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From two sides: Perceptions of social work.

SWESD, Melbourne
July 12th, 2014
Why does perception matter?

- Recruitment and retention of practitioners
- Funding of services
- The expectations of people using our services
- The trust and confidence of the public and other professionals
Previous findings

• **We are women.** (Research Works, 2001; LeCroy & Stinson, 2004; Scottish Executive, 2005; Gerritsen-Mckane, Hunter & Ofori-Dua, 2012)

• **We work in child protection—otherwise confusion about what we do.** (Hackett, Kuronen, Matthies & Kresal, 2003; LeCroy & Stinson, 2004; Scottish Executive, 2005; Krumer-Nevo & Weiss, 2006; Schmid & Benbenishty, 2011; Condie, Hanson, Lang, Moss & Kane, 1978).

• **The media influences public perception.** (NASW, 2003; Scottish Executive, 2005; Briggs, Meagher & Healy, 2007; Brodie, Nottingham & Plunkett, 2008; Jones, Vela & Vang, 2006; Zugazuga, Surette, Mendez & Otto, 2008; Mawby, Davidson & King 2005; Turner, 2011)

• **The public image may reflect the profession’s own confusion about what we do.** (Scottish Executive, 2005; Keefe, Geron & Enguidanos, 2009).
Research Questions

1. What does the public think about social work and social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand in a range of areas?
2. How do social workers think that they are perceived by the public of Aotearoa New Zealand in a range of areas?
3. How do responses to the above questions compare?
A tale of two studies

Public

- Phone survey Nov 2014
- N= 386
- Response rate 30%
- Margin of error of +/-5%.
- Mix closed, Likert and open questions.
- Asked for beliefs around what they thought the public would say

Social Workers

- Survey Monkey April-May 2015
- N= 403
- Mix closed, Likert and open questions
- Asked for beliefs around what they thought the public would say
First phrase that comes to your mind when you hear the words “social worker”?

### Public

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helper</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets specific personal needs</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children/Youth help</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets specific community needs</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CYFS/WINZ/Government</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsellor/Someone who listens</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Social workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Youth and Family</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steal/remove kids</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do gooders</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interfering/busybody</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child abuse/protection</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressful/hard job</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In general, New Zealanders trust social workers.
In general, social workers in New Zealand are hard working.
In general, social workers in New Zealand have a stressful job.
In general, social workers in New Zealand are well paid
Social workers should be registered like doctors, nurses, and teachers

Public

Social Workers

84%

16%

88%

12%
Social workers work in the areas of:

- Services for older people
- Prison and probation
- Troubled teenagers
- Health - adapting to illness
- Housing and welfare benefits
- Mental illness and addictions
- Parents and parenting problems
- Child abuse and neglect

**Public**

- yes
- no

**Social workers**

- yes
- no
Social workers:

- Do counselling with people
- Influence social policy
- Support parents and families
- Help people get resources
- Help communities solve problems
- Speak out against injustice

[Bar charts showing percentages of social workers and the public who engage in these activities.]

Public:
- Yes: 80%
- No: 20%

Social workers:
- Yes: 90%
- No: 10%
Encourage your children or a close family member to become a social worker?
• public

What social workers thought public would say

Social workers said about their own kids
How do you think the media portrays social work? (Social workers)

- Portrays them overly optimistically
- Portrays them well
- Portrays them accurately
- Doesn’t portray them very well
- Portrays them really badly
Do you think that there is stigma associated with being a social worker? (Social Workers)

- Yes: 87%
- No: 13%
Are you proud to be a social worker?

- 96% yes
- 4% no
What do we take away?

- Public appears to have a fairly good awareness of what social workers do.
- There is less than 50% agreement that the public trusts social workers.
- Social work perception of what the public thinks is slightly more negative than it appears to be.
- Social workers sense that there is stigma associated with social work and that they are not particularly well represented by the media.
- Regardless of above, nearly all respondents were proud to be social workers!
References


