A Case for Integration of the North American Rural Social Work Education Model for Philippine Praxis

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Abstract

Rural social work education and practice in North America underwent a revival in recent decades and remains a valid praxis and pedagogic model for the 21st Century. The paper posits through rigorous literature review and analysis there are numerous elements central to North American (U.S. and Canadian) and Commonwealth of Nations (U.K., Australia, etc.) rural social work that make this framework significantly germane to Filipinos. These include the necessity to function in an environment of marginal or stressed community, personnel resources and educational opportunities. Significantly, the generalist practice model comprises the core of North American rural social work; it also predominates in Philippine methodology. Both frameworks require robust client and social justice advocacy roles encouraging awareness of needs and aspirations of at risk populations. Indeed, social work researcher Thelma Lee-Mendoza reports that historically modern Philippine practice originated and is primarily organized from North American models. Rural social workers in the West, like their Philippine counterparts, are more typically generalists and innovative environmental operators. Daily they rely on profound survey and calculation of services and innovative ways to make them meaningful. The paper concludes by urging creative international and transnational research with a view towards optimizing service delivery.

Keywords: *rural social work, international social work, social work education, generalist practice, at risk populations, marginal resources*

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Introduction

The primary focus of this paper is to examine aspects of rural social work education, or as alternately termed, the practice of social work in rural settings, in North America (United States and Canada) and secondarily the Commonwealth of Nations (*e.g.,* United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand/Aotearoa) and how it may increasingly inform and positively supplement overarching social work praxis in the Republic of the Philippines. The comparative and relational aspects of this assertion are not altogether novel. It is fairly well established in extant literature that a significant portion of general Philippine social work education and praxis is fundamentally based on Western models (Almanzor, 1966; Lee-Mendoza, 2008; Noble, 2004; Yu, 2006). This paper seeks to provide insight, contour and dimension to a discussion over whether such a position has validity in post-colonial, neo-colonial and postmodern eras.

It is not the intention to imply or project a neo-colonial or patriarchal hand, bias or defense of this research undertaking. Indeed, we are cognizant and understanding to the point of view and concerns raised by innately nationalist observers of the Philippine social work educational landscape. These include Professor Nilan G. Yu of the School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy, University of South Australia. Yu argues passionately in the journal article *Ideological Roots of Philippine Social Welfare* (2006) of "the overriding colonial agendas (Spanish Imperial Empire and the U.S. among others) that were, by default, constructing Philippine social welfare policy, society and politics even to this day (Abstract)." Indeed, the authors of this analysis piece can and do appreciate the related arguments by social work researcher Carolyn Noble. It is Noble who sounded the alarm for inclusion of homegrown, nativist and indigenous peoples' voices (as has occurred in many respects in Philippine, US and Canadian praxis) and the rejection of cultural imperialism in developing and refining social work practice curricula. After researching and acknowledging that the plethora of nation-states on the Asian Pacific Rim indeed incorporate a hybrid generalist practice blend of social work curriculum drawn from Western industrialized societies Noble concluded in *Social Work Education, Training and Standards in the Asia-Pacific Region* (2004):

> There must be a real attempt to minimize the Western voice so that subject positions can emerge … Post-colonial social work demands the resurrection of lost voices in the midst of Western dominance, while postmodern social work's agenda is to encourage a multiplicity of visions not just one concerned with individual and social change and social justice, but one that reflects a more general concern for accepting differences, cultural diversity and inclusive dialogues. (p. 634)

Nevertheless, the authors contend, despite an environment where geopolitical relations between the Philippines and the government of President Rodrigo R. Duterte and the US are currently strained and in a state of flux - there remains profound social, cultural and historical linkages. This includes a niche wherein social work praxis in the Philippines could be

strengthened and become further empowered by a resilient rural social work education curricula undergoing continuing iterations in North America (Delaney & Brownlee, 2009; Farley, Griffiths, Skidmore & Thackeray, 1982; Ginsberg, 2005; Lohmann & Lohmann, 2005; Mackie, 2016). In support of this case, this article seeks to outline an operational definition of rural social work; the historical trajectory of rural social work in the U.S. and Canada; trace, analyze and correlate the organizational utilization of the generalist social work model predominantly practiced in North American rural social work educational curricula and its innate applicability to general Philippine praxis; discuss the impact and effects of digital computer communications technology and the globalization phenomenal upon these professional practices and concludes with a summary of implications for social work education and recommendations for future research.

Definitional Aspects

To appreciate the notion that rural social work practice has contemporary applicability to Philippine praxis and society it is helpful to refer to fundamental definitions. What differentiates rural social work from that practiced in urban or non-rural areas, over the decades, has been subject to redefinition and refinement. In short, as societies evolve and progress so has the working definition. One might correctly characterize the definition, at the risk of using a trope, "a work in progress" - a project not yet finished. In the simplest of definitions at the time of the growing stages of North American rural social work, Josephine C. Brown, in her seminal tutorial *The Rural Community and Social Case Work* (1933), succinctly summarized provincial practice:

> Social case work is concerned with the problems of families and individuals who are in trouble because of sickness, death, unemployment, desertion, delinquency, disagreement between husband and wife, and other differences between individuals and the community. The case worker's aim is to preserve family life where it is threatened; to restore it where it has been broken; to find for people whose homes cannot be restored the best possible substitute for normal family life. (p.20)

Tellingly, Brown identified the family as one of the primary recipients of any good that social work in a rural setting might accomplish for humanity. Indeed, her focus is a reflection of a simpler time and era when the family unit and family interaction were still at their apogee in US American life. Today, societal changes and broader social work application appears to have altered that emphasis to arguably reflect the "individual" as the basic recipient of social work services Instructive also, for purposes of this research, is that Brown's assessment and focus still retains   extant usefulness and authenticity today, namely in Philippine society, where family life and family values wield considerable influence in the social fabric (Lee-Mendoza, 2008).

Over the decades U.S. and to a lesser extent Canadian social worker educators struggled mightily with an apt definition for practice in the countryside. Those rural social work movement purists argue there are fundamental differences between urban-based and rural practice, and that schools of social work needed "to recognize, define and teach the rural focus." In Canada, in terms of contrast, this may have been less an issue given that so much of the vast Canadian catchment landscape was and is essentially rural in nature. They rejected the widely held contention that practice "is the same in both urban and rural areas and that the social worker is

prepared to practice in either area" (Farley, Griffiths, Skidmore & Thackeray, 1982, p.7). These researchers held to the premise that "while much of social work's knowledge, skills and value base is generic, practice in rural areas is sufficiently different to require some differential training" (pp. 7-8). They endorsed the seminal findings of Ginsberg (1977):

> The special characteristics of rural settings require most workers to practice in ways that differ significantly from their urban counterparts. Social workers in rural communities require skills in all social work methods and must be able to use themselves effectively with social institutions of all sizes - from the individual and his family to the total community. The *need for social workers who are generalists in rural communities* [*italics added*] is confirmed by social work theoreticians and practitioners of both the past and the present. (p. 7)

In further definitional explanation futurist Michael R. Daley, the author and researcher of *Rural Social Work in the 21st Century* (2016) and Lohmann and Lohmann (2005) summarized the inherent elements for responsive rural social work practice in the new century. Upon examination and analysis one could deduce that these values may also have relevance and applicability to Philippine praxis: 1. The imperative for tertiary education in generalist social work practice to include grounding in operational casework methodology and community organization with firm understanding and appreciation of how systems work and relate; ability to build relationships in an environment fraught with scarce resources is essential, 2. The need for community development knowledge and skills and frontline experience in community practice. "This emphasis reflects, in part, the realities and challenges faced by many rural communities, namely, that they continue to lack needed resources" (Lohmann & Lohmann, 2007, p. 7), 3. Another way to enhance the need for rural workers to deal with the reality of diminished resources and impoverishment is through aggressive and productive external relations. Helpful is the capacity to connect with and integrate positively with the existing power structure or established and elites, a common structural feature in rural locales. Lohmann and Lohmann urged that for social workers residing in small towns "one way to provide needed leadership is to seek local political office such as on the city council or county commission" (p. 9) or as community political activists, 4. Rural areas in the U.S. can be culturally, ethnically and socially distinct. Cognizance to the culture and folkways of clients and patients is traditionally an accepted rule of social work practice. However, this principle acquires added value in rural locales where the speed of human life may be slower and communities appear joined with the momentum of nature.   Daley (2016) described this condition as "closeness of the community" (p. 182) that signified the value of social workers shedding their often outside personas and becoming of the community, and truly knowing their clients and families, 5. Given the lack of or paucity of community resources to include practicing in poverty-ridden environments, Daley (2016) and numerous other theoreticians, researchers and chroniclers (*e.g.,* Ginsberg, 2005; Mackie, 2016; Martinez-Brawley, 1981; Scales & Streeter, 2004;) urged a robust search and use of strengths and assets found within rural communities. "While there has been much written on what rural people and communities lack in terms of resources and services, rural social workers have long recognized that rural communities possess assets and strengths that can be used to address social problems" (p. 180). Daley cited Scales and Streeter (2004) who clearly supported a strengths perspective approach

when they wrote of the necessity of "... practice models that keep us focused on the strengths, assets, and capacities of people (that) are critical for social work practice in rural communities" (p. 4).

Historical Background (U.S. and Canadian)

In the last Century, and into the first two decades of the 21st Century, academic interest in the craft of rural social work experienced decided periods of peaks and valleys (Martinez-Brawley, 1981). Well into the 20th Century huge swaths of the U.S. mainland remained in open, pastoral, agricultural landscapes and hinterlands thus providing the laboratory for specialty rural social work practice.   Interest in rural issues and concerns, and the subsequent emergence of U.S. rural social work theory and practice, trace their modest origins in the "country life movement." Essentially it was a social impetuous   centering on the improving and advancing the quality and efficacy of rural farm life. The predominant occupation in rural expanses at the time largely centered around crop, dairy and poultry farming, cattle ranching and the small business commercial life serving it. The cause advocated bringing scientific and technological methods into agriculture, alleviating rural poverty, promoting measured rural community development and placing greater emphasis on improving rural life versus overconcentration on city life and urban concerns. The effort led in 1909 to President Theodore Roosevelt's creation of the Country Living Commission, which resulted in elevating rural business to the national level. "It created a focus on rural issues through community improvement, which eventually helped spur the growth of rural social work," (Daley, 2016, p. 168). A major contribution was formation of the agriculture extension program embodied today in the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) of the US Department of Agriculture.

The economic trauma brought to the rural expanse by the Great Depression (1929-1937), not unexpectedly, lead to a heightened interest and utilization of rural social work practice. For example, in the early 1930s at the depression's apex, more than 50 articles on rural topics were published in social work magazines and journals (Davenport & Davenport, 1984). The foundation of rural practice took root and quickly developed through the aforementioned publication, in 1933, of Josephine C. Brown's authoritative *The Rural Community and Social Casework*, described as "the first comprehensive approach to social work in rural communities" (Daley, p. 172) in North America. "In this period of rapid expansion in public welfare, this little book, admirably organized and simply written will prove a trustworthy guide" predicted a review article at the time of the book's publication (Paige, 1933, p.691). The forecast proved most prescient. In short order Brown's 165-page monograph became a staple on the shelves of social workers and welfare program administrators; it became widely adapted for use as a text and instructional reference in U.S. and Canadian college and university classrooms. The volume, inspired by Mary Richmond's earlier doctrinal writings on urban casework, "established many concepts and practice principles that still guide social work today" (Daley, 2016, p. 173). These   include generalist practice methodology, utilization of the strengths perspective in casework formation and motivational therapy, and the imperative to develop and use available community resources (Davenport & Davenport, 1984; Daley, 2016).

Parenthetically, the deprived, meager, poverty-laden and exploited human conditions described in Brown's 1933 booklet, and its specific and detailed recommendations for remedial rural social work practice nostrums, uncannily resembles real life conditions rampant   in

contemporary disadvantaged, blighted and   poverty stricken areas of Philippine urban zones (Almanzor, 1966; Lee-Mendoza, 2008). One common condition or reality both these distinct populations experienced is encapsulated in a description of the banality of scarcity outlined by Johnson (1985). "Scarcity is, afterall, the most universal condition of human existence" (p. *x*) Johnson held. He posited that under conditions of scarcity, commonplace or aspirant values provided to those living affluent or well-fixed lives -- values such as individualism, competitiveness, accumulation and personal abundance -- would inevitably devolve into a trap or travesty of economic conflict, personal isolation and social disorganization. Taking the lead from from Marxist theory and philosophy Collier (1984, 2006), a Canadian and radical social scientist similarly argued in *Social Work with Rural Peoples*, that "materialist" conflict is the root cause of human discord, whether urban or rural. "While a Marxist approach has its critics, it offers analytical tools for understanding social relations which...no other theory provides" (p.6).   Willy nilly, whether describing conditions portrayed by Brown, Johnson, Lee-Mendoza, Collier or any other student of human misery, poverty or travail, they are all inherently conditions social workers are confronted with, immersed in, trained for and paid to deal with.

After a long dormancy interrupted by World War II and post-war prosperity Daley (2016), Lohmann and Lohmann (2005) and Martinez-Brawley (1981) maintained that a renaissance in U.S. social work practice in rural communities emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Except for intermittent lapses, it has apparently remained steady into the new century. Two late 20th century events contributed to the exponential development of rural social work as it is manifested today. One was formation of the National Rural Social Work Caucus, organized in 1976 as a learning institute for rural social work practitioners at the University of Tennessee. Today, the caucus remains a wellspring of rural research and educational curriculum development; it publishes an official online research journal, *Contemporary Rural Social Work*, in cooperation with Minot State University in North Dakota.

Another milestone is the publication of Leon H. Ginsberg's germinal *Social Work in Rural Communities: A Book of Readings* (1976). Subsequent editions including the 4th edition version referenced in this paper (Ginsberg, 2005), became a second contemporary milestone. Dr. Ginsberg's scholarship and writings achieved iconic academic status over the years. Grounded with a Ph.D. doctorate from the University of Oklahoma, he served as dean at schools of social work at West Virginia University and the University of South Carolina at Columbia. Both Ginsberg and Mackie (2016) predicted a continuing need and future resiliency for the rural social work framework and rural practice. The reality of aging of rural populations in North America (and *ipso facto* the Philippines) requires knowledge and skills development in gerontology and geriatric practice and "the unique circumstances challenging this group. From a macro perspective, as the rural population ages, there will be even higher needs for people … to access affordable and appropriate housing, transportation and health care" (p. 135). Other needs of stressed and vulnerable rural populations, including youths, young adults, single parents and indigenous and minority populations facing alcohol, drug abuse and opioid use challenges, rural impoverishment, joblessness and the need for competitive education and job training opportunities, come to mind.

Canadian social work and rural social work curricula and practice models today resemble their US American neighbor though their earliest origins were not identical. Canadian practice was largely based on Christian charity work; its primary emphasis was on helping the individual, rather than society as a whole. Both British and American traditions were followed. Jennissen and Lundy reported in *One Hundred Years of Social Work: A History of the Profession in English Canada,*

1900-2000 (2011) the US movement had a penetrating and protracted influence on Canadian social work practice and education. The two primary source researchers reported that throughout much of the 20th century professional social workers attended US conferences and regional meetings, perused American journals, studied and were conferred social work education and advanced degrees there. Until as late as 1970 the US-based Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited Canadian schools of social work.

By 1914, Canada's first school of social work was established in Ontario, Canada's most populated province, at the University of Toronto, followed by McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, in 1918. Ontario's second school of social work was founded in 1949 at what is now Carleton University in Ottawa. Similar to the US, Canadian social work and practice in rural areas underwent   major expansion during the Great Depression of the 1930s as the Ottawa central government hired social case workers to staff federal and provincial social welfare programs (Jennissen & Lundy, 2011). Since that time, 15 schools of social work have been established in Ontario alone and produce graduates with bachelor's, masters and doctorates in social work. Graduates from these programs help people from all age groups and social backgrounds solve problems that affect their day-to-day lives.

Modern day Canadian social work curricula (*e.g.*, University of Toronto, McGill, University of British Columbia) does not necessarily distinguish between binary urban and rural practice formats. Schmidt (2009) reported comparatively recent trends in Canadian social work practice and curricula development show: 1. Social workers nationwide are predominantly practicing in urban and suburban areas rather than rural and hinterland zones, and 2.) "Even though contemporary social work education at the baccalaureate level continues to concentrate on generalist practice, the reality is that most graduating social workers soon form an identity that is constructed within a specialized practice domain" (p.1). Or, in other words, also informing the advanced generalist framework. Yet the draw of rural and remote area practice environments remain prominent in western provinces. For example, an online description of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program at the University of Regina in Saskatchewan emphasizes that it is generalist in approach and specifically keyed to a Saskatchewan provincial practice context and populations, "...emphasizing preparation for work in urban, rural and remote areas including diverse individuals, families and communities with various circumstances" The on-line descriptor notes that generalist practice as a model, "is focused on strengths, and utilizes a range of approaches including assessment, intervention and connection to available resources" (University of Regina, 2019).

Generalist Practice Genre and Correlations

Since the late 1960s generalist social work practice in its various permutations is the preferred model of intervention (Daley, 2016; Ginsberg, 2005; Lohmann & Lohmann, 2005; Mackie, 2016) in North American rural practice. Significantly, this was approximately the time when social work as an organized profession was taking contemporary shape in the post-colonial era Republic of the Philippines. Sixteenth Century English Poor Law originating in the United Kingdom and the formation of hospitals, schools and asylums under Roman Catholic Church auspices during the Spanish Empire (1521-1898) pre-dominated early social welfare service experience in the Philippine islands. Yet the influence of U.S. social work was a prime factor in creation of the independent republic's modern day welfare apparatus in the decades following the U.S. colonial and commonwealth era (1898-1946). It was during those years that significant

features of the generalist model were introduced and steadily integrated into Philippine social work education curricula and practice (Lee-Mendoza, 2008; Yu, 2006).

Daley (2016) observed that while "some people suggest that rural social work is primarily community practice that involves community development … most current authors indicate that a generalist method that employs multiple methods to address individual, family, group, organizational, and community problems is best suited" (p. 193). Daley further posited that both these approaches "are not highly conflicting viewpoints, as … social workers frequently have to deliver direct services to individuals and families, and that some community development (features) is usually needed as well (p. 193).

Generalist practice, essentially anchored in social systems theory, utilizes five social systems. The interactions between these form the basis or foundation for comprehending problems and formulating strategies and movements leading to client empowerment. The five social systems are: individual, family, group, organization, and community. Daley described this methodology as a "broad model … very adaptable to many types of problems and situations and can employ multiple interventions based on specific problems presented" (p. 194). It employs person-in-environment or an ecological systems view that visualizes clients through their interaction and connectivity or lack of it with their surroundings.

Among other attributes this model includes a strengths perspective and a problem-solving option for social work practice both of which can be valuable tools and framework strategies for rural social workers (and surely for social workers operating in the Philippines) who grapple daily with the reality of scarce neighborhood resources and impoverished, stressed or marginalized client bases. A listing of extant strengths or assets might include "a community spirit of cooperation or helping and the abilities of the church, neighbors, family members, or service organizations," (Daley, p. 194).

Significantly, a central component in the problem-solving mechanism is its unstructured, almost amorphous constitution allowing for the use of varied helping strategies and tactics for different problems. "This is an important consideration for varied demands placed on rural social workers" Daley notes. "In some communities, a one-worker office can be expected to handle almost everything" (p. 195). Such is a scenario or reality that may not be far-fetched at all for a generalist social work practitioner in the Philippines where such realities as crushing poverty, social disorganization and anomie, soaring street and drug crime rates, unreliable or sub-standard communication resources and networks, official corruption and a frail social safety net are *de rigueur* (Andriesse, 2018; Cudia, 2015). Further amplifying on the versatile or "Jack of All Trades" attributes of a successful generalist practitioner Lohmann and Lohmann (2005) viewed the reality of limited resources as "(presenting) a challenge to social workers to identify innovative solutions to problems ... if you can practice in rural America, it is likely that you can practice anywhere because you have learned to be resourceful and creative" (p. 317).

Leon Ginsberg (2005), the acknowledged cognoscente of North American social work in the late 20th and early 21st Century provides sweeping contour in his description of attributes making up the effective rural social worker. Such qualities include: 1. The absolute need for rural generalists to be multi-talented and multi-skilled. He decried "...the relative paucity of social workers in rural communities which indicate that small community social workers need to be generalists or general practitioners rather than specialists" (p. 5) or clinical or psychotherapeutic

social work who are prominent in the U.S. profession today, 2.   An acknowledgement that sometimes administration, research or direct practice in rural areas is not quantitatively different from practice in urban expanses. Yet it requires a need to consider the diminutive scale of life and variations between rural and urban institutions, cultures and societies. 3. Ginsberg quotes Morris (1995) positing that "Poverty … is a more serious problem in rural (America and Canada) than in urban areas" (p. 2069), a reality requiring that rural social workers be well trained, prepared and motivated to deal with such conditions as impact of such deprivation on human populations, social disorganization and economic and community development questions.

Pugh and Cheers (2010) and Lohmann and Lohmann (2005) provide clarification and insight on how related social work models such as specialty and advanced generalist provide depth of experience and broader practice recognition. "Specialty practice is distinguished by either a sole focus upon a field of practice, such as mental health or substance dependency, or, alternately by the use of a particular practice method, such as counseling or family therapy" (Pugh & Cheers, 2010, p. 136). In the U.S. and to a lesser extent Canada, specialty practice has reached widespread use if not predominance in the popular practice fields of clinical (mental health) social work and psychotherapy. Over time the traditional generalist practice model has absorbed or incorporated some aspects of specialty mental health, human behavioral, or specialty family, youth or group   client work. This is usually achieved in the form of "multi-method conceptualization" training,   "integrated model" instruction that can apply at all client levels, or a "specific social problem, field of practice, or population group" focus to demonstrate application of the generalist methodology (Lohmann & Lohmann, p. 300).   Such changes and progressions overall are to be expected. In this regard Mackie (2016) posited that, "the history of rural social work has vacillated over time between 'practicing social work in rural areas' to the more defined modality of 'rural social work,' then back to 'practicing in rural areas," (p. 35). The discussion, he maintained, is to be attributed to a number variables including state, provincial and federal government adjustments to social needs and fiscal realities, population changes in rural areas "and even basic perceptions and misconceptions of rural life."

Both advanced generalist and specialty practice are found in different numbers or percentages throughout North America, the U.K., Australia, New Zealand and nation-states of the Pacific Rim including the Philippines. It is also accurate to report that such models are in a state of variable evolution or development. This is a trend which has been accelerated, in part, by the world globalization phenomenon underway since the last third of the 20th Century. Noble (2004) reported on the findings of a joint project by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IAASW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) that evaluated social work education and training standards and proposed formulating, elevating and unifying policies connected with them. Noble found that the prevailing "dominant global model of social work education" is strongly influenced by Western models with particularly strong input from the US and the UK.

In describing generalist social work and delivery in mental health service patterns in rural and northern Canada Bodor (2009) noted that "the differentiation between 'mental health' and 'social work' in Canada is less distinct than in Australia." He further observed that social workers were truly on the ramparts in delivering mental health services. "Often, in Canada, social workers and mental health workers provide similar services" (p. 289). This indicates that social workers in the far rural expanse, hindered by the lack of extant mental health services in the northern

provinces, are taking on responsibilities reserved for the advanced generalist practitioner as described above.

Bodor maintained that in recent years a series of conservative governments, economic downturns including the Great Recession (2007-2009) and a global push towards privatization seriously diminished rural social casework and mental health services. Particularly impacted areas and populations included vastly rural Northern Canada (including Nunavut, the Northern Territories and Yukon), the Western provinces and Indigenous and Aboriginal (First Nation) inhabitants including Inuit and Metis peoples. That downward trend, however, may be on the mend since the advent (2015) of the Liberal Party administration of President Justin Trudeau in Ottawa. Trudeau has supported increased funding for educational, human and medical services and human rights programs for Indigenous peoples and overall federal budget hikes in social and welfare services in northern, rural Canada. In 2019, for example, the Ottawa government announced budgeting of a record $4.5 billion for educational, infrastructure, economic development, children's language   In describing generalist social work and delivery in mental health service patterns in rural and northern Canada. Bodor (2009) noted that "the differentiation between 'mental health' and 'social work' in Canada is less distinct than in Australia." He further observed that social workers were truly on the ramparts in delivering mental health services. "Often, in Canada, social workers and mental health workers provide similar services" (p. 289).

Information Communications Technology (ICT)

Preparation of this paper revealed there is a research literature deficit in rural social work doctrine in two high impact areas: digital information communications technology (ICT) and globalization. We will examine and attempt to briefly analyze the import of both these phenomenon and the far reaching impact they are currently driving in some of the remotest rural expanses and far corners of generalist social work praxis.

Since 2000, for example, rural social work textbook, reader anthology, policy statement and journal research article authors have attempted to provide various degrees of attention and focus to the affect and influence of ICT and digital technology (*e.g*., Domeninelli, 2010; Ginsberg, 2005; Lohmann & Lohmann, 2005; NASW, 2012; Pugh & Cheers, 2010). The treatment of technology contained in these pieces ranges from complete chapters or sections of paragraphs to mere passing reference or perfunctory mention. While portions of the aforementioned research provide useful material on the application of technology in rural practice (e.g., distance learning and training, video-conferencing, Telemedicine, computerization of internal records, Internet education opportunities) none of the pieces provide a scintilla of information on the rapid rise, for example, of social media platforms or smartphone or iPhones, and the potential positive or negative implications these recent technical advancements have for practice. This information reporting lapse is indicative of the warp speed that ICT and digital computer technology has placed on societies and the professions

Social work professional organizations including the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in the US, the Canadian Association of Social Workers and the Philippine Association of Social Workers have officially embraced the ICT digital revolution; generally, they have urged its members embrace emerging technology creatively, if not robustly, with the caveat that possible conflict with ethical considerations and a climate for abuse remain paramount. In 2005 a NASW

memorandum warned prophetically, "Confidentially in an electronic medium can quickly evaporate; jurisdiction, liability and malpractice issues blur when state lines and national boundaries are crossed electronically" NASW (2012, p. 334).

Wasko (2005), citing Fredolino (2002), reported a decade-and-one-half ago that social workers including rural practitioners (and certainly many in the Philippines) were already using email, listservs, interactive bulletin boards, chat rooms, CD-ROMs, net meetings, interactive television, desktop video conferencing and various combinations of these applications. "The new information and telecommunication technologies appear to promise solutions to persistent problems in rural areas: lack of access to education and to efficiently delivered, high-quality health and human services" (Wasko, 2005, pp. 43-44). Wasko marveled that "the fact that online communication technologies *obliterate time and geographic boundaries [italics added]* suggests that this form of practice in rural areas may only be limited by the ability to connect to the Internet" (pp. 49-50).

Rural regions and rural practitioners (and surely vast numbers of social workers in the Philippines) regularly experience a paucity of specialized medical health, mental health and counseling and clinical services - conditions with grueling implications for both clients or patients and the worker (Ginsberg, 2005). How dramatically their struggle might be altered were they afforded contemporary or state-of-the-art ICT services to use in daily practice. These could be in the form of Telehealth and Telepsychiatry programs capable of assisting frontline social workers and clinicians with direct expertise on how to deal with treatment challenges. They could at the same time remove a sense of professional isolation rural social workers often confront (Rees & Gillam, 2003).

The following study summary offers an illustration of potential problem- solving in far off rural and countryside locales available through enhanced ICT system advances (Brownlee, Graham, Doucette, Hotson and Halverson, 2010). Brownlee, *et. al.* (2010) conducted an exploratory, qualitative inquiry to examine how advancements in ICT have impacted the way social workers practice social work in Canada's remote and climatically rigid Northwestern Territories (NWT) and northwestern Ontario province. Researchers chose a sample of 37 social work clinicians and advanced general practice workers with at least three years of broad and varied case work experience; median age spread was between ages 31 and 40. Participants possessed bachelors or masters level experience; more women than men were selected reflecting the demographics of the study catchment area. A semi-structured, open-ended questionnaire was developed for interviews. In summary the study found:

> Having access to communications resources, such as the Internet, Telehealth and Telepsychiatry, appears to be positively addressing some issues of rural and northern practice. While the role of communications technologies could be developed as a means of further addressing some of the limitations of distance and fewer professional resources in these areas, it simultaneously risks imposing an urban-centric bias upon social work practice in rural and remote communities. (Abstract)

Besides some use of Telehealth and Telepsychiatry, respondents reported wide availability through the Internet to a staple of caseworker survival - accessed online databases - or what is known in Canada as the CIMS (Caseload Information Management Systems). Indeed, the

Internet was viewed as essential to providing basic service in areas where it could be accessed. Typical professional uses included email, the aforementioned CIMS network and researching material or data for clients and patients. Sample participants reported email access as essential in connecting with other service providers and colleagues. Internet service is apparently predominantly provided through telephone power line dial-up service as wireless (wifi) service is restricted or sporadic. Indeed, a significant number of respondents reported limited use of cellphones since many of the remote expanses and hinterlands in the NWT and northwest Ontario lack basic signal support. (Brownlee, *et. al.*)

Notably Telehealth, which provides access through the telephone alone, was the least used service with use among 19 percent of respondents split between the NWT and Ontario. Telepsychiatry, whose features include interactive video contact for both urban-based and remote office workers (sometimes including clients) was widely available in northwest Ontario, but virtually inaccessible in the more northern and remote NWT. Brownlee, *et. al.* (2010) summarized that utilization of ICT applications has ameliorated some of the issues and challenges connected to rural social work practice including "professional isolation, lack of ongoing training, scarcity of resources, limited professional expertise and limited access to supervision …" (p. 630). Implementation of further ICT presence will surely not proceed without problems and challenges, study author's predicted. Many respondents reported that despite enhanced communications through email and video services most clients and patients in rural areas prefer or are more accustomed to face-to-face contact.

Significantly, the Brownlee, et. al. (2010) study concluded that "the more extensive the use of ICT technologies within social work practice, the more the distinction between rural and urban practice will be reduced" (p.631). Indeed, taken to the next level, ICT digital technology, with its acknowledged power to cross national and international borders at will and homogenize the transfer of information and data, could portend the day when regional, demographic, social and cultural distinctions fundamental to rural social work are rendered obsolete, or at a minimum quaint.

Globalization

Globalization is broadly defined as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon of primarily economic and secondarily social, cultural and political change occurring in the past 40-50 years. It is a process of interaction and integration among humans, corporations and governments worldwide. It has often been described as a form of capitalist expansion, partly driven by advances in transportation and ICT technology, leading to a global and largely, unregulated, free market economy (Guttal, 2007). Dominelli (2010) and other social science researchers contend that globalization has continuing implications for social work practice including impact upon social services delivery, the utilization of "labour processes, as these affect social workers and in practitioner-user relations … (and the) internationalization of social problems …" (p. 600).

The economic and social effect of globalization impacts significantly on rurality and the rural social work practice model. For example, Moore, Pearson, Rife, Poole, Moore and Reaves observed in *Reinventing Social Work Education and Service Delivery in Rural Areas: An Interprofessional Case Study* (2016) globalization's decades long economic strangulation and

the financial panic brought on by the Great Recession (2007-2009) that wielded devastating results on Rockingham County, North Carolina, in the state's north central Piedmont region. A destitute rural county emblematic of many similarly situated across the US, Rockingham suffered for decades during and after the consecutive loss of its dairy farming, tobacco, textile/fabric industries and other factories including a Miller Brewing plant to international competitors or destructive market forces. The Moore, *et. al.*, (2016) case study illustrated an interprofessional response and approach to providing vital social, medical and mental health services through collaboration among social workers, religiously affiliated organizations (RAOs) and community nurses.

Among other broader deleterious implications, globalization, according to Dominelli, has led directly or indirectly to a "new managerialism" within the profession threatening social work's traditional helping hands ethic by "introducing business practices and market discipline into arenas formerly excluded from market forces and profit motive" (p. 602). The trends are also coupled with or identified clearly with a thrust towards privatization or the removal and transfer of social work practice and services from the public and nonprofit NGOs to the private, for-profit sector. Dominelli also identified these other major affects: 1. Threatening empowerment of social workers by limiting "their access to resources that match their assessment of needs, particularly of those required by specific individuals," or, in other words, reducing or limiting budgetary funding required to normally or even safely operate, 2. Raising "the techno-bureaucratic nature of practice through peer performance indicators and efficiency measures aimed at maximizing the use of limited resources for the greatest number of people," or, in effect, implementing the "do more with less" workplace ethic, 3. Adjusting "the practitioner-worker relationship away from relational social work to one that is more distant, as a result of the state's involvement in commissioning processes for services to be delivered by private and voluntary sector," (p. 602). In this instance Dominelli is likely referring, in part, to recent acquisition and installations of ICT technology which social workers have complained has led to isolation and distancing between workers and their clients. (Brownlee, *et. al.*, 2010; Lohmann & Lohmann, 2005)

Social Work Education and Curriculum Recommendations

Noble (2004) acknowledged in her report of the 2002 IASSW and IFSW global policy consultation meetings on education standards that Western social work models held particular gravitas but further refinement and development is underway. She also warned of social work education and training challenges particularly for the highly diverse social and cultural Asia Pacific region:

> While there is a growing trend internationally to formalise social work education at the tertiary level, many Asia-Pacific countries still face geographical isolation, lack of access to mass communications technologies, and language and cultural barriers which means that setting global guidelines for social work education, as currently proposed, could represent a particular challenge to the continued development of social work in the region. (p. 529)

Noble (2004) noted that in India, similar to the U.S., social work education is "highly standardised" around the master's degree while the majority including Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Indonesia and Philippines teach social work at the undergraduate university level (p.

529). This is a condition that has evolved in the ensuing years following Noble's reporting. For example, both the number of university-level schools of social work and master degree programs are expanding exponentially in the Philippines. Amplifying on her concerns over training challenges, Noble noted that Papua New Guinea, Samoa, New Caledonia and other Pacific island nation-states "have adopted a more vocational, non-university approach (aimed at) preparing students (to) work in government community development programmes and NGOs" (p. 529). This appears to be, however, a geographically local or regional condition, that does not necessarily represent a trend.

Lishman, writing in *Social Work Education and Training* (2013) from a British and western European outlook, projects a grand picture perspective. He observes that professional development of social work in the UK and on the continent has:

> Always been confronted with challenges of diversity and universality in respect
> of the individuals, communities and societies it engages with. Given that both
> discipline and profession rely on close links between practice, theory and
> research, social work education is bound to be highly contingent on the variety
> of cultural, linguistic, economic and socio-political contexts that exist in
> countries and regions across the continent. (p. 49)

Lishman, for all intents and purposes, is actually describing an internationalist perspective as he boasts in the next breath that "it is not surprising that the European harmonisation agenda in respect to higher education and regional professional mobility is clearly visible in this field (*i.e.*, international social work)" (p. 49).

Parenthetically this paper hypothesizes that figments, slices or whole chapters of the North American rural social work model, are suitable for and upon review should be exported to guide or augment general Philippine praxis. Is this not in consonance with the international or integrationist frameworks described by either Lishman (2013) or Noble (2010)? If we accept the premise that there is already some reasonable connection or linkage in this proposed North American-Philippine equation, or as Lishman states "links between practice, theory and research" then "social work education is bound to be highly contingent on the variety of cultural, linguistic, economic and socio-political contexts that exist in countries and regions across the continent." Exactly! What Lishman states, as interpreted by the authors, is that the requisite links here are transparent and solid and that the case for rural social work and Philippine praxis can and maybe should proceed at some point to the formal education adaptation process.

Therefore, depending in part upon findings of suggested future research (see section below) an education curriculum could initially: 1. Invite visiting lecturers from the U.S. and Canada, similar to the framework outlined for "visiting practitioners" (Pugh & Cheers, 2010, p. 137), who can inform both undergraduate and graduate-level students of both fundamental and advanced aspects of rural social work having direct applicability to general Philippine praxis, 2. A particular contextual application within such presentations could include specific casework experience and lessons-learned modules, talks, discussions and practicum exercises (Grobman, 1999), 3. Solicitation of U.S. and Canadian university-level schools of social work (of which there are several hundred) with rural social work and rural sociology departments and curricula. This would be done to provide donated course materials, text books, DVDs, CD-ROMs and video-conferencing event

opportunities with rural social work content relative to stated educational goals and objectives, 4. As research paper conference presentations and peer-reviewed journal research articles are published on this concept they should be made available for distribution for educational purposes, possibly through mutual agreement with the Philippine Association of Social Workers, the National Association for Social Work Education, Inc. (Philippines) and the International Federation of Social Workers. 5. As Pugh and Cheers (2010) noted, with respect to the visiting practitioner program, a vital ingredient of the lecture presentations should include the quality of "contextualization." This would be adaptation or tailoring of academic content to the Philippine university community's "characteristics, concerns and preferences" (p.137).

Suggestions for Further Research

The impact and effect of the twin phenomenon of ICT digital technology and globalization on rural social work practice, and for that matter Philippine social work praxis in general, is a developing narrative and has yet to play out. There is an identifiable research deficit with respect to both of these areas of current and future scholarly inquiry. Among other possibilities there is the prospect that future developments in and applications of ICT could vastly benefit or supplement the daily professional life of rural social work practitioners who have suffered from issues of isolation, lack of communications access and/or and the everyday reality of practicing with degraded communications systems. The promise presented by ICT advances have and will impact on both rural practice and Philippine general praxis likely in a most positive way.

There is great truth to the iconic Chinese proverb, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." For purposes of this research, once this paper is presented at the Pampanga Research Educators Organization (PREO)-Don Honorio Ventura State University International Research Conference, May 24-26, 2019, on the Bacolor campus, Pampanga, Philippines it must be reviewed, revised, scrubbed and in analyzed with a view towards enhancing and amplifying a greater Philippine perspective. It then will be submitted for publication consideration, possibly from *Contemporary Rural Social Work, Rural Sociology or International Social Work,* or a related journal. Publication in a reliable peer-refereed journal would provide the primary thesis of this paper's reliability, validity and the scholarly agency to proceed toward realizing the full potential of our base hypothesis.

The initial thesis should be tested on a Philippine academic sample, possibly consisting of an admixture of students, faculty, social work university administrators, even clients, to see if the concept has resonance as an element of discipline. A questionnaire survey directed at accredited university run schools of social work, both public and private, would be ideal to further gauge reliability and validity. A second survey drawing on an audience of licensed and recently graduated social workers would be highly desirable for survey purposes. Survey queries, using a structured questionnaire that contains predominantly closed-ended, or forced-choice, questions, could include what aspects of rural social work practice are already being employed in Philippine generalist practice? Other questions could deal with practice regimens and peculiarities of North American rural social work that Philippine practitioners are not aware of and whether they have operational application.

Though this paper makes a case for rural social work doctrine as a candidate for general praxis enhancement in the Philippines it is suggested that future research also follow up with an obvious

inquiry: the efficacy of employing North American rural social work principles and practice to social work practice in a rural setting in the Philippines *nag-lisa*.

Besides initial questionnaire surveying of the quantitative variety described above, a determination would have to be made which qualitative social and social work research modalities would be most useful for eliciting useful material and data to support, eliminate or enhance the working hypothesis. For example, Padgett (2008) described the application of case study analysis (*e.g.*, individual, group, organization, profession, municipality, business) as one of the most efficient and thorough methods in quantitative research. "Case study draws on multiple perspective and data sources to produce *contextually rich* [*italics added*] and meaningful interpretation," (p. 33). Contextualization is vitally significant given that the reliability and validity of information and data obtained relies on the ability of the respondent to provide the most accurate information germane to her/his job surroundings and conditions.

Additionally, the level of research the authors seek to engage in with formation of this paper is essentially of an international genre. The topic involves a highly organized health service profession with participants and actors from three nation-states, research literature from additional nation-states, with intentions to apply their research findings to the populations being studied - all properties of intra national and transnational research (Tripodi & Potocky-Tripodi, 2007).

Summary and Conclusions

While historically Philippine social work praxis has vigorously accepted various aspects of Western social work doctrine, both in educational preparation and operational practice, this paper argues that the discrete model of rural social work, as configured in North America (U.S. and Canada), has specific application to general Philippine praxis. The authors advance the hypothesis by acknowledging that strong social, cultural and historical ties currently exist between these nation-states and, despite recent geopolitical fissures and stresses, will continue into the future.

Social work theorists and scholars might argue this paper's assertions are redundant, or perhaps even irrelevant given that measured elements of U.S. social work practice doctrine are already contained   in the contemporary Philippine generalist or advanced generalist practice models. Nevertheless, there are unique and specialty characteristics of rural practice that make it functionally germane and deserving of further exploration: 1. North American rural practice is configured to operate in areas of high poverty - a condition paramount to general Philippine social work praxis, 2. Philippine practitioners routinely function in an environment of highly limited professional, community and programmatic resources; these are challenging conditions rural social workers are specifically trained, acclimatized to, and experienced to deal with, 3. Rural practice social workers function daily with the reality of stressed and limited budgetary resources and like their Filipino counterparts live on the mantra "do more with less," 4. Rural social workers and their counterparts in Philippine praxis are both by training and credo primarily generalist or advanced general practitioners, a bonding making them aptly configured to learn from each other, 5. Rural social workers are typically confronted with the reality of unassessable, diminished, distressed, inadequate or nonexistent medical services, mental health clinical counseling and therapeutic resources testing their self-reliance, referral and resourcing skills similar to Philippine generalist and advanced generalist praxis, 6. Indigenous and minority populations are served by

both North American (*e.g.,* African Americans, Eskimo-Aleut, Hispanic, Inuit, Metis, Native American/One Nation peoples) and Philippine (*e.g.*, Aeta, Negrito, Igorot, Moro, Palawan Tribal peoples) social workers; the profession despite earlier discriminatory and racist practices continues to embrace and develop effective inclusionary protocols for these populations, 7. The abundance of university level schools of social work and subsidiary rural social work programs and curricula in US and Canada make them reasonably situated to access and guide education and training in rural social work to the benefit of Philippine professionals, scholars and students, 8. Future impact of ICT technology advancements and their implications for rural social work practice and general Philippine praxis represent an area where both operations have the potential to gain in a productive and positive way.

Research preparation for this paper has alerted authors to the negatives and pejoratives associated with Western and specifically the U.S. role and contributions to what Noble (2004) identified as the "dominant global model of social work education" (p. 539). Dustin (2007), identified in Domenilli (2010), raised the spectre of "the homogenizing tendencies of the McDonaldization or Americanization of social work" as she analyzed the acceptance and use of the care management practice framework. Critics note that this movement with significant U.S. origins led to trends to privatize social work services.

This condition and the concern and criticism over McDonaldization or Americanization of social work is well taken by the authors whose interests center on advancing the cause of scholarly, evidence-based social work practice. While we recognize that these global circumstances could well be viewed as a limitation or detractor to this research the authors genuinely seek closer professional and academic cooperation of Philippine and North American social workers professionals for the sole benefit of our customers - the clients.

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