

2019

## Too Hard to Find with Too Little Time: What School Social Workers Want in Online Resources for Evidence-Based Practice

Michele Patak-Pietrafesa

*Ohio State University*, patak-pietrafesa.1@buckeyemail.osu.edu

Natasha K. Bowen

*Ohio State University*, bowen.355@osu.edu

Ashley E. Stewart

*St. John's University*, stewarta@stjohns.edu

*See next page for additional authors*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/ijssw>



Part of the [Science and Technology Studies Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).

---

### Recommended Citation

Patak-Pietrafesa, Michele; Bowen, Natasha K.; Stewart, Ashley E.; and Kelly, Michael S. (2019) "Too Hard to Find with Too Little Time: What School Social Workers Want in Online Resources for Evidence-Based Practice," *International Journal of School Social Work*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2161-4148.1043>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *International Journal of School Social Work* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact [cads@k-state.edu](mailto:cads@k-state.edu).

---

## Too Hard to Find with Too Little Time: What School Social Workers Want in Online Resources for Evidence-Based Practice

### Abstract

School mental health practitioners, including social workers, are mandated through federal, state, and professional entities to provide evidence-based practices to students. Nevertheless, rates of use of evidence-based practices among mental health professionals in schools remain low, even as knowledge about effective practices increases. This study aimed to further knowledge about how to promote and support the use of evidence-based practices among school practitioners using online technology. School social workers attending a summer professional development event took part in focus groups exploring (a) their current perceptions of evidence-based practices, (b) their experiences finding evidence-based practice information online, and (c) their preferences for the formatting and content of online resources. Participants described a willingness to use evidence-based practice, efforts to find information, and difficulties encountered with online sources. Preferences for readily available, searchable, brief, and understandable online information were expressed. Implications for meeting the needs of school social workers with online resources are discussed.

### Keywords

Focus Group, School Social Work, Evidence Based Practice, Technology

### Authors

Michele Patak-Pietrafesa, Natasha K. Bowen, Ashley E. Stewart, and Michael S. Kelly

## Too Hard to Find with Too Little Time: What School Social Workers Want in Online Resources for Evidence-Based Practice

Between 20% and 25% of children and adolescents (Merinkagas et al., 2010; Simon et al., 2015) have mental disorders that threaten their school success (Topitzes et al., 2009), and the number may be rising, especially among children living in poverty (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, Medicine, 2015). School success is one of the biggest predictors of adult health outcomes (Topitzes et al.), so effectively addressing students' mental health (i.e., mental, behavioral, and emotional health) is a critical goal. Schools are primary settings—sometimes the only setting—in which youth with mental health disorders receive services (Atkins et al., 2017; Simon et al., 2015), and school social workers (SSWs) are key providers. Understanding SSWs' needs, preferences, and challenges in finding and implementing effective practices is a first step in addressing the unmet mental health needs of youth.

Evidence-based practice is widely considered to be a superior approach to mental health intervention (Bruns et al., 2015; Pope et al., 2011). School professionals face mandates from the federal government, states, districts, and professional organizations (e.g., NCLB, 2001; ESSA, 2015; NASW, 2017) to use practices with empirical support. For example, the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, Public law No. 114-95) which amended the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, Public law No. 89-10) mandates the use of interventions whose effectiveness is supported with either strong research evidence (based on at least 1 quality experimental study); moderate evidence (based on at least 1 quality quasi-experimental study), promising evidence (based on at least 1 quality correlational study), or a research-based rationale. Yet, the uptake of evidence-based practices among mental health providers has been inadequate (Bruns, et al.; Simon et al.), including among providers in schools, such as SSWs (Thompson, et al., 2018), psychologists (Reddy et al., 2017), nurses (Adams, 2009), and counselors (Lochman et al., 2015). Despite this fact, quantitative and qualitative research indicates that SSWs' are willing and do attempt to implement an evidence-based practice approach or some components of such an approach (Castillo et al., 2016; Kelly et al., 2015).

The first step of an evidence-based approach is accessing information on practices that are affordable, feasible, acceptable, and appropriate to the myriad problems and populations encountered by SSWs. Although the internet has substantial potential for meeting social workers' information needs and is one of the major sources they report using (Kelly et al., 2015; Phillippo et al., 2017), data

from SSWs reveal inconsistencies in their reports about searching online for EBP information. For example, researchers conducting a study of SSWs in a large Florida school district found that 70% reported using evidence-based practices in their work and spending up to four hours a week searching for them (Castillo et al.). However, 40% of respondents reported not knowing where to look for information on evidence-based practice (Castillo et al.). Further, in a national survey of SSWs, 42.6% reported “always” using evidence-based practice sites (Kelly et al., 2015) however, only 3.5% reported having a “high” level of access to sites with information on evidence-based practices (Kelly et al., 2015). Further, SSWs on average reported using online EBP websites and research article databases the most compared to other information sources, but these survey data provided no way to know more about what SSW used those resources for, or what the quality of the evidence was that they ultimately chose to use in their practice (Kelly et al., 2016; Kelly et al., 2015). The inconsistent reports by SSWs indicate that they encounter barriers at the very first step of an evidence based approach: Not knowing where to look, not having enough access to websites with EBP information, and not being confident in their ability to critically evaluate the research they do find. Other barriers identified by SSWs in Castillo et al.’s study include a lack of requisite technological knowledge to find evidence-based practices online and an insufficient amount of online information that is relevant to their needs; a finding echoed in another recent study (Phillippo et al.). Additional barriers cited in the literature include not having enough time for searching for EBP information (Franklin & Kelly, 2009; Phillippo et al., Scurlock-Evans & Upton, 2015) and a lack of publicly available information even at authoritative federal websites (George et al., 2013; Powers et al., 2010).

Despite the robust report by SSWs that there exists an insufficient amount of appropriate and publicly available information about evidence-based practices, several sources do seem to be appropriately matched to SSWs’ information needs. For example, the Intervention Central and PBIS World websites emphasize low cost or free strategies to address academic and behavioral problems. The latter organizes intervention strategies by the three prevention tiers commonly used in schools. What Works Clearinghouse mainly offers resources on academic performance but does offer practice guides on behavioral intervention as well. Finally, the School Social Work Association of America provides resources specifically for SSWs including webinars on a variety of practice topics. Even though SSWs are already searching online for evidence based practice information, it appears that individual social workers were aware of only a few of these resources (Castillo et al.).

### **Rationale for Current Study**

Efforts to more effectively disseminate evidence-based practice information to SSWs should capitalize on the demonstrated willingness of SSWs to look online for such resources. The goal of the current study was to inform the development of freely available, user-friendly, online resources for SSWs aimed at overcoming some of the barriers present with current online resources. We conducted focus groups with SSWs that specifically asked about the format, content, and navigation characteristics they prefer in online resources. We aimed to obtain information about: (a) current perceptions of evidence-based practices, (b) experiences finding evidence-based practices online, and (c) preferences for the formatting and content of resources.

### **Methods**

A phenomenological approach to data collection and analysis was employed in the current study. Phenomenology focuses qualitative exploration on the “essence” of a phenomenon that is shared by a group of people (Creswell, 2007; Padgett, 2008). This approach is well-suited to our attempt to understand school social work practitioners' experiences as they engage in the phenomenon of seeking online information and resources about evidence based practice, and their ideas about how to make such experiences more successful. Two focus groups were conducted over the course of a two-day summer training institute for SSW practitioners held on the campus of Loyola University Chicago. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Loyola University Chicago.

#### **Sampling and Participants**

A total of 110 people attended the two-day summer training institute, most of whom were current SSW practitioners working in the state of Illinois. Each day, 15 randomly sampled institute attendees were invited to participate in a focus group during the lunch hour. The number sampled was based on our target goal of a minimum of 20 total participants. Two of the original 30 sampled declined to participate and were replaced with others randomly sampled from the conference attendee list. Therefore 30 participants were selected. On the second day, however, a few additional SSWs joined the focus group out of interest. All participants were over the age of 18, all were employed in Illinois K-12 schools as SSWs and all had MSW degrees (required for state certification). Participants represented a wide range of school settings as well as experience levels. Several participants reported currently working or having worked in Chicago Public schools; others reported working in suburban districts or districts in very small

communities. All participants reported working in public schools, with the exception of one who worked in a therapeutic treatment school.

### **Data Collection**

The focus groups were moderated by two social work faculty members. Two graduate students served as observers and collected data through audio recording. Each focus group consisted of two parts: (a) group discussion about SSWs' use of evidence-based practices and their experiences in looking for information about EBPs, and (b) solicitation of feedback about two existing websites containing evidence-based practice information. A list of questions guided the discussions, but prompts and follow-up questions were used to enhance the data collected.

### **Data Analysis**

Audio recordings of the focus groups were professionally transcribed to provide a verbatim account of focus group proceedings. Transcribed data were then uploaded to Atlas.ti (1999, version 1.6.0) for analysis. The two graduate student observers also served as data coders and conducted the qualitative data analysis in this study.

In-line with Moustakas' (2011) modification of van Kaam's (1959, 1966) methods of phenomenological data analysis, the coders independently conducted preliminary grouping of statements from the full verbatim transcripts. The data were horizontalized independently by each coder such that every statement was evaluated for relevance to the phenomenon of interest (Moustaka). Statements that were not relevant (deemed unnecessary and insufficient to understanding the phenomenon), overlapping, or repetitive were eliminated. Each remaining statement represented an individual unit of meaning and the individual units of meaning were then clustered into thematic labels. The coders then independently validated each thematic code by comparing it to the original transcript. Thematic codes that were explicitly expressed or compatible with what was expressed in the transcripts, were retained as valid. Verbatim statements from the transcripts were retained as examples for each thematic code. Final thematic codes identified independently by each coder were then compared, differences reconciled, and a final thematic structure that represented the essence of each phenomenon studied was determined by consensus.

### **Rigor**

To decrease the potential for socially desirable responses from participants, facilitators used the following clinical techniques devised to increase the likelihood of valid responses: gentle assumption, normalization, and behavioral incident (Pascal, 1983; Pomeroy et al., 1982; Shea, 2002.). With gentle

assumption, the interviewer assumes that a certain behavior (that may be considered taboo) *is* occurring and frames the question as such, in a non-judgmental tone (Pomeroy et al.). For example, rather than asking focus group participants “Do you consistently use evidence based practices in your work?”, facilitators asked participants to discuss the barriers to using evidence based practices that they have experienced. Normalization is a technique that aims to reduce the expectation of stigma by communicating to an individual that others have also experienced a particular feeling, behavior or situation (Shea). Normalization was used by facilitators in tandem with gentle assumption to help participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences in the group context. Behavioral incidents (Pascal) are questions that seek specific behavioral details or facts in sequence to help an individual re-create a particular situation with more validity. This technique was employed by asking participants to provide details about the specific contexts around their attempts to locate information about evidence based practices. Finally, in an effort to further support honest reporting, participants were informed that their honest feedback would be used to improve a web-based tool that may help them find and use evidence based practices more easily.

## Results

Participants in the focus groups demonstrated knowledge of the term “evidence based practice” and were able to give examples of specific evidence-based programs, such as, “Anger Coping,” “Second Step,” “C-Bits,” “PBIS,” “Check & Connect,” “Coping Cat,” and “Positive Action.” They also cited reasons for using evidence-based programs in their schools, such as being mandated by their district to be trained in a specific program; being told by supervisors they were required to use evidence-based programs; and making a personal choice to use certain programs that they liked and were familiar with.

### **Finding Information about Evidence-based practices**

Participants were prompted to discuss their experiences looking for information about EBPs for their day-to-day practice. As shown in Table 1, they reported using multiple sources of information in their search for evidence-based practices. Some information was delivered to them through professional development provided by their school districts but this type of information likely focused on one specific program, limiting its utility for intervening with the wide variety of problems and populations encountered by SSWs. Peers and supervisors were also noted as sources. One participant, for example, described supervisors as

primarily having knowledge about academic best practices but not necessarily about behavioral interventions, school climate, or culture. Another participant described consulting with school counselors for information on interventions: “I get most of my stuff from school counselors. They are a lot more active in really having specific ways to do certain interventions.”

Participants also mentioned print resources, ranging from professional development materials to research journals. One sourcebook (Franklin, Harris, & Allen-Meares, 2013) that was mentioned is a compendium of research information on problems and populations edited by two prominent school social work researchers. The sourcebook provides brief background on topics and brief summaries of intervention strategies that have research support.

As shown in Table 1, a final category of sources on evidence-based programs was the internet. Focus group participants named several websites they were familiar with and also reported using Google searches to locate practice information. The websites mentioned included sites sponsored by the federal government, social work and counseling professional organizations, nonprofit or private groups, and a special education cooperative organization serving 11 districts in Illinois (A.E.R.O., 2017). Participants also named the “clip-and-pin” social media site Pinterest as a site they turned to as a potential source of information on evidence-based practices. The SSWs in the focus groups, therefore, sought information from online sites with a wide range of credibility levels. Despite collectively being aware of numerous online sources of information, SSWs described several challenges encountered in their online searches, including lack of time for lengthy searches, not finding what they are looking for, not finding affordable practices, and uncertainty about what is evidence-based.

**Lack of Time.** The problem of finding time to identify and evaluate evidence-based practices was universal among participants across the two focus groups. One participant expressed frustration over lack of time: “. . . If I’m during the day or even on the weekends, looking up something for my student, and it’s taking me a little while to search through all these things, I’m gonna give up . . . .” Lack of time for searching was given as a reason some went to Pinterest. For example, one participant shared “. . . you find something on Pinterest and go ‘This is great. I want to use this activity.’” Another participant stated: “. . . we [SSWs] are most of the time in the moment looking for something, and that’s why . . . I go to Pinterest. I’m in the moment looking for things.”

**Not Finding What They Are Looking For.** Contributing to the burden of time-intensive searches was the need for “user-friendly” interventions that were

appropriate for a specific problem, student, grade-level, or tier. One participant stated, “I’m looking for an intervention I can start doing.” Another participant stated:

I feel like it is a little bit difficult to find stuff that is user-friendly, day-to-day, actually be able to work. Especially on an individual basis . . . I think there is a lot of tier 1 (information) a lot of times. It’s easy to find that stuff, but when you’re trying to look for a more individual basis, it’s really hard.

Consistent with Castillo et al., participants reported it was harder to find targeted programs (tiers 2 and 3) than universal programs (tier 1). They also reported difficulty finding appropriate programs for certain populations: middle school students, preschoolers, students with intellectual disabilities and/or limited verbal ability, and parents of children with ADHD or autism. They noted it was also hard to find programs that were adaptable across age or grade levels. Another participant described concern about the relevance of evidence based trauma programs for her students who live in environments with ongoing traumatic experiences:

. . . a lot of the evidence-based things that are geared towards trauma are not actually necessarily evidence based for the type of kids that I’m working with [kids who are still in the traumatic environment]. It’s not the same as the kid who’s experienced a trauma and then he’s moved on.

If they were unable to find interventions or practices appropriate to a specific student, problem, or tier for whom they were searching many of the participants admitted to “piecemealing” an intervention to fit their needs. One participant explained “For tier 2, we pull together our own curriculum from different sources that are evidence-based; social skills, anger, those kind of things. We aren’t bound to it, because you obviously have to be flexible.”

***Not Finding Affordable Evidence-based Practices.*** In addition to the difficulty in finding practices that specifically matched individual students’ needs, several of the participants reported difficulty in finding interventions that are free or low cost. One participant stated: “I’m looking for practical strategies of things to do that I know I can implement without hav[ing] to spend extra money of my own.” Other participants described cost as a reason for having to “piecemeal” an

intervention. One stated: “I find with budget constraints, they end up taking evidence-based things and piecemealing them because we can’t afford the whole program.” Another noted having more success finding affordable evidence-programs at sites for other professionals: “When I’m looking for practical strategies of things to do that I know I can implement without having to spend extra money of my own, I find more with the school counselor websites . . . .”

**Uncertainty about What is Evidence-Based.** Others’ responses also demonstrated a lack of confidence in judging if practices were evidence based. For example, one said: “One of the things I wrestled with was behavioral strategies that are evidence-based. Does . . . the tool have to be evidence-based? Or . . . if it’s a book . . . a behavior strategy, is that [evidence-based]?” Two other participants said:

I was moved to another district. They don’t have [the evidence-based program], so I’m using bits and pieces. Then it becomes, is it really still evidence-based if you only have pieces of it?

When I do find it [evidence-based practice information] . . . it may say evidence-based, but I don’t know if I have a good understanding or foundation of how to know that it’s really evidence-based, or they’re just putting it in their paragraphs.

The challenges presented suggest that individual SSWs may be aware of some online resources but not others or have developed preferences for certain websites that still do not fully meet their needs. We next asked them for their feedback on two existing websites.

### **Feedback on Online Resources**

Participants were introduced to two existing websites for SSWs and other school-based mental health practitioners. Each website and its functionality were demonstrated. Demonstration of the two websites was used to prompt participants to discuss the features and content they would like to see in a website supporting their use of evidence-based practices. Participants indicated preferences related to the appearance, organization, navigation, and content. They also indicated features they did *not* like in addition to those they preferred.

The first school social work website, (SSWN, [www.schoolsocialwork.net](http://www.schoolsocialwork.net)), is a free publicly available site that supports the practice of SSWs and other mental health providers in schools with a variety of content types. The site was founded in 2012 by a SSW and is now maintained by the third author and the site

developer with content contributions by faculty and PhD students at The Ohio State University. Resources include links to information on school-based programs with research support, one-page “Research Briefs” about new intervention studies and relevant studies adding to the knowledge base about mental health, effective schools, vulnerable populations, child and adolescent development, etc.

The second website, School Success Online (SSO, [www.schoolsuccessonline.com](http://www.schoolsuccessonline.com)), is home to two social environmental assessment tools for school practitioners, the School Success Profile for middle and high school students (SSP, Bowen et al., 2005), and the Elementary School Success Profile (ESSP, Bowen, 2006) for third to fifth graders. The site includes a free and publicly available database of more than 150 evidence-based programs and promising practices. The database is organized by the domains assessed with the SSP and ESSP, but is also searchable by topic area (e.g., teacher support, school safety). Each topic area includes entries about multiple evidence based program options and promising practices, as well as print and online resources. Entries include one-page descriptions of the interventions, including information on who delivers the interventions, costs and resources, and where to obtain materials or more information.

**Website Appearance.** Comments of the participating social workers indicated the importance to them of website features and appearance. The first column of Table 2 summarizes SSWs’ reactions to the appearance of the two websites. In response to SSWN, participants provided verbal affirmations suggesting they liked that researchers and practitioners have their own sections at the site because it demonstrated the two groups are working together. Overall, participants reported not feeling too overwhelmed by the SSWN site. On the other hand, participants indicated that the emphasis of research on both sites might put them off. One participant said “Both of the websites, I think, look very research based. . . . I mean, it’s very professional, but it’s not what I zero in on.” Another participant added “I immediately will judge a website on the look of it. If it looks like it’s nice, well-organized, and if thought has been put into making it, it makes it look like it’s a more reliable website . . . I just, when I look at that, it’s got research all over it. I mean, it’s very academic. That’s not where my mind goes.” The social workers expressed a preference for uncluttered webpages on which they could quickly identify where to find the content they were looking for.

**Organization and Navigation.** The second column of Table 2 summarizes focus group participants’ comments about desirable website organization and navigation features. Participants emphasized a preference for features that make a

website easy to navigate. One participant shared, “I think the more user-friendly you make it and easier and quicker, I think the more likely you are that we will actually use it on a regular basis.” Participants pointed out details that they disliked, for example, the link for the best practice database (on the schoosuccessionline.com site), which is small and hard to find on the page. As shown in Table 2, they listed numerous strategies that could be used to promote a website’s ease of use. They gave examples of how content could be “broken down,” that is, organized for quick navigation, to be consistent with their likely choices of initial search categories, including prevention tier, problem area, or student grade level.

Continuing the conversation about search functionality, participants indicated the importance of using terminology they use in their schools, instead of formal terms. For example, one participant shared: “it is important to use terms, like, ‘cutting.’ I mean, I’ll say it’s a person who self-harms, but if I’m looking up something I need like this, I’m not gonna type in “a person who self-harms.” Participants also shared a desire for search features leading quickly to desired results. One participant stated “like you could limit your search as much as possible. If you go to a website and say, “Middle school, coping, girls,” like if you can narrow, narrow, and then get a short list.” Another example of search specificity was “second generation gang involvement.” On the other hand, participants indicated not liking sites that require search terms to be too precise and they suggested having a variety of cross-referenced terms leading to desired content. They also wanted search results to be very succinct: “limited to only what you need.” Participants wanted to be able to search for a specific intervention that is part of a larger program and find out what program it comes from and the evidence base behind the larger program; something they called “reverse searches.” Despite these highly specific search preferences, the SSWs indicated they wanted to be able to arrive at desired content with a minimum of clicks.

**Website Content.** As shown in Table 3, focus group participants expressed many preferences related to content in numerous categories (column 1), including interventions, assessments, listservs, and forums for sharing information with peers. The long list of content preferences included regularly updated information about policy and research, brief questionnaires, and intervention strategies or information on specific populations. For example, one participant stated:

Essentially, you have kids that are living in a war zone. It's not the same as the kid who's experienced a trauma and then he's moved on. Personally, for me, I want people to throw some money at doing more research on what—how you can help kids be most successful when they're living in a constantly traumatizing environment, versus dealing with the after-effect of a trauma.

The last column of Table 3 lists numerous preferences the social workers mentioned about the formatting of information. Their preferences included numerous conveniences, such as use of grids, printable content, and embedded links to more detail on topics. They also indicated a desire for “practitioner-friendly” and concise content.

### **Discussion**

School social workers work with a wide range of vulnerable populations and presenting problems, often with substantial time and resource constraints. They are trained to work with school staff and leaders, parents, communities, and students themselves at the individual, group, and schoolwide levels. Therefore, their information needs are unique and extensive, and their interface preferences are stringent. Findings from the current study support those of previous studies reporting that SSWs have insufficient time to find the EBP information they need among the current website resources available (Castillo et al., 2016; Franklin & Kelly, 2009; Phillippo et al., 2017). The current study contributes to the literature, detailed accounts from SSWs about the specific barriers they encounter when seeking practice resources online. It also reports specific recommendations about SSWs preferences for the content, format, and navigability of online resources. Participants in the focus groups conducted for this study expressed their desire for readily available, user-friendly, easily searchable, and credible information about multiple elements of evidence-based practice, including interventions, assessments, and basic knowledge about populations and problems. They also express a need to have sites that are attractive, well-organized, and rooted in solid empirical support, but not to be too “academic” in tone or content. These are significant and challenging demands from this group, and indicate the hard work we have ahead in bringing quality evidence to SSW via online resources.

Free online web resources have the potential to accommodate SSW needs

and preferences. Access is immediate and content can be offered in multiple formats. *Collectively* the websites mentioned by the SSWs in Table 1 provide extensive valuable information, including information that satisfies some of the needs identified by focus group participants. However, each site has its own organizational strategy, none satisfy all SSWs' needs, and perceived time constraints may reduce social workers' willingness to search multiple sites. For example, the Intervention Central and PBIS World websites emphasize low cost or free strategies to address academic and behavioral problems. The former offers information in both handout and video formats, and the latter organizes intervention strategies by the three prevention tiers commonly used in schools, but neither provides information on the range of intervention targets of SSWs or other types of background knowledge needed for effective practice with special populations. What Works Clearinghouse offers practice guides on behavioral intervention, but the documents are long (e.g., 8 pages) and most target academic performance. The School Social Work Association of America provides professional information for SSWs and resources including webinars on selected topics, but not searchable or systematic information on the range of topics needed by SSWs. Even within sites, if social workers don't quickly see how to navigate to information they are seeking or if the content is not relevant to their circumstances, they will leave the site. In addition to their identification of shortcomings of existing websites, it appears that few SSWs are aware of some potentially useful existing sites. Nor are they willing or able to search multiple sites on a regular basis. With their detailed feedback on how online resources can be better aligned with their needs and preferences however, practitioners in this study have given us a greater chance at improving such resources toward ultimately increasing their use of evidence-based practices in schools.

### **Limitations**

Participants in this study were all from Illinois and chose to participate in a summer professional development program and the focus groups. Illinois has one of the oldest traditions of school social work practice in the U.S., along with a highly-developed infrastructure (e.g., a strong state association, state certification for SSW), and over 3,000 SSWs statewide. Therefore, findings offered here may be different from responses SSWs from other states or a national sample would give. Further, the research participants who attended the summer institute may be qualitatively different even from Illinois SSWs who did not choose to attend the professional development or focus groups. Participants' views, preferences, and willingness to use online resources may not represent views from all those we ultimately hope to target with online evidence-based practice resources. However,

data collected may represent the perspectives of SSWs we first want to target with online resources as part of an iterative effort to meet SSW needs. Finally, we did not collect individual-level contextual data from participants which may be important for fully understanding SSWs practices, preferences, and needs.

### **Implications**

Information from the SSWs who participated in the focus groups provides further detail about their needs and preferences for online information and resources. Data from the study provide guidance to researchers for the development of credible and responsive internet resources for evidence-based practice. To eliminate the need for SSWs to search multiple websites, a single portal should be developed with content tailored to the specific needs of SSWs. Multiple search mechanisms, including graphics should be prominently available at the site, and links to other useful online resources should be embedded in content as appropriate. The numerous comments about “piecemealing” and wondering how and if interventions can be modified and remain evidence-based also suggests the need for social work researchers to study and provide SSWs with information on “core components” of interventions (Blasé & Fixsen, 2013). Input from participants in this study and others is valuable to the iterative process of developing the content, format, and navigation qualities of online evidence-based practice resources. As such, SSWs should continue to be included at all steps of the process. The information gained from participants in this study can be directly applied in efforts to create online evidence based practice resources that are responsive to busy school social workers’ needs.

### **References**

- Adams, S. (2009). Use of evidence-based practice in school nursing: Survey of school nurses at a national conference. *The Journal of School Nursing*, 25(4), 302-313. doi: [10.1177/1059840509335008](https://doi.org/10.1177/1059840509335008)
- A.E.R.O. Special Education Collaborative. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.aerosped.org/>
- Atkins, M. S., Cappella, E., Shernoff, E. S., Mehta, T. G., Gustafson, E. L. (2017). Schooling and children’s mental health: Realigning resources to reduce disparities and advance public health. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 13, 123-147.

- Atlas.ti. (1999). Berlin: Scientific Software Development.
- Blasé, K. & Fixsen, D. (2013). Core intervention components: Identifying and operationalizing what makes programs work. ASPE Research Brief. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Human Health and Services.
- Bowen, G. L., Rose, R. A., & Bowen, N. K. (2005). *The reliability and validity of the School Success Profile*. Philadelphia, PA: XLibris.
- Bowen, N. K. (2006). Psychometric properties of the Elementary School Success Profile's child questionnaire. *Social Work Research, 30*, 51-63.
- Bruns, E. J., Kerns, S. E. U., Pullmann, M. D., Hensley, S. W., Lutterman, T., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Research, data, and evidence-based treatment use in state behavioral health systems, 2001-2012. *Psychiatric Services, 67*, 496–503. <http://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201500014>
- Castillo, H. L., Rivers, T., Randall, C., Gaughan, K., Ojanen, T., Massey, O. "Tom," & Burton, D. (2016). Placing evidence-based interventions at the fingertips of school social workers. *Journal of Behavioral Health Services and Research, 43*, 474–483. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11414-015-9493-4>
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (Second Edi). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- United States. (1965). Elementary and secondary education act of 1965: H.R. 2362, 89<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., Public law 89-10. [Washington]: [U.S. Govt. Print Off.]
- Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), Pub. L. No. 114-95 § 114 Stat. 1177 (2015-2016). Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off.
- Franklin, C., Harris, M. B., & Allen-Meares, P. (Eds.). (2013). *The school services sourcebook* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- & Kelly, M. S. (2009). Becoming Evidence-Informed in the Real World of School Social Work Practice. *Children & Schools, 31*, 46-56. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/cs/31.1.46>

- George, M., Taylor, L., Schmidt, S. C., & Weist, M. D. (2013). A review of school mental health programs in SAMHSA's national registry of evidence-based programs and practices. *Psychiatric Services (Washington, D.C.)*, *64*, 483–486. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.000502012>
- Kelly, M. S., Frey, A., Thompson, A., Klemp, H., Alvarez, M., & Berzin, S. C. (2016). Assessing the national school social work practice model: Findings from the second national school social work survey. *Social Work*, *61*(1), 17-28. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/sw/swv044>
- , Thompson, A. M., Frey, A., Klemp, H., Alvarez, M., & Berzin, S. C. (2015). The State of School Social Work: Revisited. *School mental health*, *7*(3), 174-183. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-015-9149-9>
- Lochman, J. E., Powell, N. P., Boxmeyer, C. L., Qu, L., Sallee, M., Wells, K. C., & Windle, M. (2015). Counselor-level predictors of sustained use of indicated prevention intervention for aggressive children. *Prevention Science*, *16*(8), 1075-1085. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-014-0511-1>
- Merinkagas, K. R., He, J. P., Brody, D., Fisher, P. W., Bourdon, K., & Koretz, D. S. (2010). Prevalence and treatment of mental disorders among US children in 2001-2004 NHANES. *Pediatrics*, *125*(1), 75-81.
- Moustakas, C. (2011). Phenomenological research: Analyses and examples. In *Phenomenological research methods* (pp.120-154). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412995658>
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2015. *Mental disorders and disabilities among low-income children*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2017). *NASW code of ethics*. Washington, DC: NASW.
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Pub. L. 107-110, § 115, Stat. 1425. Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off.
- Padgett, D. (2008). *Qualitative methods in social work research* (2nd ed.).

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pascal, G. R. (1983). *The practical art of diagnostic interviewing*. Homewood, IL: Dow Jones-Irwin

Phillippo, K. L., Kelly, M. S., Shayman, E., & Frey, A. (2017). School social worker practice decisions: The impact of professional models, training, and school context. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 98, 275-283. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.2017.98.40>

Pomeroy, W. B., Flax, C. C., Wheeler, C. C. (1982). *Taking a sex history: Interviewing and recording*. New York: Free Press

Pope, N. D., Rollins, L., Chaumba, J., & Risler, E. (2011). Evidence-based practice knowledge and utilization among social workers. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work*, 8, 349-368. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15433710903269149>

Powers, J. D., Bowen, N. K., & Bowen, G. L. (2010). Evidence-based programs in school settings: Barriers and recent advances. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work*, 7, 313-331. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15433710903256807>

Reddy, L. A., Forman, S. G., Stoiber, K. C., & Gonzolez, J. E. (2017). A national investigation of school psychology trainers' attitudes and beliefs about evidence based practices. *Psychology in the Schools*, 54(3), 261-278. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1002/pits.21999>

Scurlock-Evans, L., & Upton, D. (2015). The role and nature of evidence: A systematic review of social workers' evidence-based practice orientation, attitudes, and implementation. *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work*, 12(4), 369-399. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15433714.2013.853014>

Shea, S. C. (2002). *The practical art of suicide assessment: A guide for mental health professionals and substance abuse counselors* (Paperback ed.) New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

- Simon, A. E., Pastor, P. N., Reuben, C. A., Huang, L. N., Goldstrom, I. D. (2015). Use of mental health services by children ages six to 11 with emotional or behavioral difficulties. *Psychiatric Services*, 66, 930-937. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201400342>
- Thompson, A. M., Kelly, M. S., & Frey, A. J. (online first, 2018). Factors influencing school social work practice: A latent profile analysis. *School Mental Health*.
- Topitzes, J., Godes, O., Mersky, J. P., Ceglarek, S., & Reynolds, A. J. (2009). Educational success and adult health: Findings from the Chicago longitudinal study. *Prevention Science*, 10, 175-195. Doi:10.1007/s11121-009-0121-5
- Van Kaam, A. (1959). Phenomenological analysis: Exemplified by a study of the experience of “really feeling understood”. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 15, 66-72.
- . (1966). Application of the phenomenological method. In A. van Kaam (Ed.), *Existential foundations of psychology*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America

## Appendix A

Table 1

*Sources of Information on Evidence Based Practices*

Professional Development	Consultation	Reading or Print Materials	Online Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District sponsored trainings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School counselors</li> <li>• School and department leaders, supervisors</li> <li>• Other SSWs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General &amp; School Social Work research journals</li> <li>• Books &amp; printed materials from in-person trainings</li> <li>• Materials acquired during their time as interns</li> <li>• The School Services Sourcebook<sup>a</sup></li> <li>• The Teacher’s Encyclopedia of Behavior Management<sup>b</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intervention Central website (<a href="http://www.interventioncentral.org">www.interventioncentral.org</a>)</li> <li>• PBIS World website (<a href="http://www.pbisworld.com">www.pbisworld.com</a>)</li> <li>• Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) website (<a href="http://www.casel.org">www.casel.org</a>)</li> <li>• National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP) website (<a href="http://www.samhsa.gov/nrepp">www.samhsa.gov/nrepp</a>)</li> <li>• What Works Clearinghouse website (<a href="https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/">https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/</a>)</li> <li>• School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) website (<a href="http://www.sswaa.org">www.sswaa.org</a>)</li> <li>• American Council for School Social Work (ACSSW) website (<a href="http://www.acssw.org">www.acssw.org</a>)</li> <li>• School counseling organization websites</li> <li>• A.E.R.O. Special Education Cooperative of Illinois website (<a href="http://www.aerosped.org">www.aerosped.org</a>)</li> <li>• Google searches (<a href="http://www.google.com">www.google.com</a>)</li> <li>• Pinterest (<a href="http://www.pinterest.com">www.pinterest.com</a>)</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup> (Franklin, Harris & Allen-Mearns, 2006; 2013)

<sup>b</sup> (Sprick & Howard, 2012)

## Appendix B

Table 2

### *Website Organization and Navigation Preferences of School Social Workers*

Appearance	Organization and Navigation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional</li> <li>• Uncluttered</li> <li>• Prominent display of important details</li> <li>• Visual organization</li> <li>• Not too much verbiage—avoid too many details on pages</li> <li>• Not “researchy”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy navigation, user-friendly</li> <li>• Site map, table of contents</li> <li>• Buttons, “click here” icons</li> <li>• Consistent with search categories social workers will use to start their searches</li> <li>• Drop down menus for more narrow categories</li> <li>• All desired information at the website (not requiring navigation to other sites)</li> <li>• Search function that accepted more than one way of phrasing terms</li> <li>• Accommodate searches with combinations of terms</li> <li>• Accommodate “reverse searches”</li> </ul>

## Appendix C

Table 3

*Website Content Preferences of School Social Workers*

Content Type	Preferences
Intervention information	Preferred Content
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information about free interventions</li> <li>• Interventions and strategies that can be used immediately without additional materials</li> <li>• Practices for pre-school aged children</li> <li>• Practices for students with intellectual disabilities, limited verbal abilities, or severe disabilities</li> <li>• Practices for students in alternative school placements</li> <li>• Information about social emotional learning standards</li> <li>• Educational information for parents about ADHD and Autism</li> <li>• Info about relevant books</li> <li>• Information on burnout prevention</li> <li>• Include the cost of implementation &amp; whether a program is “backed” by a government entity</li> </ul>
Assessments	Preferred Format
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grid format for evidence-based options</li> <li>• Not “researchy”</li> <li>• No lists of resources without annotation</li> <li>• Quick “practitioner friendly” summaries of interventions</li> <li>• Additional info available for download</li> <li>• SEL standards listed by grade</li> </ul>
Trainings	Preferred Content
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The use and implementation of specific evidence-based practices</li> <li>• Details about how to measure expected outcomes</li> <li>• How to access research journals</li> <li>• Local opportunities for professional development</li> </ul>

	Preferred Format: Not mentioned
News feeds	<p>Preferred Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizations can post news &amp; updates</li> <li>• Research updates</li> <li>• Policy updates (i.e. Every Student Succeeds Act, ESSA)</li> <li>• Trending searches</li> </ul> <p>Preferred Format</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Practitioner friendly” versions of news &amp; updates</li> <li>• Links for more information</li> </ul>
Forums	<p>Preferred Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practitioners can voice concerns &amp; interact with each other</li> <li>• A way for postings to be screened for validity &amp; appropriateness prior to posting</li> </ul> <p>Preferred Format: Not mentioned</p>
School social work listservs	<p>Preferred Content: Not mentioned</p> <p>Preferred Format</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Info in emails is concise (i.e. with bullet points)</li> <li>• Links to more info</li> </ul>