ABSTRACT

BURROUGHS, MEGAN MELISSA. The Use of Coaching Strategies within the Field of Social Work. (Under the direction of Kimberly Allen, Nichole Huff, and Mitzi Downing).

Coaching is a rapidly growing discipline that has permeated a variety of fields over the last 40 years. Not only has the specified use of coaching been seen in multiple arenas, but the techniques associated with coaching have been found in yet more fields.

Concurrently, the field of social work is constantly being adjusted to better serve more diverse populations with many different issues. The present study aims to find a connection between the fields of coaching and social work. Specifically, this study aims to identify the extent to which social workers use coaching strategies, if at all. Further, it will identify whether or not social workers connect their strategies with coaching strategies and if they consider themselves to be coaches. Using mixed-methods research, this study collected data by sending a survey to social workers and social work students who work with youth and families. For the sample collected, it was found that social workers do understand the techniques they use are coaching techniques, although they do not consider themselves to be coaches.

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The Use of Coaching Strategies within the Field of Social Work

by
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BIOGRAPHY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The field of social work, like all fields of family practice, continues to grow by identifying and researching innovative ways to meet the needs of the families served. As such, social workers are able to grow and better serve families when evidence-based approaches are identified as potential ways for serving families. Family coaching is one such approach to helping families.

The field of coaching is not new. In fact, coaching is growing rapidly and is increasingly being viewed as its own distinct practice (International Coach Federation [ICF], n.d.). Grant (2008) discusses the positive effects coaching has and stresses the importance of having an evidence-based approach when it comes to the use of coaching. The conversation of coaching families is now being addressed in the family science literature (Allen, 2013). There is growing evidence that coaching families is an effective approach to serving families and the practice is growing in popularity among family practitioners (Allen & Huff, in press).

The use of coaching as an approach to social work is not new. The literature on social work has references to coaching, and coach training and certifications are slowly becoming available to social workers. Still, more information is needed. Research shows that improvements are needed to the child welfare system and also to the way that social workers interact with and help families (Raphel, 2012). More research is needed to identify and grow the practice of social work. This study aims to fill a gap in research by determining the extent to which coaching techniques are being used within the field of social work. It

further seeks to determine whether social workers view themselves as coaches and how conscious social workers are of the potential existing application of coaching techniques.

1.1 Defining Coaching

To understand the way in which “coaching” will be used in this study, a working definition of the term is necessary. While there is no standardized definition of family coaching, the (International Coach Federation, n.d.) defines coaching as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential, which is particularly important in today’s uncertain and complex environment” (pp. 1). This definition will serve as the working definition for this study.

In family practice, a definition is only theoretical. In order to serve families, the practice of family coaching must be operationalized. According to Ives (2008), coaching techniques include: empowering the client to take charge of their life and situation, the use of questioning techniques, and a collaborative relationship between the coach and client that is tailored specifically to the client and shaped by their strengths. In family coaching, Rush and Sheldon (2011) have identified additional techniques for coaching families. They suggest the use of joint planning, reflection by asking powerful questions, feedback by the coach, and observing the plan in action.

It is important to note that although there are similarities with other family practices fields, coaching is a distinct approach to serving families. Edelson (2010) describes coaching as a type of consultation but also as a division of therapy, though the vast majority of literature on the subject views coaching as a completely separate practice (Hart, Blattner, &

Leipsic, 2001). Neenan (2008) further argues that whether the client needs coaching or counselling is based off the psychological health of the client. Based on the previous definitions, this study will employ “coaching” as a practice separate from therapy that includes working together with clients to empower them and mutually create solutions to their issues.

1.2 Social Worker Job Competencies

It is important to understand the expected skills of social workers in order to draw conclusions on whether or not coaching techniques align with the duties social workers perform. An employment advertisement for a case manager in the Oregon Department of Human Services specifies that coaching techniques form part of the job’s duties. “Determining the strengths of the family” is listed in the job description as a job duty (Oregon Employment Department, 2013). This specific job description language is in line with the strengths based approach to social work that is documented in the social work literature (Noble, Perkins, & Fatout, 2000). In addition, the United States Department of Labor (2014a) reports that the duties of a social worker include working with families to devise ways to deal with challenging situations or to change behavior. The technique of determining family strengths is also a common technique highlighted in coaching literature (Noble, et al., 2000). For example, the ICF (n.d.) describes coaching as collaborating with clients to reach solutions to current life problems. Additionally, Ives (2008) reports the use of identifying clients’ strengths as a technique specific to coaching.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2013a) has set national standards for professional social workers. Standards include ethics, qualifications,

knowledge, cultural competence, assessment, service planning, advocacy, collaboration, practice evaluation, record keeping, workload sustainability, and professional development. More specifically, the NASW requires that social workers work in partnership with their clients to create goals and build off of the personal strengths of clients. Once again, this strategy is in close alignment with the field of coaching, which is essentially a coaching strategy (ICF, n. d.). Furthermore, Haight et al. (2005) specifically describes the use of collaboration by coaches when working with mothers during visits monitored by child welfare. Though the NASW (2013) requires the use of coaching strategies by social workers, coach training is not a requirement.

1.3 Social Work Training

There are many different programs offering degrees in social work throughout the United States. To make conclusions about the type of training social workers should have with regard to coaching, it is important to analyze the type of training that currently exists. There are programs currently available for prospective social workers and for current social workers seeking to further develop their knowledge and training. The University of Michigan's School of Social Work (SSW) offers one of the most reputable Master of Social Work degrees in the United States (Connect with SSW, 2014). This program offers several specializations for students to choose from as well as specialty programs such as Aging in Families in Society, Community and Social Systems, and Mental Health (MSW Program Concentrations, 2014).

While a plethora of social work training and academic programs exist in universities in the United States and abroad, there is no specialization option in coaching-specific training

(MSW Program Concentrations, 2014). In fact, there are no specialties that involve coaching specific training at all nationally (Specialization & Certification Programs, 2014).

Furthermore, a search of the course catalog revealed no courses that offer coaching-specific training (Course Catalog, 2014). According to the National Association of Social Workers (2014b), there are several Advanced Practice Specialty Credentials licensed social workers can obtain. Social workers can obtain certain credentials that allow them to better serve the needs of certain at-risk groups, such as members of the military, hospice patients, and clients with addictions, among others. The National Association of Social Workers does not list any specific credentials for coaching.

While coach-specific training is not widespread for social workers, there are some training programs available such as graduate level certifications within universities and non-academic professional trainings. Boston University School of Social Work offers a coaching certificate through their Master's in Social Work program. The description for the coaching program explains that coaching programs are needed for social workers because coaching a natural addition to social work (Professional Education Programs, n. d.). Additionally, North Carolina Division of Social Services is offering coach training for state social workers. The coach training is specifically recommended for social workers who work with families (Division of Social Services Child Welfare Services, 2013).

Smith and Carlson (1999) discuss the need for families receiving social services to be empowered. Further, they discuss the use of coaching by parents in teaching social skills to their children. They argue that in order for parents to use coaching techniques, parents themselves need to be coached. While it is suggested that social workers use coaching to

serve families, training social workers in coaching is not discussed. It is unreasonable for social workers to be expected to provide services in a manner in which they have not been trained. Coaching is an effective method to changing behaviors (Theeboom, Beersman, & van Vianen, 2013) but training is needed to ensure proper use.

1.4 Need for Study

There is limited research on the application of coaching in social work. Stout-Rostron (2011) interviewed service providers who used coaching in a variety of fields, ranging from leadership and executive coaching, to social networking and HIV/AIDS awareness. The researchers found that coaching is practiced in many fields, and could be utilized in many more. Further research is needed to discover if coaching techniques are being used in other fields, particularly in the field of social work.

At the time of this study, few research articles on the use of coaching techniques by social workers were available. An EBSCO search for “coaching” and “caseworker” yielded zero results. An EBSCO search for “coaching” and “social worker” however, generated one peer-reviewed journal article. The article, by Kelly and Bluestone-Miller (2009) discusses the role of coaching among school-based social workers. School-based social workers act as coaches when working with students with behavioral problems. The social worker uses a coach technique of asking students how to solve their problem and identifies the strengths of the individual in order to improve the student’s behavior in the classroom. The use of questioning is a specified coaching strategy (Ives, 2008).

While there is a deficit of articles outlining coaching practices used by social workers, there is literature demonstrating that coaching has been used within the field of child welfare.

The literature on coaching in social work tends to be descriptive of specific interventions or approaches to coaching, rather than a polling of use across the field. For example, Noble et al. (2000) report the use of strength coaching by a social worker who was assisting a mother to regain the custody of her child. The social worker was able to identify the strengths of her client and use them to develop a collaborative relationship. By utilizing the strength model, the social worker was able to empower her client to create her own rules and routines, rather than to have them delivered to her by the social worker.

The coaching practice in social work is different from the traditional approach of case management whereby a social worker comes in and instructs a family. As documented in Hegar and Hunseker (1988), the use of empowerment while working with families can keep children out of state custody or more quickly reunite a separated family. When families are empowered to make decisions that concern themselves, they are more likely to flourish and reach their goals. This model, similar to the model of coaching, allows families to work within the system as required, but gives them a voice and the power to make their own choices. Forcing rules upon others can disable their development, rather than support it. Ideally, the use of coaching in social work would emphasize empowerment through a collaborative relationship between the social worker and the family. This is preferred to the social worker simply ensuring that the family follow specified rules and instructions, which is the case for traditional case management.

While a search combining the terms “coaching” and “social work”, produced only one article, there is much information that points to the use of coaching strategies by caseworkers. A search for articles discussing the various techniques used by social workers

while working directly with clients exemplified the use of coaching strategies within social work. These results indicate that coaching strategies are being used, but are not being clearly defined as such. Peterson (2012) argues that social workers should be using coaching as a technique while developing decision-making models with families. There are several articles that discuss different coaching strategies employed by social workers, although the terms “coach” or “coaching” are not used (Baer & Federico, 1978; Banack, 1999; De Jong & Berg, 2001; Howe, 2008; Miller, 2012; Sloper, Greco, Beecham, & Webb, 2006). This evidences the need for this study in its exploration of the conscious or unconscious application of coaching techniques by social workers.

Raphel (2012) discusses the improvements needed within the child welfare system. There is a lack of services available for at-risk children, such as those living in poverty, children living in rural communities, and children of incarcerated parents, among others. Further, there is a high turnover rate of staff within the child welfare system, with a difficulty retaining experienced and educated supervisors. Coaching has been shown to be effective in multiple contexts, including organizational (Theeboom, et al., 2013), personal (Grant, 2008), and parent education (McDonald, FitzRoy, Fuchs, Fooker, & Klsen, 2012). Incorporating coaching techniques into training for social workers is needed as coaching has been shown to be an effective approach to helping families (Noble et al., 2000). Moreover, social workers need specific coach training in addition to fulfilling the requirements to become a social worker. Herbert and Mould (1992) underscore the importance of social workers’ perceptions about their general practice, as well as their practice within certain roles. This includes coaching techniques such as helping the client solve their own problems. Training social

workers in coaching may help them to better serve their clients. It will also help the social worker feel as though they are doing what they should be doing, and in turn help improve the child welfare system.

This current study is crucial to the field of coaching because there is evidence that coaching is happening within social work but there is a gap in research on the specified use of coaching in social work. In addition, this study will be helpful to the field of social work because of the existing stigma attached to therapy (Owen, Thomas, & Rodolfa, 2013). Although they heavily contrast, coaching and therapy strive to achieve many of the same goals (Hart et al., 2001). The term “coaching” does not carry the same stigma as the term “therapy”. A practice that achieves the same goals will be very beneficial because a broader population that may not otherwise have sought assistance, or may not have been as receptive to the assistance, could be reached.

1.5 Research Questions

This study will answer two research questions; “Do social workers use coaching strategies and realize what they are using are, in fact, coaching techniques?” and “Do social workers consider themselves to be coaches?” The first question seeks to understand the behaviors and terminology of social workers around the practice of coaching. The hypothesis for the first research question is that social workers use coaching strategies, but do not associate the techniques they use the practice of coaching. This hypothesis was formulated based on the scarcity of research concerning the specific use of coaching strategies within social work. The literature reveals evidence of the use of coaching strategies by social workers; however, the specific term “coaching” is not used.

The second research question in this study deals with the perception of social workers as coaching professionals. Because the first hypothesis suggests that social workers do utilize coaching techniques it is predicted that although social workers use coaching strategies in their work with clients, they do not consider themselves to be coaches. This hypothesis originates from not only the lack of research on the specific use of coaching strategies within social work, but also from the lack of coach training provided to social workers in their formal education and in further trainings offered by state agencies, as previously discussed.

Both of these research questions are important for the fields of social work and coaching in order for them to grow. “Do social workers utilize coaching strategies in their work with families and if so, do they associate the techniques they use as coaching techniques?” Answering these questions will allow professionals in the fields of social work and coaching to draw conclusions on what techniques are currently being used and if further training is needed.

The following chapter presents a review of the literature surrounding coaching and social work in order to provide the reader with background information on the two fields and how the two fields have intersected. Coaching-specific strategies, as previously defined, are used to compare the practices that are reportedly used by social workers in the literature. This will help bridge the gap in research between actual strategies used by social workers and strategies that are considered to be coaching strategies. Additionally, it will provide the basis for the present study of how social workers use coaching strategies in their work with youth and families.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The following chapter will highlight the literature on the practice of coaching and the field of social work. This review of literature will provide critical information on the theories that can be found within coaching, the history of both coaching and social work, and the types of coaching that exist. Finally and most importantly, this review of literature will offer ways in which coaching has permeated the field of social work.

2.2 Theoretical Perspective

All approaches to serving families need a theoretical foundation to ensure that methods have been tested and are shown to work. Many coaching techniques can be traced back to psychological theories including Adler's Individual Psychology, Humanistic Psychology and the work of Maslow and Rogers, Gestalt Theory, Bowlby's Attachment Theory, Dialectical Behavior Therapy, and Gottman's work on emotion coaching. These theories help build the foundation on which we illustrate the significance of the use of coaching with families.

Alfred Adler's (1930) concept of therapeutic encouragement includes techniques that are very similar to coaching techniques. Therapeutic encouragement deals with empowering the client by focusing on their strengths and cultivating a collaborative relationship. This method was and is considered to be a way to facilitate change within clients (Watts & Pietrzak, 2000). Although not specifically called 'coaching', it is apparent that Adler used coaching techniques as the basis of his practice.

It can be postulated that the idea of humanism is the underlying theme of coaching. Humanistic psychology focuses on the central idea that people are good and full of potential (Rogers, 1961). Humanistic psychologists believe that people are in control of their own ideas and they have control over outside forces. Free will is one of the bases of the humanistic view, therefore if we want to become better and lead a more satisfying life, we can (Coon & Mitterer, 2007). Coaching embraces these same ideas. Abraham Maslow was at the forefront of humanistic psychology. He believed in the idea that it is innate for humans to want to attain self-actualization. He believed that the ultimate human goal was to be creative, productive, and to be an individual (Maslow, 1959).

Carl Rogers' theory of client-centered therapy shares with coaching the idea that treatment should be about the client, not the service provider. He had a humanistic approach and believed that people innately want to be healthy and grow. In order to be an effective therapist, he believed that therapists must be accepting of the client, have sincere empathy, be honest, and not give advice; the therapist should foster self-discovery (Rogers, 1946). Like Rogerian therapy, coaching places the innate interest in one's personal health and happiness via encouraging self-discovery at the forefront.

Lines can be drawn between Gestalt therapy and coaching techniques. According to Gestalt theory, in order to be healthy, one must be held accountable for one's own feelings and behaviors (Coon & Mitterer, 2007). Edelson (2010) states that coaching focuses on the present instead of the past. Gestalt therapy also focuses on the present, instead of the past (Coon & Mitterer, 2007). Coaching, like Gestalt therapy, encourages the individual or family to seek their own solutions to happiness.

Bowlby's (1969) Attachment Theory is also directly related to coaching. Bowlby theorized that the way in which we attach to a caregiver early in life dictates how we develop into adults and our behavior throughout life. Part of being an effective coach is tailoring approaches to fit the unique needs of the client(s) (Wasylyshyn, Shorey, & Chaffin, 2012). Drake (2009) suggests the importance of considering attachment theory in the use of coaching because attachment theory allows for clients to better understand their clients and subsequently mold the techniques used to better coach the client.

Linehan (1993) developed Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) in working with Borderline Personality Disorder, and more broadly, suicidal patients. DBT requires practitioners to be understanding and empathetic. However, it requires practitioners to hold their clients accountable. Holding clients accountable is considered to be coaching (International Coach Federation, n.d.). More specifically, DBT encourages the client to accept how things are, rather than change the way one thinks of their situation.

More specific to families, Gottman (2001) discusses *Family Philosophy of Emotion*. In this, he refers to families who deal with emotions in a healthy way as using the 'emotion-coaching philosophy'. With this philosophy, emotions are acknowledged and considered valid. Families are accountable for their emotions and are accepting of the emotions of others. The emotion-coaching philosophy is more successful than any other emotion philosophy that Gottman presents.

While these theories are all relevant to the field of coaching, this list is by no means all-inclusive. As with most fields in family practice, there are many additional theories that have a connection with coaching such as family systems theory, adult learning theory, and

many others. The theories presented here fit well both with the fields of coaching and social work. It is important to understand the different theories that can and have had an influence on the field of coaching. Coaching is considered a newer approach, although, it is rooted in theory articulated decades ago. These theories that can be found within coaching show how coaching has been an effective way in which to serve populations and can be expanded to greater service.

2.3 History of Coaching

The term ‘coach’ was first seen in the 1500s in reference to a wagon coach. The actual idea of coaching began at Oxford University, where it was used as a slang term for an academic tutor in 1848. Years later, the term coach was used in the sports arena in England (Turner, 2013).

Into the twentieth century, coaching continued to be used within academia. A study in which children were coached prior to taking a mental test yielded positive results for coaching when compared to a control group (Zirbes, 1924). Other experiments were conducted in the 1920s to test the effect of coaching on intelligence tests (Dunlap & Snyder, 1920; & Gilmore, 1927).

Coaching continued to be used primarily in sports and academia through the first half of the twentieth century. There is a small amount of evidence that coaching was starting to be seen in therapy in the 1960s (Flippi, 1968), however, it started to gain more relevance in business practices. Executives began using coaching as a tool to coach their employees (Glaser, 1958).

By the 1970s, the field of coaching had made its way into therapy in a variety of capacities. Coaching was beginning to be used in behavior therapy (McFall & Lillesand, 1971), treating emotional trauma (Bloch & Bloch, 1974), and marital counseling (Jacobson, 1977). Coaching was also seen in helping build social skills among children (Calpin & Cinciripini, 1980). An EBSCO search of the subjects, ‘coaching’ and ‘families’, showed that the first article was published 1978. However, the literature on coaching and families is growing very slowly, only 37 peer-reviewed journal articles have been published since then. Although coaching has been practiced for decades, the research is still scarce and the need for this study is great.

The field of coaching is found in many different subjects including but not limited to executive coaching (Lee, 2013), business coaching (Kahn, 2011), peer coaching (Parker, Kram, & Hall, 2013), life coaching (Grant, 2008), health coaching (Heimendinger et al., 2007), relationship coaching (Ives, 2012), and family coaching (Allen, 2013). It is important to identify fields in which specified coaching strategies exist and utilize that as a basis for which unspecified coaching strategies are being used in other fields, such as social work. The following section provides what fields coaching is found and in what ways it is applied.

2.4 Types of Coaching

Executive Coaching

Wasylyshyn et al. (2012) identified three patterns of leadership behavior seen in business leaders by coaches. The patterns of leadership include remarkable, perilous, and toxic. It is important for the coach to recognize where their client falls on this spectrum of leadership behavior. In line with the coaching technique of identifying the client’s own

strengths (Ives, 2008), the coach's ability to see what type of leadership pattern their client practices will assist them in being an effective coach. To be an effective coach, one must adjust their methods to fit the unique qualities of their client(s) (Wasylyshyn et al., 2012). Ellinger, Ellinger, Bachrach, Wang, & Elmadag Bas (2011), found that selective coaching significantly improved employee job satisfaction and performance, thus identifying patterns of leadership behavior is important to establishing a well-functioning business.

Coaching is not only seen in for-profit companies, but in non-profit organizations. Coaching within non-profit organizations can be seen when working with clients who receive services and also in training employees. The results of coaching in a particular non-profit organization resulted in enhanced learning, lower levels of depression and anxiety, and overall operational improvement (Whybrow & Lancaster, 2012).

Business Coaching

As with executive coaching, business coaching occurs in the corporate world. Rather than only working to improve the leadership skills of executives within the company, business coaching works with all levels of employees. The goal of business coaching is to apply theoretical frameworks of coaching, such as mutually agreed upon outcomes, to businesses in order to help them become organizationally successful. (Kahn, 2011).

Peer Coaching

Delving further into the idea of business coaching, one encounters peer coaching. Like executive and business coaching, peer coaching occurs in the employment setting. Peer coaching sets out to improve the skills of employees but on an even playing field. Peer coaching is unique in that both the coach and coaching recipient aim to learn and develop

professionally from the coaching experience. This type of coaching is very easy to use. However, risk factors include lack of experience between the two individuals using the peer coaching practice and having different sets of ideas about learning (Parker et al., 2013).

Life Coaching

Williams (2012) describes life coaching as a whole person approach. Life coaching is client-centered and helps clients achieve optimal living. George (2013) established that with the economic downturn beginning in 2008, there has been an influx of people who seek alternate forms of employment. Many have turned to self-employment and thus, the emergence of life coaches. Life coaches work one-on-one with clients to help them attain their personal goals. Utilizing coaching techniques such as active listening and using non-directive questions, life coaches guide their clients to the realizations of the solutions to their problems. In interviewing 25 people who identified as life coaches, it was found that professionals in this field are having a difficult time overcoming the stigma that life coaching is not a legitimate field. There are too many individuals who claim to be life coaches, but do not have the appropriate accreditation.

Health Coaching

With the high obesity rate in the United States, and subsequent health problems such as diabetes and hypertension, there is a need for professional help when it comes to healthy eating habits for families. In an effort to realize changes to the level of professional help in developing healthy eating habits for families, a program was implemented with the specific goal of reducing the obesity rate among the rural bi-ethnic population of Colorado. In addition to school-based and community-based programs, a home-visit coaching program

was put in place. Advisors visited families to help them understand their current eating and exercise habits and how they can be improved, and to help families set and achieve goals. Advisors were able to coach families by helping them set goals that were achievable and relevant to the family. A positive correlation between home visits and achievement of health goals was found (Heimendinger, Uyeki, Andhara, Marshall, Scarbro & Belansky, 2007). Thus, professional help had a positive impact on developing health patterns for families.

Relationship Coaching

Comparable to life coaching and related to family coaching is relationship coaching. The main purpose of relationship coaching is to help the individual build skills that will help them be more successful in relationships. The point of being successful in relationships for individuals that seek out relationship coaching is to attain successful life-partnerships. Not only does relationship coaching focus on how to build relationship skills, it also helps the individual achieve personal development (Ives, 2012). It can be argued that relationship coaching might be a natural transition into family coaching.

Family Coaching

The fields of coaching and family life education have both existed for quite some time. However, the explicit idea that the two can be combined to form a new model, family life coaching, is relatively new despite the evidence of the use of coaching strategies by social workers dating back to the 1970s. Baer and Federico (1978) list specific objectives, functions, and activities related to the problem-solving process. In order to use the background information that social workers collect from clients, social workers are to use “mutual assessment” (p. 71) to reach a definition of the client’s situation. Evidence exists

that family life professionals use coaching strategies in their work with families, but these strategies are not being labeled as coaching strategies (Allen, 2013). It is possible that labeling these strategies as coaching strategies and having these professionals become accredited coaches can strengthen the field of family life education and improve the work that is being done with families.

In order to find the extent in which family professionals use coaching strategies, Allen and Huff (n. d.) surveyed 180 professionals in the field. Their results indicate that 65% of family professionals currently use coaching strategies. Moreover, 85% reported being interested in receiving training in family coaching and an astounding 99% of participants said they believed it was important for family coaches to have the proper credentials.

2.5 Characteristics of Coaching

With the lack of research available that specifically discusses coaching techniques and social workers, there is a strong literature base on general coaching techniques. The following characteristics are included in coaching: asking powerful questions and viewing the client as the most knowledgeable person in their situation (Haight, et al., 2005), involving clients in setting goals that are achievable (Heimendinger et al., 2007), adjusting methods to fit the client (Wasylyshyn et al., 2012), recognizing the clients' strengths (Ives, 2008), empowering clients to make changes (Noble, et al., 2000), observing behavior and providing feedback (Rush & Sheldon, 2011) and being more future rather than past-oriented (Hart et al., 2001). These specific characteristics were searched in conjunction with 'social work', 'casework', 'case management', and 'child welfare' to find evidence of the use of these strategies by caseworkers.

2.6 History of Social Work

Stroup (1960) discusses the charity organization movement in Buffalo, New York and the very beginning of social work in the United States. The Buffalo Charity Organization Society was based off the London Charity Organization Society and was founded in 1877. This society started out helping the poor and grew to help other populations. The charity organization movement spread to many cities throughout the United States. It also grew to provide disaster relief, health education, services for juvenile delinquents, legal services, and services not only for individuals but families as well.

Jane Addams further evolved social work in the United States. She developed social settlements, starting with the Hull-House in 1889 (Lasch, 1965). This settlement was established in a neighborhood of Chicago which was the home to many immigrants and riddled with poverty. Hull-House offered educational services, cultural social events, and a place for community members to use a kitchen and bathroom. While the Hull-House was very successful, there was not yet formal training available for social work.

The first social work training program was established in 1898. The American Charity Organization Society started a program that became the New York School of Philanthropy. Columbia University eventually turned that program into the School of Social Work (Tannenbaum & Reisch, 2001).

Concurrently, the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was established. Parents were beginning to be held responsible for providing for their child(ren)'s needs. If they were unable or unwilling, social workers had the right to intervene. In this era, it was the duty of the social worker to identify needy people and

determine whether or not these families needed aid from private organizations (McGowan, 2005).

2.7 Needs of Families

According to the National Association of Social Workers (2014a) there are several programs that meet the needs of children and families. These services include finding foster care families, child maltreatment reduction, housing, food stability, and help for immigrant families, among others. It is important to establish the needs of families served by social workers in order to determine whether or not specific trainings and accreditations will be effective in helping to meet those needs.

Miller (1997) established the need for diversity specific parenting education classes for African-American parents in the child welfare system. Empowerment was identified as one of the most critical aspects needed for the success of the parent education classes. This study highlights the importance of empowerment, a coaching strategy (Noble et al., 2000) and how it can be used to fulfill the needs of parents within the child welfare system.

Samuel, Hobden, LeRoy, and Lacey (2012) identified specialized needs for families with children with intellectual or developmental disabilities. It was found that this population is underserved by social service systems and is in need of additional assistance in dealing with their children. Interestingly, this study found that these families were in particular need of services that empowered them and understood their strengths.

2.8 Coaching and Social Work

The use of coaching within the field of social work first emerged within the medical field. The job of the medical provider is to inform the patient on the best treatment that is

needed. Thus, a need for decision coaching developed. Social workers were needed to work as decision coaches to help inform patients of all the possibilities of treatment. Medical providers have been trained to only give the necessary information. Decision coaches in the form of social workers can outline all options to help patients make informed decisions about their healthcare (Peterson, 2012).

In a study to find the extent to which early intervention providers use coaching strategies when working with families, Salisbury, Cambray-Engstrom, and Woods (2010) found that providers used coaching strategies more than what had been reported in previous literature. While these providers are trained to use coaching strategies when working with families, they are not accredited coaches. Fulcher and McGladdery (2011) stated that the role of social workers with foster families is growing into the role of a coach. Having accredited coaches may increase the amount of actual use and reported use of coaching strategies.

There are many studies that discuss different strategies used by social workers. Many of the strategies used appear to be very similar to coaching strategies. For example, in a qualitative study about the strategies used by social workers who use a family preservation program, Banach (1999) describes which strategies and coping skills are most successful in obtaining clear boundaries with families. Social workers discussed fostering independency in families, rather than dependency. In an effort to establish clear boundaries with a family, one social worker specifically told them, "I'm not supposed to be doing anything, I'm supposed to be guiding you – teaching you" (pp. 242). Although the term 'coaching' is not

used in this study, it is apparent that the strategies described by social workers are indeed coaching strategies.

Another example of social workers using strategies that are characteristic of coaching strategies is the creation of individualized programs. Providing individualized programs to clients is considered to be a coaching strategy (Ives, 2008). In one particular community, the need for individualized programs for families was established. This sparked the creation of a strength and empowerment based program, which provided services to families based on each family's unique needs. This program resulted in families who were higher functioning and a general feeling of empowerment within the family (Ray, Stromwell, Neumiller, & Roloff, 1998).

Coaching strategies are not only being used by social workers, but in some programs the word 'coaching' is also being used. Parent-Child Interaction Therapy is a mode of therapy where the service provider coaches parents while they are parenting. To find out if there was a way in which to increase the speed and effectiveness of coaching parents on their parenting skills, Timmer, Zebell, Culver, and Urquiza (2010) tested using this therapy in the home. Using observational and standardized measures, researchers found while coaching parents does help with parenting skills and improved child behavior, having in-home coaching did not make a difference. Parent-Child Interaction Therapy is most effective when the parent(s) receive the most coaching possible, regardless of environment.

In another instance where coaching is being specifically used, Beyer (2008) discusses the importance of enhancing family visitations within the child welfare system by using visit coaching. Visit coaching helps parents use their parenting skills in an effort to improve those

skills. Visit coaching also helps parents cope with their own emotions in addition to preparing them for their children's emotions during family visits. Parents are often unaware of the purpose of visits other than simply seeing their child. Visit coaching can help the parents understand that the purpose of visits is for them to show their parenting skills so that they may be reunified with their children. It helps parents meet the needs of their children, instead of having a visit where needs are not met and skills are not gained. Visit coaches can build upon the skills that the parents already have, instead of starting with the basics as many parenting classes do. If coaching were a part of the regular training of caseworkers, the need for an additional professional to provide visit coaching would be nonexistent as caseworkers are often the ones to supervise family visitations. In a similar study, Haight, et al. (2005) focused on the end of the visitations, which mothers identified as the most difficult aspect. Participants were given coaches to help them through this part of the visit. Coaches asked mothers what they thought would help their children separate from them at the end of the visit, and collaborated with mothers to formulate a plan that the mothers thought their children would best respond to. While the results showed that mothers who received coaching were more respectful of their child's needs, it was also found that these mothers were less engaged with their children. More research is needed to draw more conclusive results as only 20 mothers participated.

With coaching being helpful improve parenting skills of mothers who are not in custody of their children, it is understandable that it could be effective in coaching parents who expose their infants to substances prenatally. Ryan, Choi, Hong, Hernandez, and Larrison (2008) found that introducing a recovery coach decreased the likelihood that the

mother of a substance exposed infant (SEI) would have subsequent SEIs in comparison to mothers who did not receive the help of a recovery coach. The success of recovery coaches is attributed to the fact that recovery coaches increase the access to substance abuse services and increase the probability of family reunification.

Social workers are also used in families with children with disabilities such as autism, cerebral palsy, and developmental delays. Characteristics of social workers who work with families with disabled children were analyzed. There were many characteristics but one in particular stood out as a coaching technique. Having parents involved in steering the group showed positive outcomes, but only when the social worker was accomplishing other aspects of their role with the family (Sloper et al., 2006). Nowhere in the article do the terms ‘coach’ or ‘coaching’ appear, but it is apparent that at least one coaching technique is analyzed and found to be important when working with families. This idea is similar to the idea of co-construction: “Co-construction is the process whereby new meanings and solutions are generated by two or more parties, in this instance the service user and the social worker” (Miller, 2012, p. 132).

Social workers work with both court-mandated and voluntary clients. Social workers have reported that working with these two populations is very different, yet the welfare system only offers one approach to be used with both. A study was done to see if a solution-focused approach was beneficial to clients who are court mandated. A solution-focused approach includes treating the client as if they were the ones who are most knowledgeable about their situation, asking powerful questions, and establishing a collaborative relationship, where the client can come up with solutions and a plan of action. In using these techniques,

social workers found that mandated clients are more motivated to solve the problems that brought them into the system and are overall more cooperative (De Jong & Berg, 2001). The ideas within the solution-focused approach are very similar to the ideas of coaching, though this article did not specifically call the solution-focused techniques ‘coaching’ techniques. A solution focused approach does not require a direct connection between the past experiences of the client and the solutions they want to achieve. This approach requires minimal intervention from the caseworker and allows the client to come up with his or her own solution to the problem. The social worker uses questioning to help aid the client in coming up with a solution (Miller, 2012). Noble et al. (2000) exemplified several cases where this type of approach was successful with court-mandated clients.

Many families are not court mandated, such as parents seeking help when it comes to their children with disabilities (Sloper, Greco, Beecham, & Webb, 2006). The retention rate of low-income families in parenting education classes is low. A study was conducted using coaching techniques in parenting classes through the Families and Schools Together (FAST) program, which yielded a higher retention rate. Techniques included were empowering parents, having parents help in producing the program, and adjusting programs to fit the particular needs of each family. These were some of the techniques that attributed to the high retention rate of the program (McDonald et al., 2012). In yet another study on ways in which to increase engagement among clients, Kemp, Marcenko, Hoagwood, and Vesneski (2009) found that it is especially difficult to maintain engagement in services among ethnic populations. In corroboration with the previous study, techniques such as empowerment and promoting collaboration and partnership were found to aid in the retention of clients with

services, proving that coaching techniques can be beneficial to both involuntary and voluntary clients.

Another example of non-court mandated clients can include people within the homeless population. Historically, the homeless is a difficult population to engage. Cohen (1989) proposed that with the use of empowerment and offering voluntary services, the homeless can receive help. Specifically, using the strategies of appreciating the strengths of the client and building upon the client's knowledge can help the client engage and receive help. More specifically, the use of lifestyle coaching has been suggested to help improve the relapse rates among the drug addicted homeless population because the clients were able to choose certain aspects of their recovery, including identifying healthy behaviors to engage in (LePage & Garcia-Rea, 2012).

In their unique approach, McGoldrick and Carter (2001) found that coaches can help an entire family by just coaching a single member. The assumption is made that families work in a circular, rather than a linear motion. Knowing this, if one member of the family makes changes, this disrupts the regular flow of the familial system. If the coach is successful, the client will be able to withstand the resistance they face by their family members and help them make positive changes to the familial system. Often times, coaching can take less time than traditional therapy because of the emphasis put on the work of the client between sessions. Social workers have also been known to give relationship and marriage education to couples in the hopes that it will in turn have a positive effect on the children (Schramm, Futris, Galovan, & Allen, 2013). This idea is further supported by a study in which researchers tested the use of coaching methods in helping concerned family

members getting their drug-addicted relative into treatment. The program was successful in achieving high rates of engagement among drug-addicted adults (Landau, et al., 2004).

Coaching specifically has been seen in social work and even more so, the use of previously identified coaching strategies has been seen being used by social workers.

Coaching literature in the realm of social work is scant. *Values-Based Coaching: A Guide for Social Workers and Other Human Service Professionals* is the first book of its kind in that it is the first book to be published about coaching that is specifically for social workers. The next steps are to find out if social workers realize that they use coaching strategies and if they consider themselves to be coaches. If so, it is important that social workers become accredited coaches to fully realize their strategies for creating positive interactions with their clients. Williams (2012) stresses the significance of quality coach training as it is based on several fields within psychological research.

In order to understand what practices are used when serving families, a survey including several coaching techniques was administered to social workers, asking how often they used those techniques. Analysis of the survey results can provide a basis to bridge the gap between the fields of social work and coaching. This study is needed to help grow the field of coaching, particularly family coaching, since coaching has been found to be an effective way to help families (Allen, 2013). Additionally, this study will add to the body of existing research on ways in which the field of social work can be improved.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This correlational study was conducted using mixed-methods research. Mixed methods research consists of both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected to determine the extent that coaching strategies are used by social workers, if at all, and also to determine the attitudes social workers hold regarding coaching. Qualitative data were collected to gain additional insight to the knowledge and attitudes social workers have towards coaching. This chapter will explain how answers to the research questions: “Do social workers utilize coaching strategies in their work with families and if so, do they associate the techniques they use as coaching techniques?” were obtained.

3.2 Procedure

The instrument used in this study was a survey formulated by the researcher using the survey making website, Qualtrics.com (see Appendix A). Wood, Nosko, Desmarais, Ross, and Irvine (2006) found that the length of a survey can have an effect on the survey response rate; longer surveys tend to have a lower response rate. Thus the survey was kept as concise as possible and consisted of six demographic questions, two yes-or-no questions related to the topic of coaching, 14 Likert scale questions, and one open-ended question requesting additional feedback. Wood et al. (2006) also found that respondents generally feel more comfortable with surveys that are administered online rather than in paper form and find taking online surveys more enjoyable. This survey was administered online for practicality and in the hopes of attracting as many participants as possible and obtaining the most truthful

and accurate responses. Data collection lasted for approximately two months, allowing the researcher to exhaust all channels from which to recruit participants.

There were several purposes of the administered survey. First, the researcher wanted to find general demographics of the sample including gender, location, education level, job title, years worked in social work, and any additional credentials the participants held. Second, it was crucial to determine the degree to which social workers use coaching strategies, if at all, and if they consider themselves to be coaches in order to find answers to the afore stated research questions. Finally, general information about the participants' views and knowledge of the field of coaching were desired to enhance the information obtained from the quantitative data collection.

According to Jackson (2009), convenience samples are used by researchers to obtain participants in a manner in which it is most suitable for the researcher. A convenience sample was used through which the survey was administered via personal contacts in the social work field and social media websites such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) website. In addition to general postings, individuals who advertised being a social worker on their Twitter page were messaged directly and asked to participate in the study. Moreover, individuals who listed their e-mail address on the NASW website were contacted directly and asked to participate in the study. This sampling technique was chosen because it is difficult to obtain large lists of contact information for social workers. A snowball sample, in which participants were asked to forward the survey onto their colleagues, was also used. Snowball sampling is particularly

useful when many members of the population are inaccessible to the researcher (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005), as in this case with social workers.

The importance of establishing validity in research is reviewed in Jordan and Hoefer (2001). A study is valid when it measures what it intends to measure. The goal of this study is to find if social workers use coaching strategies when working with families and if they consider themselves to be coaches. An extensive review of literature was completed in order to find the characteristics of coaching and use those characteristics to determine if social workers use coaching strategies. This helped determine the content validity of the study.

3.3 Participants

For this study, the population of interest is social workers across the United States who work with youth and families. In an attempt to glean as many respondents as possible, social work students were also included in the sample, since many have worked in the field and/or are required to complete internships in which they work directly with youth and families.

The majority of participants were from the United States (95.9%) with most coming from the state of Maine (81.3%). There were so many participants from Maine because the contact from the Maine NASW expressed interest in the research and shared the research instrument with all of the members of the Maine chapter of the NASW. The researcher believes that this is the only chapter of NASW where sharing of the survey occurred, although many others were contacted and asked to forward the research instrument to their colleagues.

In order to make inference to the population of interest, the sample must be representative of the population (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Social work is prevalent throughout the United States (United States Department of Labor, 2014c), thus the researcher attempted to obtain respondents from as many states as possible. Further, the majority of social workers in the United States are female (United States Department of Labor, 2014b), the majority of participants in this study are female.

3.4 Measures

The methods for this study were reviewed by the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board (IRB#: 3656). This study did not require a full review by the IRB because participants only included professionals and the topic was not sensitive in nature. Therefore, the study received administrative approval. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in order to maximize data (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Quantitative data were emphasized for direct answers to the research questions, “Do you believe you use coaching strategies when working with children and families?” and “Do you consider yourself to be a coach?” The qualitative data enhanced the research in that it gave the researcher a better idea of participant attitudes and current knowledge regarding the field of coaching.

The quantitative portion of this study was in the form of correlational research. Correlational research is used when the data collected are used to find out whether or not a link exists between variables (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The variables in this study included: 1) whether or not social workers believe they use coaching strategies; 2) whether or not they consider themselves to be coaches; 3) and the extent in which they use certain

coaching strategies. The first portion of the study asked participants demographic questions such as gender and geographical work location. They were asked to list their credentials, how many years they have worked in the field of social work, and their current job title. Participants were asked whether or not they believed they used coaching techniques and whether or not they considered themselves to be a coach. Likert scales are commonly used to measure attitudes (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Using a Likert scale, participants were asked to rate how often they used various coaching techniques in their work with youth and families. Finally, participants were asked about their views on coaching, also using a Likert scale.

Nominal data is considered to be data that can be categorized while ordinal data is rank ordered (Jordan & Hoefer, 2001). The demographic questions in this study are in the form of nominal data and can be categorized. The Likert scale questions are in the form of ordinal data, as they measure using rank order the amount in which social workers use coaching strategies and their attitudes on coaching.

As part of the qualitative data collection, participants were asked if they had additional comments concerning the study. This type of question is open-ended and allows for qualitative data collection. Collecting qualitative data after quantitative data is constitutes an explanatory design within mixed methods research in that the qualitative data helps clarify the quantitative data. While qualitative data was not the main objective in this study than quantitative data, the quantitative data are enhanced greatly by the qualitative data (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2009). In this study, the qualitative data exceeded expectations and added useful insight to this study.

3.5 Assumptions

The survey questions were designed under the assumption that participants have a minimum of a high school diploma. It is also assumed that participants were currently working in the field of social work. Furthermore, it is assumed that all participants resided in the United States; however there were participants from the United Kingdom and Australia, which only added to the study. Finally, Solomon and Draine (2001) state the importance of understanding that quantitative results can allow researchers to generalize to the target population, however it cannot be assumed that the results apply to everyone within the target population. Thus, it is assumed that the results can be applied to many social workers but not to each and every one.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS & DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This study examines the scope in which coaching is used by social workers that serve youth and families. In the previous chapter, the procedures, participants, and measures for this study were presented. This chapter will provide the results of the data obtained from 171 social workers who work with youth and families through an online survey which presented both quantitative and qualitative type questions.

4.2 Demographics

The majority of participants work in the United States. There were two participants (1.2 %) from the United Kingdom and one participant (.6%) from Australia (Table 4.1). The snowball technique went unexpectedly well with the contact at the Maine branch of the NASW sending the survey to all of their contacts, resulting in 139 (81.3%) of participants from Maine.

Social work has formally been in existence for more than 100 years (Tannenbaum & Reisch, 2001) and has a national presence throughout the United States. Therefore, a national sample for this study is needed. The majority of participants reside on the east coast of the United States, with some participants from other parts of the country including Oregon and Texas.

Table 4.1 *Location*

Location	n	%
Australia	1	.6
Kentucky	1	.6
Maine	139	81.3
Maryland	2	1.2
Massachusetts	1	.6
Michigan	1	.6
Minnesota	1	.6
Multiple (ME & FL)	1	.6
New Jersey	1	.6
New York	5	2.9
No Response	4	2.3
North Carolina	6	3.5
Ohio	1	.6
Oregon	2	1.2
Pennsylvania	1	.6
Texas	1	.6
United Kingdom	2	1.2
Vermont	1	.6
Total	171	100.0

Most of the participants were female (84.8 %). One participant (.6%) chose not to answer the gender question and one participant (.6%) answered with something other than ‘female’ or ‘male’ (Table 4.2). This is comparable to the national representation of females in the field of social work. According to the United States Department of Labor (2014b), more than 80% of social workers are female

Table 4.2 *Gender*

Gender	n	%
Female	145	84.8
Male	24	14.0
No Response	1	.6
Other	1	.6
Total	171	100.0

All participants had received some sort of higher education. The majority of participants received a Master's degree (73.1%) (Table 4.3). Statistics on the amount of social workers with Master's degrees in comparison to social workers with Bachelor's degrees was not available. However, the NASW (2014) reported that 29% more Master's degrees were awarded in social work during the 2010-2011 academic year than Bachelor's degrees.

Table 4.3 *Education Level*

Degree	n	%
Associate's Degree	2	1.2
Bachelor's Degree	38	22.2
Master's Degree	125	73.1
Doctorate Degree	6	3.5
Total	171	100.0

Participants were asked to report the number of years they have worked in the field of social work. Means are often influenced by outliers (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009) thus, the median was calculated. The median number of years worked by sample participants was 13

years, while the mean number of years worked by sample participants was 14.39 years with a standard deviation of 10.081.

Table 4.4 represents the job titles of participants. Titles with eight or more respondents are listed while the rest are listed under “other”. Some of the job titles that fell under “other” were: professor, program manager, behavioral health specialist, and intern. Such an array of different job titles is in accordance with social work being a very diverse field. Northern Michigan University (2014) lists 13 subfields in which a degree in social work can be used. A few of the subfields include mental health, child welfare, and education.

Table 4.4 *Job Titles*

Title	n	%
Social Worker	27	15.8
Clinician	24	14.0
Therapist	16	9.4
Case Manager	15	8.8
Coordinator	13	7.6
Clinical Social Worker	12	7.0
Case Worker	10	5.8
Supervisor	8	4.7
Director	8	4.7
Other	38	22.2
Total	171	100.0

Table 4.5 represents specific credentials. Similar to job titles, credentials with 12 or more participants were listed while the rest are listed under “other”. Some of the credentials that fell under “other” included Behavioral Health Professional (BHP), Mental Health

Rehabilitation Technician (MHRT), and no additional credentials. Also, many participants listed several credentials.

None of the participants reported having a coaching credential. In contrast, 55% of participants consider themselves to be coaches (Table 4.7). Additionally, more than half of all participants believe that it is important for coaches to be credentialed (Table 4.10). These results will be further discussed later in this section.

Table 4.5 *Credentials*

Credential	n	%
LCSW	43	25.1
No Response	21	12.3
LSW	20	11.7
MSW, LCSW	18	10.5
LMSW – CC	12	7.0
MSW	12	7.0
Other	45	26.3
Total	171	100.0

Note: LCSW = Licensed Certified Social Worker, LSW = Licensed Social Worker, MSW = Master's in Social Work, LMSW-CC = Licensed Master of Social Work – conditional clinical

4.3 Quantitative Results

Results of “*Do you believe you use coaching strategies when working with children and families?*” and “*Do you consider yourself to be a coach?*” were tallied and reported in tables 4.6 and 4.7. Participants responded to these questions with either a “yes” or “no” answer. This type of answer was chosen to reduce ambiguity and allow the researcher to compare the answers to those questions with that of further questions in the survey. Those questions included specific coaching strategies and asked the participants to use a Likert

scale to describe the extent in which they use each strategy. There is a noticeable difference in responses to the two questions. The majority of respondents felt that they use coaching strategies when working with children and families. In contrast, the results of “*Do you consider yourself to be a coach*” were more even.

Table 4.6 *Quantitative Data*

	Yes (n)	Yes (%)	No (n)	No (%)	No Response (n)	No Response (%)	Total (n)	Total (%)
Do you believe you use coaching strategies when working with children and families?	159	93.0	8	4.7	4	2.3	171	100.0
Do you consider yourself to be a coach?	94	55.5	76	44.4	1	.6	171	100.0

Figure 4.1 presents graphically the large difference in answers to the two questions, “*Do you believe you use coaching strategies when working with children and families?*” and “*Do you consider yourself to be a coach?*”

Figure 4.1 *Reported Use of Coaching Strategies*

Participants were asked to rate how frequently they used certain techniques when working with youth and families. This was done to determine if social workers use coaching strategies when working with youth and families, and if so, the extent in which they use coaching strategies. The majority of respondents selected ‘very often’ and ‘often’ for their responses, although there were a few outliers who answered ‘sometimes’ and ‘never’. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) describe outliers as

results that show an infrequent exception to the general pattern of the data. There were no participants who answered any question with 'rarely' (Table 4.8).

The answers to questions in Table 4.8 corroborate the hypothesis that social workers use coaching techniques when working with families. Each question highlights a specific coaching technique. For all nine questions (Table 4.8) the majority of participants reported using each strategies very often or often.

Table 4.7 *Indicate how often you use the following techniques when working with children and families.*

	Very Often (n)	Very Often %	Often (n)	Often %	Some- times (n)	Some- times %	Rarely (n)	Rarely %	Never (n)	Never %	NR (n)	NR %
Working together, with the client(s) to help them come up with their own solution for their problems.	119	69.6	46	26.9	6	3.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Empowering client(s) to take charge of their own life.	126	73.7	44	25.7	1	.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Working off the personal strengths of the client(s).	139	81.3	30	17.5	2	1.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Holding client(s) accountable for their decisions.	98	57.3	64	37.4	8	4.7	0	0.0	1	.6	0	0.0
Customizing the approach to fit individual client(s) needs.	132	77.2	37	21.6	1	.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	.6
Providing support to enhance the skills the client(s) already has.	121	70.8	45	26.3	5	2.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

Table 4.7 *Continued*

Involving clients in goal setting.	121	70.8	44	25.7	5	2.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	.6
Focusing more on the present and future, rather than the past.	74	43.3	76	44.4	19	11.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	1.2
Asking questions to help the client(s) make connections and come up with solutions to problems.	113	66.1	49	28.7	9	5.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	n=1,043		n=435		n=56		n=0		n=1		n=4	

Note: NR = No Response

96.5% of participants answered the first coaching technique question, “*Working together, with the client(s) to help them come up with their own solution for their problems*” with “very often” or “often”. Haight et al. (2005) discusses the use of collaboration when working with families. This technique is used by coaches and is considered to be an explicit strategy used in coaching.

The majority of participants (99.4%) reported using the coaching technique “*Empowering client(s) to take charge of their own life*” either very often or often. Empowerment is a key coaching technique as described in Ives (2008). This strategy is the basis of many other strategies within coaching, such as working off the personal strengths of clients.

Moreover, 98.8% of participants reported using the technique “*Working off the personal strengths of the client(s)*” very often or often. Noble et al. (2000) illustrate the use of identifying personal strengths and building off of them. This is a strategy used in coaching in order to aid in goal setting.

“*Holding client(s) accountable for their decisions*” was reportedly used very often or often by 94.7% of participants. The ICF (n. d.) considers this technique a coaching technique. The use of this technique is not as widely discussed in literature on coaching as other techniques. Interestingly, this was the only technique that was reportedly never used by at least one participant. Though the ICF (n. d.) considers this a coaching technique, it may not be considered a coaching technique by others in the field, thus explaining the outlier for this question.

Furthermore, “*Customizing the approach to fit individual client(s) needs*” was reportedly used very often or often by 98.8% of participants. Wasylyshyn et al. (2012) discuss the importance of the use of this technique in the success of coaching in the field of executive coaching. Ives (2008) expands the use of this technique to include personal development.

Continuing with the same trend, 97.1% of participants reported using “*Providing support to enhance the skills the client already has*” very often or often when working with families. This strategy is very similar to “*Working off the personal strengths of the client*”. Noble et al. (2000) report the use of this strategy by a social worker working with a mother to regain custody of her child. In this instance, the social worker used this coaching strategy by building of the parenting skills the mother already had.

“*Involving clients in goal setting*” was used by 96.5% of participants either very often or often when working with families. Heimendinger, et al. (2007) reports the use of this technique in health coaching with families. This relates to the strategy of collaborating with clients and is considered to be a strategy essential to coaching.

Slightly less but still a majority, 87.7% of participants reported using “*Focusing more on the present and future, rather than the past*” very often or often. Hart et al. (2001) list this strategy as one that differentiates coaching from therapy. Like the strategy of holding clients accountable, this strategy is not as widely spread throughout coaching literature, explaining the fewer “very often” and “often” responses.

Finally, “*Asking questions to help the client(s) make connections and come up with solutions to problems*” was used very often or often by 94.7% by participants in this study.

George (2013) lists this technique as a specified coaching technique. This technique helps facilitate empowerment, another characteristic of coaching.

What is particularly fascinating about these results is that the majority of participants answered “very often” or “often” to the use of every coaching strategy listed. Additionally, the majority of participants reported using coaching strategies when working with families. In contrast, only slightly more than half of participants considered themselves to be coaches. Moreover, no participants listed a coaching credential when asked to list their credentials.

Next, participants were asked about their views on coaching. This was done to determine whether or not social workers are interested in receiving coach training and how important they feel it is for coaches to be credentialed. Additionally, this portion of the research was conducted in order to find out how familiar social workers are with using coaching techniques in working with youth and families and if they see coaching as an up and coming approach to serving families (Table 4.10).

Table 4.8 *Attitudes on Coaching*

	Very Much (n)	Very Much %	Somewhat (n)	Somewhat %	Neutral (n)	Neutral (%)	Very Little (n)	Very Little %	Not At All (n)	Not At All %
Are you familiar with social work professionals offering coaching services to the families they serve?	37	21.6	63	36.8	21	12.3	29	17.0	21	12.3
Do you see coaching as an up and coming approach to serving families?	54	31.6	61	35.7	37	21.6	15	8.8	4	2.3
How important is it to you that family coaches are credentialed?	72	42.1	41	24.0	40	23.4	8	4.7	9	5.3
How interested are you in receiving family coaching training?	47	27.5	60	35.1	34	19.9	14	8.2	15	8.8
Have you received coaching specific training?	24	14.0	35	20.5	30	17.5	30	17.5	64	37.4
	n=234		n=260		n=162		n=96		n=113	

While the majority of social workers reported using coaching strategies when working with families (93%), 58.4% reported being either “very much” or “somewhat” familiar with social work professionals offering coaching services to the families they serve. The researcher believes that the cause of this disparity is due to the fact that only 28.7% of participants responded with “very much” or “somewhat” when asked if they had received coach specific training. Social workers realize that they use coaching techniques but also understand that they are not formally providing coaching techniques because they are not accredited coaches.

Additionally, 67.3% of participants either “very much” or “somewhat” consider coaching as an up and coming approach to serving families. In regards to the importance of credentialed coaches, 66.1% of participants felt that it was “very much” or “somewhat” important. Further, 62.6% reported being “very much” or “somewhat” interested in receiving family coaching training. It is understandable that the answers to these questions had similar outcomes due to their similar nature. However, it is surprising to the researcher that with 93% of participants reportedly using coaching strategies, more participants would not feel the importance of credentialed coaches and the receipt of coaching specific training. The researcher believes because social workers already use coaching strategies when working with families, they may not feel that training for something that they already do is necessary.

A Pearson product-moment coefficient of correlation was configured between the questions ‘Do you believe you use coaching strategies when working with children and families’ and ‘Do you consider yourself to be a coach?’. This type of analysis is most useful

when both variables are quantitative (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). A significant correlation was found, $F = 6.007$, $p = .015$ (Table 4.11). Answering ‘Do you believe you use coaching strategies when working with children and families’ indicated the answer to ‘Do you consider yourself to be a coach’ [$F(1,169) = 6.007$, $p = .015$].

Also configured was a Chi-Square Test (Table 4.10) in order to determine whether or not the variables “Do you believe you use coaching strategies when working with children and families” and “Do you consider yourself to be a coach?” are dependent or independent from one another. The null hypothesis is that the answers to these questions are independent from one another. As stated in Agresti and Finlay (2009), if the Chi-square test reveals a p -value of less than .05, we must reject the null hypothesis. The results ($p = .031$, Chi-square test) indicate that we must reject the null hypothesis and therefore, answers to “Do you believe you use coaching strategies when working with children and families” are dependent upon answers to “Do you consider yourself to be a coach?”.

Table 4.9 *Results of Chi-square Test*

Do you believe you use coaching strategies when working with children and families?	Do you consider yourself to be a coach?			Total
	Yes	No	NR	
Yes	8 (4.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (4.7%)
No	66 (38.6%)	92 (53.8%)	1 (.6%)	159 (93%)
NR	2 (1.2%)	2 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (2.3%)
Total	76 (44.4%)	94 (55%)	1 (.6%)	171 (100.0%)

Note. $\chi^2 = 10.624$, $df = 4$. Numbers in parentheses indicate column percentages.

4.4 Qualitative Results

The qualitative portion of this study was in the form of an open-ended question at the end of the survey asking, “Is there anything else you would like us to know about your experience or opinions of Family Coaching?” Overall, participants had positive things to say regarding family coaching and some offered useful insight. More specifically, four themes were identified in the collection of this data. Themes included: 1) identifying coaching techniques within other practices used; 2) relating coaching specifically to strengths based practice; 3) having an understanding of the practices within coaching but not the term coaching; and 4) some participants reported being familiar with the term coaching and using the techniques associated with coaching.

Theme 1: Identifying coaching practice within other practices

The first theme that was identified was “identifying coaching techniques within other practice used.” There were 8 comments that identified coaching techniques within other

practices. One participant commented, “It seems as the term 'coaching' could fit into the multiple modalities that are already in place in my practice. Also coaching is utilized through the Socratic questioning modalities I utilize everyday.” There were many other practices mentioned, such as motivational interviewing. One participant wrote, “The only training/experience I have directly geared towards coaching has been via Motivational Interviewing. While I think "coaching" is apart of the work we do with clients, I would've never considered it to be a title or method, rather another tool/skill in my toolbox.” Signs of Safety was another method that several participants commenting on. Another participant wrote, “We use the Signs of Safety approach, which is a lot like coaching, empowering the parents to come up with their own solutions rather than our telling them what to do.”

Theme 2: Relating coaching to strengths based practice

There were many other methods that participants related to coaching. However, the strengths based method was listed more often than any other method, with six participants mentioning it. One participant wrote, “The term "coaching" can mean so many things. By offering guidance on techniques while having the client determine the best fit goal, is what I consider "coaching" and that method of therapy is taught with strength based perspective in MSW programs already but could be a "specialist" for families training I suppose.” Another commented, “Family coaching, as explained in your study, is really the same thing as a strengths based approach to working with clients. I believe ALL social workers should be using the strengths based approach when working & it should not be a "specialty”. ”

Theme 3: Understanding coaching practice but not the term coaching

While many participants were able to connect coaching with similar methods, 12 participants articulated that they see the techniques used, but simply do not have a word for them. One participant commented, “I’ve never heard the term “family coaching” but it is in essence what social workers do.” Another participant wrote, “I think a lot of social work professionals use coaching techniques in their practice often but may not formally call it “coaching.” Another simply wrote, “I have honestly not heard this term but do use this approach.”

Theme 4: Familiar with the term coaching and uses coaching techniques

A smaller, final theme was identified with four participants reporting that they are familiar with coaching and understand that what they are using are coaching techniques. One participant wrote, “I have coached families and been coached by other professionals while working as an Early Interventionist.” In addition to reporting using coaching techniques, another participant also related coaching techniques to other methods and wrote, “I am trained as a personal lifecoach and offer this service separately from the therapy work I do. As part of my therapy work with individuals, couples and families, I use coaching techniques when appropriate. All of the techniques you listed in the first section of this survey are just what I consider part of good therapy, especially if you are using motivational interviewing, cognitive behavioral, strengths-based and solution-focused techniques. I do not know what Family Coaching training actually entails, so it is hard for me to endorse it, but I do believe all therapists would benefit from understanding and using the techniques you listed in the

first section of the survey.” What is particularly interesting about this last comment is that no participants listed coaching as an additional credential.

Credibility

It is important to establish not only instrument validity and reliability, but internal validity as well (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The quantitative data collected not only answered the research questions, the qualitative data supported the findings. The quantitative data collected confirmed that social workers use coaching techniques when working with families. The qualitative data supported the fact that social workers use coaching strategies in that many reported using the techniques or other methods that incorporated the same techniques as coaching.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

Information presented in this section represents data collected from 171 social workers who participated in an online survey regarding the use of coaching strategies by social workers. This section will offer results of the hypotheses and how the results relate to the existing research on coaching in the field of social work.

The hypothesis that social workers use coaching strategies but are unaware that they are using coaching strategies was false. The vast majority of participants reported that they use coaching strategies when working with children and families. Concurrently, participants reported an overwhelming use of the specified coaching strategies. With these results, we can conclude that many social workers use coaching strategies when working with youth and families and are aware that the strategies they use are coaching strategies.

The hypothesis that social workers do not consider themselves coaches was found to be somewhat true. An overwhelming amount (93%) report using coaching strategies, while 55% report considering themselves as coaches. This result is particularly interesting because none of the participants listed a coaching credential, yet over half of the participants reported that they consider themselves to be coaches. Additionally, the majority of social workers in this study reported that they feel that being a credentialed coach is important.

Overall, social workers are using coaching techniques but they are not credentialed coaches and only half consider themselves to be coaches. This is consistent with the research findings on the types of strategies social workers use when working with youth and families. Social workers work with clients to help them come up with solutions to their problems, they empower clients to take charge of their lives, they work off the personal strengths of the clients, hold the clients accountable for their decisions, customize their approach to fit individual needs, provide support to enhance existing skills, involve clients in goal setting, focus on the present and future, and ask questions to help clients come up with solutions to problems. Social workers report using all of these strategies, however, many relate these strategies to other practices, which is also consistent with the research. Social workers are already using these techniques and should receive the proper training to ensure that they are using the techniques appropriately, are serving youth and families to the best of their abilities, and that the services they offer clients are mainstreamed with the services offered by other social workers.

The availability of obtaining a coach credential is not widely spread through social work degree programs, additional specializations through the National Association of Social

Workers, or individual state agencies. However, social workers are interested in coach training. They feel that it is important that coaches be credentialed. Additionally, many social workers view coaching as an up-and-coming approach to serving families. These findings support the notion that coaching should be more widespread among social work degree programs and should also be made available as additional education within social work agencies and through the National Association of Social Workers.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, & IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The goal of this study is to identify the extent to which social workers are using coaching strategies, if at all, when working with youth and families and to identify the attitudes social workers have when it comes to the field of coaching. The following section will discuss conclusions about the results received in this study, limitations of the research, and implications for future research, the fields of coaching and social work, and for families.

5.2 Conclusions

With the considerable growth in the field of coaching (Grant, 2011) and extent to which it has permeated new fields such as family life education (Allen, 2013), it is important to recognize other fields coaching may already be seen in. Coaching has been shown to be an effective method in increasing skills, well-being, coping, and goal-directed self-regulation (Theeboom et al. 2013) and therefore should be named when using strategies that are essentially coaching strategies. This study will offer initial research regarding the fact that coaching strategies are indeed used in social work.

This study found that social workers extensively use coaching techniques in their work with families. This study is consistent with the existing research about the types of techniques social workers use when working with families. For example, Beyer (2008) describes the use of coaching strategies during visits between parents and their children who are in state custody. Furthermore, De Jong and Berg (2001) reported the use of specific strategies such as building a collaborative relationship and working with clients to set goals

within the field of social work. This study will bridge the gap between literature that reports the unspecified use of coaching strategies and the specified use of coaching strategies in social work.

This research found that social workers are interested in receiving coaching training and feel that it is important for coaches to be credentialed. This is consistent with Allen and Huff's (in press) findings that family professionals are interested in receiving coach training. This evidence supports the idea that coaching training programs should be more widely spread among universities and social work programs. Furthermore, coaching certification programs should be more prevalent among trainings and resources within social work agencies.

5.3 Limitations

In order for this study to be generalized to the population of social workers throughout the United States, a broader sample would need to be taken from more locations. The majority of participants in this study were from the east coast of the United States. A more diverse sample would include a relatively equal amount of participants from all parts of the country. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) stress the importance of obtaining a representative sample.

Larger sample sizes can lead to more significant results. In correlational studies, it is recommended that there be at least 100 participants to support external validity of the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). While this study has more than the recommended number of participants, having more would strengthen the external validity and would increase its generalizability.

The qualitative data collected in this study were limited in that participants were not required to answer the last question, which asked, “Is there anything else you would like us to know about your experience or opinions of Family Coaching?” Interviewing participants about their attitudes about coaching in social work would have added to the research tremendously. A drawback of mixed-methods research is the time needed to conduct the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). While interviewing participants would allow for more effective qualitative data collection, the time needed to conduct this research would be too consuming.

5.4 Implications

This study shed light on the extent to which social workers use coaching strategies when working with youth and families. It also demonstrated how social workers feel about the idea of coaching credentials and their attainment. Social workers realize they use coaching techniques and they want to be trained in using these methods. For social work to be effective, social workers need to be trained in the techniques that they use when working with families. These findings are useful for future research, for social workers who work with youth and families and are interested in expanding their training and knowledge, and ultimately, for families. The subsequent section discusses implications for future research within social work and coaching and for professionals in the field of social work.

Implications for Research

As previously discussed, the body of research regarding coaching and families and more specifically, coaching and social work is limited. This study will add to the existing research on the use of coaching strategies with families and the use of coaching techniques

by social workers. It is the hope of the researcher that this study spurs additional research on the topic of social work and coaching, as coaching has already been shown to be an effective method of working with families in a variety of contexts, including by not limited to, social work (Noble, et al., 2000).

It is concerning that social workers use techniques that have been proven to be successful (Theeboom et al. 2013) but there is little research that discusses the specified use of coaching within social work. With the use of coaching strategies by social workers dating back to the 1970s, it is imperative that more research be produced on the intersection of the two fields. This research provides a starting point for studies on the use of coaching strategies by social workers, but more is needed to truly determine how well coaching serves families in the context of social work.

The field of coaching has grown tremendously in recent years, especially considering how long the practice has existed. However, since there is so little research on the use of coaching within social work, it is important to see that future research analyze the effectiveness of coaching strategies within social work. This study can be used as the basis for future studies on the coexistence of these two fields.

Implications for Coaching

The field of coaching has grown tremendously over the past decade (Grant, 2011). This study provides yet another avenue in which coaching has expanded. This study has the potential to demonstrate how it can be applied to a multitude of fields. Coaching is known to be a multibillion-dollar industry (ICF, 2012). This study shows that coaching is also a way to effectively serve families.

Implications for Social Workers

The use of coaching techniques has already been shown to be effective in other fields, such as family life education and parent education (Allen, 2013; & McDonald et al., 2012). It is only natural that the specified use of coaching strategies will progress into social work. The researcher predicts that with further research into this topic, social workers will eventually become required to be accredited as coaches. Since social workers are already using coaching strategies, and are expected to do so (Smith & Carlson, 1999), it is imperative that they receive formal coach training so that coaching is standardized among social workers. In a recent study of 180 family professionals, Allen and Huff (in press) found that 99% of family professionals feel that it is important for family coaches to be accredited. Accreditation is also important to ensure that social workers are using these techniques correctly and that the use of coaching techniques among social workers is streamlined.

Implications for Families

The ultimate goal for any improvement or change within the child welfare system is to better serve families. Having additional training for social workers in a field such as coaching that has already been shown to be effective will undoubtedly benefit families. Families, especially those who receive social services, need highly trained and qualified professionals working with them. These families are in particular need of professionals who are capable of showing respect, building upon strengths, and empowering individuals. Coaching techniques not only embody all of those characteristics, but it allows social workers to serve families in a professional and effective manner.

While the available research suggests the use of coaching strategies by social workers is effective, there is a concern. Hartman and Laird (1983) discuss the implications of moving a social worker more towards the role of a coach. This requires not only a change in thinking by social workers, but it changes the relationship between worker and client. Transference has been shown to be problematic within families receiving coaching services from social workers. Coon and Mitterer (2007) define transference as the shifting of feelings a client has towards an important person in their life to the practitioner. It is imperative that social workers have the ability to recognize when transference is occurring and are able to avoid it.

In conclusion, the results of this study indicate the prevalence of the use of coaching strategies by social workers who work with youth and families. This study also found that although social workers understand they use coaching strategies, they do not consider themselves to be coaches. Furthermore, it was found that social workers are interested in receiving coaching-specific training and find that accreditation for coaches is important. Having coach-accredited social workers will further expand the field of coaching and allow social workers to more effectively serve youth and families.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT CONSENT LETTER

My name is Megan Burroughs and I am a graduate student in North Carolina State University's Family & Youth Development program. For my thesis research, I am conducting a study in the hopes of finding a connection between coaching techniques and techniques used by caseworkers when working directly with youth and families.

Please complete this survey if you

- are a social worker/caseworker
- work with youth and families
- are a social work student and work with youth and families

There is growing research that is finding coaching within several different fields. Coaching techniques consist of building upon the strengths of the client, asking questions to help clients come to their own conclusions, and involving clients in setting goals for themselves, among other things. It is my theory that many coaching techniques are being used on a regular basis by caseworkers and I hope to bridge the gap between coaching and social work.

Your participation in this study is voluntary but appreciated. If you choose to participate, you will be asked about the different techniques and methods you use when working with children and families. Your expected time commitment for this survey is approximately 10 minutes. You may exit the survey at any time but only completed surveys can be used in this study.

You will not be asked to input your name in any part of this survey. The answers you give in this survey will be confidential and you will in no way be linked to this study.

In order to obtain as many research participants as possible, I would greatly appreciate it if you would forward this survey on any of your colleagues who work directly with youth and families.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Megan Burroughs. You may also contact my faculty supervisor, Dr. Kimberly Allen at kimberly_allen@ncsu.edu. If you have further questions, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus, (919) 515-4514 or Jennie Ofstein, IRB Coordinator, Campus Box 7514, Raleigh, NC 27695, (919) 515-8754.

Thank you,

Megan Burroughs
Graduate Student at North Carolina State University
541-326-8811
mburrou@ncsu.edu

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT SURVEY

1. Please list the state in which you work.
2. How many years have you worked in social work?
3. What is your education level?

High School Diploma

Associate's Degree

Bachelor's Degree

Master's Degree

Doctorate Degree

Other (please list)

4. Please list any additional credentials you have (i.e. MSW, LPC, CFLE).
5. What is your gender?
6. What is your job title?
7. Do you believe you use coaching strategies when working with children and families?

Yes

No

8. Do you consider yourself to be a coach?

Yes

No

9. Indicate how often you use the following techniques when working with children and families.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often

Working together, with the client(s) to help them come up with their own solution for their problem(s).

Empowering client(s) to take charge of their own life.

Working off the personal strengths of the client(s).

Holding the client(s) accountable for their decisions.

Customizing the approach to fit individual client(s) needs.

Providing support to enhance the skills the client(s) already has.

Involving client(s) in goal setting.

Focusing more on the present and the future, rather than the past.

Asking questions to help the client(s) make connections and come up with solutions to problems.

10. Please answer the next 5 questions using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Not At All	Very Little	Neutral	Somewhat	Very Much

Are you familiar with social work professionals offering coaching services to the families they serve?

Do you see coaching as an up and coming approach to serving families?

How important is it to you that family coaches are credentialed?

How interested are you in receiving family coaching training?

Have you received coaching specific training?

11. Is there anything else you would like us to know about your experience or opinions of Family Coaching?