 11 year time period (1985-1996) studied.

For this study, we looked at each of the four regions: North, South, Midwest, and West separately. We used chi-square statistics to determine if there were significant changes in the percentage of women over the time frame at the Director level for each of the regions in the country. The findings in Table 1 show that only the South had a significant change in the percentage of women holding these positions, with $\chi^2 = 6.446$ and $p < 0.05$. The findings for the other regions were not significant. Of interest, not only did the South have the only significant change in the gender makeup of its Directors, it also had the highest percentage of women in this role in 1996, 65 percent. In addition, not only does the South have the greatest percentage of women, it also has the greatest number of women due to the large number of programs in this region. The large number of programs in the South does not necessarily represent a disproportional ratio of B.S.W. programs, since the South is made up of more states than any of the other regions.

It is interesting to note that for all four regions the percentage of B.S.W. directorships held by women was greater than 50 percent by 1996. This change represents progress since 11 years earlier none of the regions had women holding the majority of these positions. In addition, there were no significant differences between regions for each year studied 1985, 1990, and 1996 at the $p < 0.05$ level.

Hypotheses 2:

For each of the four regions studied, there is not a significant difference in the percentage of women in deanship positions at M.S.W. programs over the 11 year time period (1985-1996) studied.

Again, we look at the four chi-square separately to determine if in any region there was a significant change in the gender makeup of Deans over the time period studied. The percentage of these positions held by women is reflected in Table 2. The chi-square statistics show that the only region with a significant change in the representation of women between 1985 and 1996 was the Midwest with $\chi^2 =$

7.063 and $p < 0.05$. Of greater interest is the fact that the Midwest is the only region with over 50 percent of these positions held by women in 1996. In fact, the Midwest went from the lowest representation, 23 percent, to the highest representation, 57 percent, in this eleven year span. In addition, the Midwest is the only region where there was a decrease in the total number of male Deans over the time studied. Although other regions reflect increases in women deanships, this was due to the growth in the number of programs, not a decrease in male representation. Although no other region demonstrated a significant change in representation of women Deans, all four regions did show increases in the percentage of women Deans between 1985 and 1996.

Worth noting, however, is that in the Northeast the representation of women actually decreased slightly between 1990 and 1996, and more surprisingly, the Northeast had the lowest representation of women Deans by 1996. In addition, there were no significant differences between regions for each year studied.

Conclusions

As part of our larger study, we find that significant progress has been made for women in attaining the two highest levels of administration within social work academia, the directorship of a B.S.W. program and deanship of an M.S.W. program. The focus of this project is to ascertain if region has a bearing on these findings. We find that the impact of region on the percentage of women in directorships of B.S.W. programs is significant only in the South. Since the South is generally not thought of as a progressive region, these findings are of particular interest since 65 percent of the directorships are held by women. Further research will need to be done to determine if this is due to social work being seen as women's work in this region. Also worth looking at further is why the Northeast has stagnated between 1990 and 1996 with just over 55 percent of the positions held by women.

At the M.S.W. level, the relation between region and the attainment of deanships for women was significant only in the Midwest. In addition, the Midwest remains the only region where more than fifty percent of the deanships are held by women. Since deanships represent greater responsibility and respect, it is not surprising to see more of these positions held by men than women, even in the woman dominated field of social work. These positions tend to be located at Research I and Research II institutions and carry personnel and budgeting responsibilities. In contrast, Directors are often at lower ranked institutions and often have greater teaching responsibilities than Deans. Yet, why does the Northeast have such a low representation of women Deans when this region is found to have greater representation of women in professional and entrepreneur positions. As with directorships, the percentage of deanships held by women in the Northeast stagnated between 1990 and 1996, leaving additional reasons to research this phenomena.

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Table 1: Percentage of women in Director positions by region of the country for

1985, 1990, and 1996

■ Northeast		
Year	N	Percent Women
1985	74	48.7
1990	83	55.4
1996	81	55.6
Chi-square=0.959	P < 0.7	
■ Midwest		
Year	N	Percent Women
1985	102	36.3
1990	111	45.1
1996	126	51.6
Chi-square=5.347	P < 0.1	
■ South		
Year	N	Percent Women
1985	115	49.6
1990	123	54.5
1996	137	65.0
Chi-square=6.446	P < 0.05	
■ West		
Year	N	Percent Women
1985	36	33.3
1990	35	40.0
1996	37	51.4
Chi-square=2.496	P < 0.3	

Table 2: Percentage of women in deanship positions by regions for 1985, 1990, and 1996

■ Northeast		
Year	N	Percent Women
1985	19	26.3
1990	22	40.9
1996	31	38.7
Chi-square=1.100	P < 0.6	
■ Midwest		
Year	N	Percent Women
1985	22	22.7
1990	23	30.4
1996	28	57.1
Chi-square=7.063	P < 0.05	
■ South		
Year	N	Percent Women
1985	24	33.3
1990	32	40.6
1996	34	41.2
Chi-square=0.427	P < 0.9	
■ West		
Year	N	Percent Women
1985	16	31.3
1990	17	35.3
1996	23	47.8
Chi-square=1.250	P < 0.6	

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