An exploration of factors that motivate career choice in social work among a sample of undergraduate social work students.

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An Exploration of Factors That Motivate Career Choice in Social Work Among a Sample of Undergraduate Social Work Students

by

Gina M. Bulcke, B.A., H.B.S.W.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the School of Social Work in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Social Work at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, 1994
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### BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES
- Agriculture: 0473
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- General: 0306
- Anatomy: 0287
- Biostatistics: 0288
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- Cell: 0379
- Ecology: 0529
- Entomology: 0353
- Genetics: 0359
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- General: 0786
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- Biogeocchemistry: 0425
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- General: 0579
- Adult Development: 0621
- Clinical: 0622
- Developmental: 0623
- Experimental: 0624
- Industrial: 0625
- Personality: 0699
- Psychological: 0634
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- Social: 0641

### PHYSICS
- General: 0579
- Medical: 0581
- Modern: 0582
- Nuclear: 0583
- African: 0331
- Asia, Australia and Oceania: 0332
- Canadian: 0341
- European: 0342
- Latin American: 0343
- Middle Eastern: 0344
- United States: 0345
- History of Science: 0586
- Law: 0398

### SOCIAL SCIENCES
- General: 0523
- Anthropology: 0524
- Cultural: 0525
- Business Administration: 0526
- Accounting: 0527
- Banking: 0528
- Management: 0529
- Marketing: 0530
- Economics: 0531
- Canadian Studies: 0532
- African Studies: 0533
- Asian Studies: 0534
- European Studies: 0535
- Latin American Studies: 0536
- Middle Eastern Studies: 0537
- United States: 0538
- History: 0539
- Law: 0540
- Political Science: 0541
- International and Area Studies: 0542
- Public Administration: 0543
- Public Policy: 0544
- Social Work: 0545
- Sociology: 0546
- Criminology and Penology: 0547
- Development: 0548
- Education: 0549
- Ethnic and Racial Studies: 0550
- Individual and Family Studies: 0551
- Labor: 0552
- Public and Social Welfare: 0553
- Social Structure and Development: 0554
- Theory and Methods: 0555
- Transportation: 0556
- Urban and Regional Planning: 0557
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Abstract

This exploratory-descriptive study reports data from a survey of third and fourth year undergraduate social work students. It explores factors that motivated their decision to pursue a career in social work. The sample was composed of 87 undergraduate social work students (48 third year students and 39 fourth year students) enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work Program at the University of Windsor during the 1993-1994 academic year. Data were collected by means of a researcher-administered, structured questionnaire. Its' four sections included: 1) background information; 2) personal attributes and early life experiences; 3) professional opinions and values; 4) career choice and interests.

Socio-demographic information revealed that the majority (85.1%) were female, they had an average age of X=28.04 years with a mode of 21 years, over 50% had never been married, and the majority (90.6%) were attending university on a full-time basis. Also, the majority had no prior degree or diploma (54% of the sample), before entering social work. Eighty-eight percent of the sample reportedly planned to pursue a master's degree in social work, and the majority (37.9%) were the born first in their families of origin.

Analyses of the respondents personal attributes and early life experiences revealed that in regard to personal attributes, the respondents endorsed attributes that have traditionally guided the profession, namely the attribute 'I care a lot about people and their problems'. Conversely, the personal attribute 'I have always been able to share my feelings with other' was endorsed the least. In regard to early life
experiences, death of a loved one, domestic violence and serious illness were endorsed as being experienced the most by respondents, and poverty, drug abuse and being a victim of crime were experienced the least.

The perceived professional opinions and values of respondents revealed that the ability to make an important contribution to people and society was most important, and the ability to work with social workers and other professional as a team was ranked the most important job characteristic.

In regard to the level of appeal of specific fields of practice, the sample endorsed counselling, client advocacy, and family/marital therapy as most appealing and administration, program/policy design, and research as the least appealing. Similarly, working with people with family/marital problems, and working with abused/neglected children were perceived as the most appealing client groups for the sample.

Primarily, socio-demographic data including: year of study, age, gender, educational status, family type, and private practice, yielded significant statistical relationships with such dependent variables as; career fields of practice, influential life experiences, personal attributes, professional values, and age. Implications of the study are directed toward future research, social work curricula, and the social work profession in general.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my husband

Darryl

and my children

Brian and Alexander,

without their patience, love, and encouragement

this year would not have been possible

To my family, whose constant support and encouragement

have been a source of strength throughout my life’s endeavours
Acknowledgements

Many individuals contributed to this thesis. First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. M. J. Holosko, who has guided me through this sometime seemingly insurmountable research process. His competence and knowledge in many areas, in particular research, have been truly inspirational. I will always be grateful for the time he dedicated to this project and the knowledge imparted to me. He has contributed immeasurably to a very worthwhile educational experience.

I would also like to extend my thanks Dr. J. Chacko, Director, School of Social Work, for his assistance and guidance in completing this research project, as well as in helping the process along through the appropriate channels. My gratitude is extended to Dr. M. Gold, Director Department of Communication Studies, for her initial assistance and support of this research project, and to Dr. S. Selby, Professor, Department of Communication Studies, for graciously accepting the task as external reader and providing his guidance and support during the completion of this thesis. Thank you to Dr. S. Ramcharan for assisting in this process as defense chairperson.

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A special thanks to Sandra Kearney, Sandy Van Zetten and Ann Merner, Secretaries, School of Social Work, for their assistance.

My appreciation also goes out to the third and fourth year undergraduate social
work students who volunteered their time to complete my research questionnaire. Their input into this project was essential. Thank you to the following professors and instructors who allowed me to take valuable time from their classes; Dr. M. J. Holosko, Dr. F. Hansen, Dr. W. Gallant, Mr. W. Marcotte, and Ms. G. Fisher.

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Last but certainly not least of all, are the most important people in my life - my family who have also contributed to this project with their love and constant support.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Purpose</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The concepts</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of the Literature</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Occupational/Career Choices of Individuals</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Historical Perspective</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Motivational Factors</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. The Career Choices of Women</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. The Motivation to Pursue a Career in Social Work</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Literature Review</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Setting</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Population and Sample</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Procedure</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Questionnaire</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results and Discussion ........................................... 37
I. Background Information .................................... 37
  Discussion of Background Information .......... 40
II. Personal Attributes and Life Experiences. .......... 43
  Discussion of Personal Attributes and 
  Life Experiences ........................................ 52
III. Professional Opinions And Values ................... 54
  Discussion of Professional Opinions 
  and Values ............................................. 59
IV. Other Statistical Analyses .............................. 61
  Independent variables with other 
  dependent variables .................................. 61
  Independent variables with main dependent 
  variables ............................................. 64
  Discussion of these Variable Relationships .... 68

Conclusions .................................................... 72
I. Conclusions Related to the Literature 
  Review .................................................. 72
  A. The Occupational/Career Choices 
     of Individuals ..................................... 73
  B. The Motivation to Pursue a Career 
     Choice in Social Work ............................. 74
II. Conclusions Related to the Findings of the 
    Research Questions ................................ 75
III. Limitations .............................................. 79
IV. Recommendations ...................................... 81

Appendices:
  Appendix A: COVER LETTER and INFORMED 
               CONSENT FORM ................................. 84
  Appendix B: QUESTIONNAIRE ............................. 87
  Methodological Notes .................................... 96
  References .............................................. 97
  Vita Auctoris .......................................... 106
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Educational Background of Undergraduate Social Work Students (N=87)</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Birth Order of The Sample (N=87)</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The Ranked Means of Personal Attributes That Motivate Career Choices in Social Work (n=86-87)</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The Ranked Percentages of Occurrence of Early Life Experiences (n=35-86)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The Ranked Means of Early Life Experiences That Influenced the Decision to Pursue a Career in Social Work (n=23-49)</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The Perceived Label or Role of the Sample in Their Respective Families of Origin (n=87)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Professional Opinions and Values of the Sample (n=86-87)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>The Ranked Means of the Importance of Social Work Job Characteristics to Respondents (n=87)</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>The Level of Appeal of Working in Various Social Work Fields of Practice for the Sample (n=85-87)</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Statistical Analyses of Socio-Demographic Variables with Other Independent Variables</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Statistical Analyses of Socio-Demographic Variables with Dependent Variables</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An Exploration of Factors That Motivate Career Choice in Social Work Among a Sample of Undergraduate Social Work Students

People spend substantial parts of their adult lives working in some employment capacity. The role and meaning of work in one's life has broad significance, and the choice of employment and/or an occupation or career present a difficult and complex task for most individuals. Kantor (1960) rationalized the complexity of this process of occupational choice by reviewing some factors which influenced career selection among persons. He indicated that...

"forces within the individual reflecting his unique psychological development, his diffuse needs, his aptitudes and interests, his self concept and personal role orientations are important determinants of occupational preference. Familial, social and cultural influences which produce social role orientations and demands. Consider, moreover, special experiences in determining whether an individual's life will proceed along one or another of various paths. Add to these the career opportunities open to some and denied other persons, and the importance of having sufficient information about possible careers. And, finally, consider the fact that unconscious, as well as conscious, factors impinge unpredictably on career decisions, and indeed the process of occupational choice becomes an intractible anomaly". (p. 47)

The concept of work, one's perception of work, and the meaning of work are important factors in influencing individual differences in choosing an occupation or in career selection. Thus, when one's career choice corresponds with one's needs and one's perception is congruent with one's choice, then one increases the likelihood of subsequent satisfaction and tenure in their chosen occupation. An
individual's work needs have generally been categorized as 'intrinsic' or 'extrinsic' (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). The former emphasizes that one's work should contribute to one's self-esteem, self-actualization, and fulfillment of life. Extrinsic needs are those rewards that work brings once completed, including: pay, fringe benefits, and security, for examples. Therefore, in selecting an occupation or a career, individuals usually make compromises and set priorities so that the rewards of work are maximized.

Generally, the field of vocational psychology and career development can be said to have begun in 1909 with the publication of Parsons' landmark book *Choosing a Vocation*, which introduced reasons why individuals selected certain careers or professions. Since that time, researchers from a range of academic disciplines, including social work, psychology, education, labour relations, etc., have contributed theory, empirical knowledge, and practical information about vocational psychology in general and career selection and motivation specifically. Despite such efforts, the literature pertaining to motivation and career selection in the field of social work are minimal at best.

Kadushin in 1957, addressed the National Conference on Social Welfare in Philadelphia, and questioned why individuals made the career choices they did. Concurrently, at that time in the United States, there was a dire shortage of social welfare personnel, particularly professionally educated social workers (both BSW's and MSW's), and he noted that this was affecting the overall delivery of social welfare services. Subsequently, a number of American schools of social work
conducted research studies to better understand motivational reasons for selecting social work as a profession, and factors which influenced career choices, as well as their educational implications (Pins, 1960). It appears that studying motivational reasons of students and graduates was undertaken in order to learn about their backgrounds, employment and life experiences, motivational reasons for selecting social work, and eventual career aspirations (Pins, 1960).

The previously noted research void in study of motivational reasons for choosing a career in social work over the past thirty years has resulted in the same questions being raised today by researchers (Grossman & Perry, 1994). Indeed, understanding motivational reasons for entering social work has implications for a variety of stakeholders namely, the profession itself, accrediting bodies, schools of social work and the clients served by the profession. Never before has accountability and relevance been such integral components of day-to-day social work practice from a variety of perspectives, and an understanding of why people enter social work may assist the profession in better understanding itself, its' education and training, and how individuals come to choose this career.

**Statement of Purpose**

One of the many sequelae of the Industrial Revolution has been a qualitative change in the notion of the nature of work and its function, both for individuals and society. Between 1850-1900, the issue of a defined career emanating from
traditional work e.g. crafts, jobs, occupations, and professions, presented itself to society in general as a new idea. During this time, the notion of a career meant scheduled mobility, the cultivation of skills, education and training, and the entire coherence of an intellectually defined and a goal-oriented occupational life (Bledstein, 1976). Today, a career includes many of these same attributes but frames them more cohesively in a lifelong context ranging from: motivational choice to education and training to career selection to professional growth and development. In this regard, the linear orientation of this concept and its incrementalism are both conscious and systematic aspects of this development.

Yankelovich and Immerwahr (1984) examined three possibilities related to the primary motives for working. Similar to Maslow’s (1954) typology regarding the hierarchal fulfillment of needs, the first level of motivation perceives work primarily as a means of survival. At this level, the motive for working is the desire to feed, clothe, and shelter one’s self and one’s dependents in order to survive. A second level of motivation assumes that the basic survival needs have already been met and the motivation places a heavy demand on improving one’s standard of material well-being. A third level takes both survival and increasing standards of living as a given, builds on them, and deems personal growth and self development as the primary motive for working (p.66).

Motivational reasons for selecting social work can be construed from the standpoint of either professional motives or personal ones. In regard to the former, when one examines the foundation or essence of social work, it presents itself as
an altruistic helping profession. Specifically, the attributes that set social work apart from other professions are the commitment to serve the poor, minority, disadvantaged, disabled, and dependent members of society. In this regard, social workers have functioned historically as the 'social conscience' for society, as mediators and advocates of people in need (Turner & Turner, 1986). Besides this, a host of other professional issues such as the task and function of social work, its role in society, people's orientations, perceptions of social work practice, and experiences with the profession itself, constitute the remaining motivational reasons related to the profession's appeal.

Personally, the motivation to select social work as a career usually requires one to go to great pains and expense in selecting, planning, and implementing a conscious career choice. One may surmise several possible personal reasons that may motivate one to choose social work as a career e.g. people orientation, good interpersonal skills, a need to help others, a need for self fulfillment, etc. However, an inquiry into the personal factors that motivate choice provides individuals pursuing a social work career with an opportunity to take inventory of themselves and their motives, and may provide schools of social work with data that may address or identify particular needs of their students. Thus, the nature of the profession itself appeals to individuals who have professional or personal motives as such.

The purpose of this study was to determine the motivation of students who choose social work as a career. This study employed an exploratory-descriptive
design with a survey approach and was directed at determining the relationship between specific factors influencing motivational choice, namely birth order, life experiences, educational and employment experiences and other socio-demographic characteristics of the BSW students themselves. The emphasis of this study was on exploring and identifying the extent and nature of the relationship between these study variables. Implications are directed toward educators in schools of social work in order to help them better understand what motivates people to come into social work and in turn, their understanding of how to educate and train these entry level professionals.

**Rationale for study.** As previously indicated, although the subject of vocational psychology and career choice have been important to researchers for most of this century, very limited systematic research attention has been devoted to understanding motivational factors affecting career choice in social work. This study, therefore, fills a distinct void in the social work literature.

This topic also has relevance as it relates to the issue of professional autonomy. In short, as the profession evolves, it becomes important for both educators and practitioners to understand more about who they are, how they practice, and how they are effective. Thus, a study on motivational factors may impart knowledge on these practice concerns which form the basis of the profession's identity and autonomy.

Further, researching motivational factors seems to be a timely issue for the
profession of social work as well. The demands on accountability are prominent from both within and external to the profession. Accountability, as Levy (1988) described it requires evidence that a social worker knows the moral nature of the action, whether it can be justified and how (p. 27). The resolution of ethical dilemmas require mediation, negotiation, and compromise. These dilemmas and tasks create much personal stress for the practitioner and are influential factors in the inherent nature of day-to-day social work practice. In turn, they may constitute significant pressures that lead to burnout, disillusion and alienation, to deviant professional behaviour, and/or to a flight from the social work profession itself. Compounding these realities are the current issues of licensure, liability, accreditation, practice effectiveness, and professional conduct. Thus, the extent to which the profession ignores such concerns inhibits its ability for professional growth, development, and actualization.

Finally, researching this topic has decided educational implications. Essentially, social work entails generic and specialized education and training that prepares individuals to perform their professional duties in a competent manner (Barker et al., 1987). The purpose of professional education is two-fold: 1) to teach basic information and skills relevant to the profession; and, 2) to socialize individuals into the profession itself (Khinduka, 1987). As such, social work programs should reflect (as well as prepare graduates) to influence prevailing social attitudes, issues, and problems of the profession (Holosko et al., 1991). Ideally, a social work education should meet the needs of students so that they become competent and
ethical practitioners. Thus, this study may assist admission committees and educators in better understanding the type of students entering the school of social work, the factors motivating their decision to enroll in a program and pursue a career in social work, and the program's ability to be attentive to the aspirations and attributes of these applicants, based on their personal characteristics and life experiences. In this regard, failure to understand the motives of students selecting the career of social work may lead to an unfulfilled educational experience.

The concepts. Motivation or the verb to motivate is defined by Webster's *New Collegiate Dictionary* (1961), to provide with a motive; to impel; incite (p. 550). Vocational/ career choice takes into account relevant psychological, social, and economic factors that allows individuals to make an actual career choice or decision. Career is defined by Webster's *New Collegiate Dictionary* (1961) as a profession or calling demanding special preparation and undertaken as a lifework; as to follow diplomacy as a career (p.125). Greenhaus (1987) defines career as a pattern of work related experiences that span the course of a person's life.

For the purpose of this study, socio-demographic variables include; birth order, gender, marital status, age, and educational experiences. Life experiences include personal events that have occurred in one's life. Influential life experiences include personal events that may or may not have had a significant impact on one's ability to make choices, particularly career choices. Personal attributes include individual characteristics such as being helpful, caring, or a
good listener. **Professional opinions and values** refer to opinions and values related to social work that students value as important in their professional career such as, being able to make an important contribution to people and society or the occupational versatility of social work. **Students** in this study are third and fourth year full and part-time undergraduate social work students currently enrolled in the BSW program at the School of Social Work at the University of Windsor during the 1993/1994 academic year.

The definition of **social work** selected for this study was taken from the CASW Code of Ethics contained in Yelaja (1985) where the purpose of social work was presented as: "a profession committed to the goal of effecting social changes in society and the ways in which individuals develop within their society for the benefit of both" (p.360).
Review of the Literature

There is a scarcity of literature specifically addressing the topic of the motivation to pursue social work as a career. More specifically, there is a minimal amount of empirical or theoretical research that explores what motivates individuals to pursue a career in social work. The related literature on this subject matter will be reviewed according to: I) occupational/career choices of individuals; II) the motivation to pursue a career in social work.

I. Occupational/Career Choices of Individuals

A) Historical Perspective

Overall, the Industrial Revolution for Canada and the United States, from about 1870 to the 1970's generally shifted the main sector of the economy from agriculture to industry. The current post-industrial revolution is shifting North American economies from traditional "smokestack" manufacturing industries to those based upon information, services and new technologies (Yankelovich and Immerwahr, 1984). It took decades to accommodate the cultural and social implications of the first revolution, and it would be optimistic to assume that society will not face serious social and economic changes in coming to terms with the changes that are transforming the workplace today.

Current economic conditions have changed in important ways with two
tremendous shifts resulting in the kind of jobs held by working people in the Western World. One shift was the move from blue-collar jobs toward white collar jobs, and the other was the movement from jobs in industry to jobs in the service sector. Yankelovich and Immerwahr (1984) suggested that in North America this movement has "elevated the work ethic to a position of strategic importance" (p. 63). Indeed, managers can no longer stimulate one's motivation through the existing reward system and/or through traditional methods of supervision; instead, they must rely on the internal motivations of job holders to guarantee higher levels of effort and productivity.

Even though work and the motivation to work has changed, it clearly remains the principle activity of adult life. Amongst others, Freud (1961) capsulized the importance of work to optimal psychological functioning when he noted "the healthy adult is one who has the ability to love and to work" (p. 97). Thus, he perceived of work as one of the two great spheres of human activity necessary in binding each individual more closely to the human community.

Virtually all adults - male and female - engage in some form of regular work activity or behaviour, whether it is actual paid employment, volunteer work, or family work (raising children, running a household, etc.). Although the nature of work typically engaged in by men and women may differ, their reasons for working, are usually the same (Astin, 1984). Astin proposed a model that defined both the psychological factors (e.g. work motivation) and the cultural-environmental factors (e.g. sex-role socialization) that interact to produce one's career choice.
Although the concept of work is a multi-faceted and too complex to be evaluated in its entirety, a modest approach was taken during the early 1930s when economists, psychiatrists, sociologists, and psychologists joined forces to study the reasons why people worked in certain organizations (Ginzberg, 1988). Despite the volumes of investigations exploring various aspects of occupational decision-making, no single or adequate theory has been developed to explain how the multiplicity of factors within the environment, and forces within the individual, act and react on each other so that individuals arrive at a conclusion related to their occupational choice (Ginzberg, 1988).

Ever since Parsons' (1909) seminal work on vocational choice, theorists and researchers have worked energetically to increase an understanding of career decision-making processes. His book *Choosing a Vocation*, outlined the 'matching of men and jobs' to career decision-making. This approach specified that career choices should follow the three steps of: 1) self-knowledge; 2) knowledge of occupational alternatives; and 3) a process of 'trust reasoning' to find a good fit or "match" between persons and job, became a foundation of the field and a central basis for vocational counselling (p.54).

Since 1909, the existence of numerous theoretical views of this process has been of significant help in guiding empirical research and making sense of the accumulating evidence of elements related to career decision-making. The theorists in the field, notably, J. Holland (1972, 1973, 1985), D. Super (1957, 1963), the Ginzberg group (1966), and J. Crites (1969, 1976, 1981) have
elaborated on the nature and process of career choice and development over the
life span.

B. Motivational Factors

Although many factors related to vocational decision-making are still
unexplored, significant bodies of theoretical and empirical research have shown a
clear development toward unravelling aspects of this complex phenomenon.
Specifically, in terms of acceding to the theoretical foundation of definitive works
which have shaped this field of study, one is compelled to examine Bandura's
(1977) social learning theory. Bandura proposed that learning and related
behaviour are viewed from three sets of interacting influences: 1) background or
given influences such as gender, ethnicity, and ability; 2) psychological or
personal self-concepts factors such as attitudes, beliefs, and previous experiences;
and 3) environment or social factors that affect the individual. From this context,
psychological functioning involves a "continuous reciprocal interaction between
behavioural, cognitive and environmental influences" (p.34). Thus, one's motivation
and ultimate decision to pursue a career is dependent on many factors, and this
process has been studied by researchers across many fields.

Similarly, Tiedeman and O'Hara (1963) developed a theoretical model of
decision-making and described the process as continuing through an
implementation stage characterized by induction into the environment. This was
an assertive attempt to reform the environment in which the individual is integrated.
Subsequently, Harren (1979) refined this theory to describe the career decision-making process among college students. Both of these models conceptualized career decision-making as following a developmental progression from awareness of the need to make a decision -- through to exploration and crystallization, and finally to the commitment to decide upon something.

Social science theorists have explained this decision-making process from a variety of levels. For instance, the basic assumption of the theory of occupational choice developed by Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad and Herma (1951) was that an individual reaches his ultimate decision, not at any single moment in time but through a series of cumulative decisions over a period of many years; the overall impact being the determining factor. The basic elements of this theory were: 1) occupational choice is a process; 2) the process is largely irreversible; and 3) compromise is an essential aspect of every choice. Once again, the multi-faceted aspects of the decision-making process in choosing a career are an integral component of this concept.

Other theorists have focused on the interactional aspects of the decision-making process in choosing a career. Super (1963) conceptualized one's career choice as an implementation of the vocational self-concept, and postulated essential characteristics of the vocational self-concept namely, clarity, certainty, refinement, stability, and realism. Similarly, Krumboltz, Mitchell and Jones, (1976) reported about the interaction of genetic, environmental and learning factors in influencing career decision-making. As well, Gottfredson (1981) postulated a
number of factors that guided the processes of compromise and circumscription which occurred during decision-making. Pitz and Herren (1980) reviewed career decision-making from the perspective of information processing and decision theory. It cannot be denied that personalities have a lot to do with one's occupational or career choice.

Holland's (1972, 1973, 1985) theory of vocational choice holds that generally people are motivated to seek out occupational environments consistent with their personalities. In a 1988 American study comparing general occupational themes of women of four undergraduate academic majors (Social Work, Business, Music and Math/Computers), using the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory, Holland showed a congruence between personality type and later selection of a college major, consistent with his theoretical framework. Subsequently, in another 'college student study', Augustin (1985) sought to determine the interests of adult students at the University of Wisconsin, and explored the process of selecting a major field of undergraduate study. He concluded that a majority of adults were working toward a college degree primarily for career-related reasons, in order to develop a new career or to advance in a current job. More specifically, the fields of business, education, social work, nursing and accounting were the most popular majors selected in this study. This study reported that indeed, personal characteristics such as interests, occupational plans, self-development goals, abilities and skills have a major influence on one's choice of a field of study. To elaborate, previous work experience was a major influence on choice of field of
study among adults, but not with younger students. As well, adults also indicated that age was a factor in their choice of a field of study. Interestingly, half of the adult juniors and seniors had changed their majors at least once, and two-thirds selected their major after enrolling in college (p. 29).

An essential feature of these studies is that educational/career decision-making is a developmental process, in that individuals begin at a stage of pre-awareness and move through awareness, planning, commitment, and implementation. Clearly, it has been determined that factors which influence the decision-making process as such include: personal characteristics (e.g. personal identity, self-esteem, and decision-making style); the developmental tasks to be accomplished; and, the task and context conditions under which the decision is made. Although they have not been as well documented in the literature or as systematically studied, other influences such as gender, social status, education, age, intrinsic values and environmental variables have also been found by researchers to influence the decision-making process in career/occupational choice (Farmer, 1985).

Finally, Astin (1984) proposed a needs-based socio-psychological model which incorporated four important constructs: motivation, expectations, sex-role socialization, and the structure of opportunity, that interacted to produce career choice, which in turn was implemented into work behaviour. This model assumed that work motivations were the same for men and women. However, work expectations, and hence work outcomes in the form of career choice and occupational behaviour, tended to differ because of sex-role socialization (which
rewarded and reinforced gender-differentiated behaviours) and because the structure of opportunity for men and women differed.

However, recent employment trends in North American society that directly affect women, giving them greater freedom to choose a wider range of options, has resulted in an opportunity structure that has become more equalized. Although certain professions (i.e. nursing, social work, etc.) continue to be dominated by either men or women, developments in these areas are allowing the conditions of employment and the pattern of career opportunities to shape initial career and employment choices that men and women are making in today's society. The motivational factors of both men and women, although distinct provide a greater awareness of the career decision-making process.

C. The Career Choices of Women

Since gender has been shown to be a variable that influences the decision-making process in career choice, and since this study is about the profession of social work, a female dominated profession, part of this review of the literature will be devoted to exploring the career choices of women. Although, the field of vocational psychology has had theoretical and applied utility, its focus has until recently been primarily on the career development of men (Osipow 1975, 1983). In other areas of psychology as well as related academic disciplines, females have traditionally been largely ignored in the literature. As a response to this, Tyler (1978) noted that "much of what we know about the stages through which an
individual passes as he prepares to find his place in the world of work might appropriately be labelled "The Vocational Development of Middle Class Males" (p.40).

There are probably many reasons for this gender bias, including assumptions that historically, women did not work as their place was in the home, and that if they did work, theories of career development generated with men in mind would be adequate for understanding women’s vocational motivation and behaviour. This reality is slowly changing and it parallels the role of women in the workplace. For example, the last 20 years or so, have been characterized by widespread growth of interest in research related to women and their career development. Such research has formed the basis of some theoretical development as well as the development of practical efforts designed at understanding this issue from a women's perspective (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987).

According to Tsuchigane and Dodge (1974), aspirations among females tend to be underdeveloped due to social and cultural conditioning or to sex role socialization. Referred to as 'sex-stereotypic' (Marini, 1976), such aspirations were generally thought to be partly responsible for the limited career opportunities available to women (Spaeth, 1977). Bain and Fottler (1980) suggested that as a result of 'anticipatory socialization' adolescent females form vocational self-concepts which differ from those of adolescent males and which later produce different career choices. Even when female aspirations are somewhat equivalently developed, they may not be matched with the needs of the organization. As one
may surmise, this deficiency, according to Hennig and Jardim (1977), thwart women's aspirations and in turn, particular achievement. Spitze and Waite (1980) reported that since many women were motivated to work for the reason of 'just wanting to work', they would likely be induced to accept initial jobs with lower earnings and status provided the positions offered some prospect for advancement.

In the wake of Herzberg et al.,'s (1959) landmark motivation study, researchers explored the antecedents and the effects of intrinsic motivators (e.g. achievement, recognition, responsibility, etc.) versus extrinsic ones (e.g. supervision, security, working conditions, etc.). Subsequently, Hulin and Waters (1971) observed, for example that it was the intrinsic factors which were more important in determining overall job satisfaction. However, Quinn et al., (1974), Andrisani and Shapiro (1978), and Miller (1980) suggested that motivations of working women may be too complex to be classified in this single dichotomy.

For instance, Mincer (1978) revealed that women engage in substantially less mobility at all tenured occupational levels. Further, they generally indicate less willingness than men to accept jobs in other areas 'Niemi, 1974). However, this disinclination may be the result of differential opportunity structure (Lloyd and Niemi, 1979; Rosenfeld and Sorensen, 1979), of organizational and career 'filtering processes' (Bartol, 1978), or of family responsibilities (Mincer, 1978).

Thus, researchers like Spaeth (1977) contended that the relative immobility of women reflected a deficient commitment to pursuing a career. Women tended to
see their jobs as a 'here-and-now' means of self-fulfilment, rather than a step in a career progression (Henning & Jardim, 1977). More often than not, women find themselves either in a satisfactory career path, or trapped by interlocking effects of their work experience, earnings and unemployment which deprived them of career opportunities (Lloyd & Niemi, 1979).

II. The Motivation to Pursue a Career in Social Work

The research studying motivational reasons for pursuing social work as a career is cyclical, as interest in the subject seems to surface in different decades. For instance, during the 1960s, a considerable amount of attention was given to this topic across the United States where there existed a shortage of social workers, and a concerted effort was made by schools of social work to recruit students. At that time, research was directed toward studying the typology of students entering social work so that recruitment programs could better meet the needs and demands of students interested in the field of social work. Additionally, the majority of the surveys and empirical research in this area are idiosyncratic to certain geographic areas, with exception of a few national studies.

Although part of this review devoted some attention to the fact that gender issues are relevant in the consideration and decision-making process of a career or occupation, surprisingly [given the profession is gender biased], an examination of the literature exploring motivational factors in pursuing a career in social work
devotes limited attention to this issue.

Social work has traditionally emphasized the need to focus on values that have guided the profession based on an ideology of humanitarianism and service for the welfare of all people (Bartlett, 1954; Brill, 1990; DiNitto and McNeece, 1990; Gorden, 1962). The 1967 preamble to the code of ethics adopted by the National Association of Social Worker's (NASW) in the United States, stressed the need to recognize the dignity and worth of all human beings, respect for individual differences, and a commitment to service. Similarly, the U.S. Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) (1982), suggested that admissions and student self-selection processes tend to attract persons whose basic values reflect the threefold mission of social work: caring, curing, and changing (Morales & Shaefer, 1989). Thus, social work’s primary goals have historically centered around values of the Judeo-Christian tradition and principles of democracy, values that are often given relatively low priority by the public domain. Currently, these values are embodied in the problem-person-situation perspective of social work, known as the ecological systems perspective (Germain, 1973; Meyer, 1983; Siporin, 1980), which forms a more distinctive, and characteristic feature of social work’s approach to helping people. This helping approach, which is the current norm in the profession, focuses on the holistic, interrelated configuration of problems in social living, the personal/social attributes of individuals and collectives, and of their life situations.

Across the United States and Canada during the 1950s and 1960s, a 'critical' shortage of social welfare personnel, particularly professionally educated social
workers existed. It was estimated that approximately ten to fifteen thousand new social workers were needed annually to fill existing vacancies, replace those leaving the field, and to staff new positions (Pins, 1963). Collectively, at that time, all schools of social work in the United States and Canada had only been graduating about two thousand students annually. Effective recruitment programs seemed to be the answer however, these programs were seriously handicapped by the lack of definite knowledge regarding the student population who chooses social work. To respond to this problem faced by schools of social work across Canada and the United States, studies were undertaken during the 1950s to provide information about age, sex, marital status, education and working conditions for members of the social work profession.

Only a few research studies specifically addressing motivation and vocational choice in social work were found in a search of the literature. In 1959, the then existing American Association of Schools of Social Work conducted a national survey on why students choose social work, as background material for the Hollis-Taylor (1951) report on social work education in the United States. During this time individual schools of social work conducted limited studies or surveys of their own students and graduates to learn about their background, employment, how they learned about social work, and when and why they made the career choice they did. The majority of these studies involved small unrepresentative samples, and although their findings were informative and useful in recruitment programs at that time, they could not be assumed to be definitive for all students enrolled in schools.
of social work across Canada and the United States. It was not until the landmark study "Who Chooses Social Work and Why?" (Pins, 1963) that studied 2771 entering first-year full-time students enrolled in the 1960-61 academic year, that added to the growing understanding of the personnel, socio-economic, and educational characteristics of students who ultimately choose social work as a career. Social work students, according to the findings of this study [conducted in 1960], represented an upwardly mobile group. Students entering schools of social work in 1960 were predominantly recent college graduates, who came from lower middle class homes, and who had lived the greater part of their lives in large cities in the eastern part of the United States. The study indicated that among the respondents 57% were female and 43% were male. Almost 70% of the students were under thirty years of age and about 10% were over forty years of age. Forty-two per cent of the students who responded to this study had been or were married, and surprisingly more male than female students were married.

The decision to pursue a career in social work was made relatively late, and for most students it was not the first career choice. The major sources of information about social work (i.e. work experience, courses and instructors, and social workers themselves) were also the factors reported by the students to have influenced them the most when they selected a career in social work. Most students who had considered or tried other careers prior to social work indicated that they felt they were better suited for social work than their first career choice or other possible occupations. In general, students chose social work because they
valued its goals and functions and found it to coincide with their assessment of their own interests and skills. Very few were influenced by social work's monetary or status remunerations.

As a follow-up to Pins' (1963) study, Golden, Pins and Jones (1972) conducted a similar study that was designed to obtain information concerning the personal, socio-economic, and academic backgrounds of the first-year social work student population of 1966. It was recognized that the profession's understanding of its manpower situation and its ability to anticipate future needs and problems in this sphere would be enhanced by a periodic compilation of data similar to the data collected in the 1960 study. Approximately, 40% of the students were male and 60% were female. Almost one-half of the students were under 25 years of age when beginning their graduate social work education, and almost half (48%) of the students were or had been married. Similar to the findings in the 1960 study, the three major sources of information about social work were also the key factors influencing the choice of social work as a career: work experience, courses and instructors and, relatives and friends in social work.

When this follow-up study was undertaken, it was assumed that many substantial changes which had occurred in the nation's social climate and in social work itself, would be reflected in the backgrounds, past achievements, motivation, and interests of students matriculating for the master's degree in social work in 1966. Thus, an effort was made to measure the impact on the composition of the social work graduate student body of the heightened social consciousness which
began with the New Frontier and moved into the Great Society and included the
development of the Peace Corps, Vista and the whole network and anti-poverty
programs, and changes in the civil rights movement.

These national studies were the impetus for future research, even though none
were as broad in scope as the 1960 and 1966 studies. Researchers began
studying specific motivational factors in an effort to determine what influences
information on the subject of the underlying motives of individuals pursuing a
career in social work. For instance, Lackie (1982) found that males who chose to
go into social work came from families characterized by disruption and stress more
often than females who go into social work. Lackie's 1982 survey of more than
1500 social workers revealed that over two-thirds identified themselves as
'parentified' or 'over-responsible' in their families of origin. A disproportionate
number of them were first born children and they saw themselves as having been
assigned and have accepted the role of the parentified child; the over-responsible
good child, the mediator, or 'go-between', and/or the burden bearer for the family.
Lackie noted, "there is evidence... that one's choice of social work as a career may
be an attempt to deal with an earlier imbalance of parentification/infantilization"
(1983, p. 315). The major focus of this study was to assess the family correlates
of career achievement in social work. As stated, he believed that the application
of birth order explained variations in behaviour and personality characteristics, as
well as abilities and skills. "The role of caretaker allows for some symbolic
gratification of one's needs through identification with the client or patient to whom one is giving. And, over time, a fairly stable balance may be struck between giving care to others and receiving care" (McCarley, 1975, p.223).

The issue of birth order was studied by Adler (1959) when he studied professions in general and proposed that one's position in the family of origin at birth could be influential on personality development. The first born child with younger siblings was seen as being faced with a great deal of frustration and envy at birth of younger siblings and titled this position the "dethroned" child. Since Adler's model, researchers have ascribed traits to different birth order positions. Rossi (1965) found that first born were given more responsibility in a family. Bradley (1968) found that first born attended college more often than people with younger birth positions. Relevant to this study, Rossi (1965) found that first-born females were most likely to go into occupations that are extensions of childhood experiences of nurturing and responsibility.

Later, Bedford and Bedford (1985) administered personality tests to a group of British social workers and found scores deviating from general population data with respect to heightened tendencies toward self-blame, mistrust, and self-sufficiency, as well as higher empathy norms. These findings were consistent with descriptions of strengths and weaknesses of parentified children, previously cited in the literature about this subject (Miller, 1981; Wegscheider, 1981).

Conceptions about how the family may elicit and shape child development have emerged from the study of alcoholism (Black, 1981; Wegscheider, 1981;
Woititz, 1985). Children of alcoholic parents have been found to bear a burden of premature responsibility within the family. Schaef (1986) wrote about co-dependence as a progressive disease modeled along the lines of alcoholism. She discussed the implications of helping professionals who have had exposure to addictive or compulsive behaviours in their family of origins.

"Staff members need to recognize that working in this field is a constant invitation to indulge in their disease (co-dependence), and they need the tools and support to continue focusing on their own recovery as well as the recovery of the client. If staff members do not admit that they are actively recovering, they become part of the problem and impede the progress of the client." (p. 93-94)

Professional careers, like family backgrounds, are rarely free from turmoil. Babcock (1953), in discussing her experience with social workers wrote: "I have been struck by the frequent occurrence of ... feelings of inadequacy, of being depreciated, of inability to record as required " (p.418). McCarley (1975) also referred to the feelings of being overburdened with a need to give, a theme common to clinical caretakers, who "tended to feel excessive responsibility for helping people, and ... have a proclivity for spurring themselves to greater and greater effort to rescue their patients" (p.22).

Other studies have compared the personality traits of social workers with other professional groups. For instance, Rosenberg (1957) used a concept of 'faith in people' in assessing the values of various professional groups. He found that social workers rated highest in valuing work with other people and lowest in valuing extrinsic rewards such as status and money. Similarly, Polansky (1957) found that social workers seemed willing to accept low pay and identified with the
least privileged groups in society. He considered the professionals in social work 'marginal people' themselves because of their apparent low ambition.

Green (1975) found no differences between a group of graduate students studying rehabilitation counselling and a group studying social work. This study was possibly anomalous because of a non-representative gender ratio in the sample. It could also have reflected the similarity of students who chose two types of helping or caring professions. Feld (1987) examined the self-perceptions of power among social work and business students and found there were differences between these two groups. He noted that a sub-group of the social workers interested in administration were more similar to the business students than they were to clinically oriented social workers. In their choice of a helping career, Marsh (1988) studied 133 social work and business students. Social work students were expected to show similarities to students in other helping disciplines such as nursing, teaching, or psychology, while business students were expected to represent a contrast group, on the basis of their choice of a career not primarily concerned with helping people. This study was concerned with the addictive and compulsive behaviours in the family backgrounds of people with eating disorders and alcoholism. This study found that gender-birth order interaction, some dimensions of values, and the addictive/compulsive profiles in family of origin all appear to have some relevance to career choice. Groups of social workers and business students were found to differ significantly from each other on these variables, as measured in this research. The results of this study justify further
interest in how such variables may find expression through a helping career.

Understanding the derivatives of career choices does not immunize against future uncertainties, however it can enhance the capacity to tolerate them. Thus, the better and more able one is at recognizing past experiences, the better one is as a professional, in balancing personal and professional life.

Summary of the Literature Review

The previous literature revealed that there is general consensus that occupations or careers tend to recruit individuals who possess the characteristics and values consistent with orientations of their particular chosen profession. Researchers from various disciplines have attempted to explain the occupational/career decision-making process and how factors such as gender, age, social status, environmental variables and intrinsic values influence this process and ultimately choice. Literature related to the career choices of women is only now receiving the attention it deserves. This is of particular interest to the profession of social work, which has historically been dominated by women. Until recently, research in the area of career/occupational decision-making was directed toward men.

Literature related to the motivation to pursue a career choice in social work appears to surface in different decades. Earlier studies were motivated by the
shortage of social workers in social welfare and the profound decline of students in schools of social work across Canada and the United States. Subsequent to these initial studies, researchers studied specific motivational factors such as gender, birth order, personality traits and value orientation, as a means of learning about the types of people entering the profession and what attracted them. The theoretical notions in the review of the literature, were useful in formulating the empirical base from which the research questions were derived for this study.
Research Questions

As previously indicated in the literature, a minimal amount of research has been conducted studying factors that motivate students to pursue a career in social work. Further, with the exception of a few studies conducted 20 or 30 years ago, the literature has not systematically addressed this issue from its multifaceted perspectives. This exploratory-descriptive study is directed at studying specific motivational factors for pursuing social work as a career. As there are a number of variables which will be examined in relation to motivational factors, a number of research questions are posed in lieu of formal hypotheses. These questions provide the framework for the ensuing method and data analyses. They attempt to reflect relevant issues derived from the previous literature review.

1. What is the background of the sampled undergraduate social work students enrolled in the school of social work?
2. What are the personal attributes of undergraduate students that may have motivated their choice to pursue a career in social work?
3. What life experiences influenced career choice in social work?
4. What are the professional opinions and values of the undergraduate students?
5. What are the career interests of undergraduate social work students?
The Setting

The University of Windsor located in Windsor, provided the setting for this study. The City of Windsor is located in Essex County in the south western part of Ontario, and has a population of approximately 200,000. It is an international border city located across the river from Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A. Although Windsor is a medium sized city, it has strong ties to the rest of Essex County which is predominantly rural.

The School of Social Work at the University of Windsor, which is part of the Social Science Faculty, offers a four year Bachelor of Social Work (B.S.W.) degree. The first two years of the B.S.W. program (pre-Social Work) are open to all students at the university, whereas entry into the third year is on a competitive and suitability basis. The undergraduate social work program is organized as a professional sequence which combines studies in the social sciences, the humanities and other options along with professional courses. The program objective is to prepare undergraduates for general practice, social work and social work graduate study. Enrollment in the B.S.W. degree program has generally numbered over 300, with less than half of these students being registered in the third and fourth years of the program.

At the University of Windsor, the first classes in social work were offered in 1966 as part of the Bachelor of Arts program. By the fall of 1967, the Bachelor of
Arts program had become the Bachelor of Social Work. The BSW program, designed as a full-time study, was formally accredited by the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work on January, 1975 (University of Windsor School of Social Work, 1983) and has been subsequently accredited to date. An average of approximately 54 students per year graduate from the program.

The Population and Sample

The population sampled for this study was composed of all third and fourth year undergraduate students enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work program during the 1992/1993 academic year. There were 57 third year students and 59 fourth year students enrolled in the program during this time on a full or part-time basis. All students were sampled, of which 87 constituted the final N. This represented 75% of the total number of students enrolled in the BSW program. From those students sampled 55.2% were third year undergraduate social work students, and 44.8% were fourth year undergraduate social work students.

The Procedure

The questionnaire was administered to 116 third and fourth year undergraduate social work students during a compulsory third year practice class (which was divided into three sections), and a compulsory fourth year research class (which was divided into two sections). With the instructors permission, the researcher
attended these classes and administered the questionnaire directly to the students. The students in each of the classes were provided with the option of completing the questionnaire during class time or submitting it at a later date. Those students volunteering to complete the questionnaire were given time in their respective classes. Ninety-five percent of the students completed the questionnaires during class time and returned the questionnaires directly to the researcher once completed, and 5% returned the questionnaires within two weeks to the researcher through the student mail service.

An attached cover letter outlining the study purpose, assurance of confidentiality and human subject consent form were attached to the survey (see Appendix A). All data analyses were programmed through the micro-computers at the University of Windsor’s School of Social Work Computer Lab. All analyses utilized the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS/PC+) (Norusis, 1991).

The Questionnaire

Questions asked on the survey instrument derived from two sources. The first was from survey instruments used in other similar studies (Golden, Pins, and Jones, 1972; Perry, 1994; Pins, 1963). Second, the researcher and her thesis advisor Dr. M. Holosko, at the School of Social Work developed the remaining questions. The questionnaire was comprised of five sub-sections that contained a total of 22 questions, most of which were close-ended or fixed choice. These
were as follows:

1. **Background Information:** i) age and gender; ii) marital status including the number of dependent children; iii) current educational status, including prior post secondary degree(s)/diplomas obtained, and plan to further education with a master's degree in Social Work; iv) issues involving family of origin, including number of children in family of origin, birth order of respondent, and family type.

2. **Personal Attributes That May Have Motivated Choice:** i) specific issues that may have influenced career choice were itemized on an 11 item inventory scored as 1 = 'Not at All', 2 = 'Somewhat' and 3 = 'Very Much'.

3. **Life Experiences That May Have Influenced Choice:** i) 10 items noting common childhood experiences experienced by respondents, and the level of significance of these experiences in the choice to pursue a career in social work scored as 1 = 'Not at All Significant', 2 = 'Somewhat Significant' and 3 = 'Very Significant'; ii) a 5 item inventory identifying the perceived role characteristic of respondents in their families of origin (i.e. 'None Apply to Me', 'Over-Responsible', 'Rescuer', 'Scapegoat' and 'Irresponsible').

4. **Professional Opinions and Values:** i) the degree of importance of specific professional values and opinions in the decision to enter the school of social work
as measured by a 5 item inventory with scores ranging from 1 = 'Very Unimportant' to 4 = 'Very Important', ii) the attitude of respondents with regard to the groups of people in society that social work should pay attention to (i.e. the poor or all groups).

5. **Career Choice and Interests:** i) when did the respondent first consider social work; ii) the major source from which the respondent first learned about the profession of social work; iii) was another career considered before deciding on social work; iv) the level of importance of specific job characteristics; v) the level of appeal of specific fields of practice; vi) the level of appeal of specific client groups; and vii) the prospect of entering private practice at some point in the respondent's career.
Results and Discussion

The results and discussion of data are presented in the following sub-sections; i) background information; ii) personal attributes and life experiences; iii) professional opinions and values; and iv) other statistical analyses. In these analyses, missing data are excluded by item not by case, and as a result, sample sizes may vary accordingly in this presentation.

I. Background Information

Of the 87 undergraduate social work students who comprised the sample, 55.2% were third year students and 44.8% were fourth year students; of this total, 85.1% were female and 14.9% were male. Their ages ranged from 21 to 52 years. The mean age was 28 years, the median was 25, and the mode, or most frequently reported age was 21 years.

The marital backgrounds of respondents were diverse and ranged from married to never married. More specifically, 55.2% of the sample were never married, 32.2% of the sample were married, 6.9% of the sample were involved in a common-law relationship, 4.6% of the sample were divorced and 1.1% were separated. When further queried about the number of children each respondent had, the responses varied from having no children to having 5 children. More specifically, 69% had no children and 13.8% had one child.

The educational status of the respondents was predominantly full-time for
90.8% of the sample. Table 1 illustrates the educational backgrounds of the social work students which ranged from having a college diploma or a bachelor's degree to having obtained no prior degree(s) or diploma(s).

### Table 1

**Educational Background of Undergraduate Social Work Students (N=87)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous Educational Background</th>
<th>Frequency (f)</th>
<th>Relative Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. No Prior Degree(s)/Diploma(s)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. College Diploma</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, in regard to Table 1, the majority of respondents (88.5%) indicated that they planned to further their education with a Master's degree in social work.

The order of birth of the respondent's in their families of origin ranged from being born first to being born tenth or more. Table 2 illustrates these data.
### Table 2

**Birth Order of the Sample (N=87)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth Order in Family of Origin</th>
<th>Frequency (f)</th>
<th>Relative Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 1st</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 2nd</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 3rd</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 4th</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 6th</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 5th</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. 10th or More</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>87</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table 2, 88.4% of the sample were either 1st, 2nd, or 3rd born. Finally in this respect to their families of origin, the majority of respondents were born in two-parent families (89.7%), and 10.3% were born in one-parent families.
Discussion of Background Information

The background information about this sample revealed generally very few surprises, in terms of descriptive characteristics of the undergraduate social work students. Although few studies are available for comparative purposes, what was available when compared to these data suggest that a modest case for generalizability could be made.

Specifically, the gender, marital status, birth order, and student educational level, were fairly typical of undergraduate social work student studies of this nature. However, in this study, the age of the students revealed a slightly older cohort than what was expected and their prior educational experiences reflected a unique profile in this regard.

The data from this study appears to be consistent with the findings of Hemrich’s (1987) study of all undergraduate social work students enrolled in the social work program at the University of Windsor and Spezowka’s (1991) study of third and fourth year undergraduate social work and nursing students enrolled at the University of Windsor. In the 1987 study, 194 undergraduate students comprised this sample where 162 (83.5%) were female and 32 (16.5%) were male. The mean age was 24.3 years and the mode was 21 years of age. The ages ranged from 19 to 40 years. In the 1991 study, 56 undergraduate students comprised the sample of social work students, where 49 (87.5%) were female and 7 (12.5%) were male. The mean age ($\bar{X}$) for social workers was 27.4 years, and the ages ranged from 21 to 52 years.
The similarity of this sample to national ones also appears more similar than dissimilar. In a study of 27 schools of social work that currently exist in Canada, 22 responded to a 1990 national survey conducted by the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work (CASSW). This national study found that overall, females comprised 93% of the total student enrollment in full and part time study. In this study, the ratio of males to females was almost 6:1. However, although speculative, this finding suggests that women continue to pursue careers such as social work that have traditionally been dominated by them despite the growing trend toward employment equity realized during the past decade in other professional domains. Age ranges varied in this sample of third and fourth year undergraduate students, as revealed by the mean age being 3% greater than the median. In terms of comparative studies, this was similar to what was noted in Spezowka’s (1991) study, and an older population than what was noted in the Hemrich’s (1987) study conducted at the University of Windsor in which approximately 50% of undergraduate social work students were under the age of 22 years. One may infer that these older students seem to return to social work after other pursuits.

The marital status of this sample was mostly distributed between married and never married, a finding that was slightly lower but similar to the samples studied by Hemrich (1987) and Spezowka (1991). As indicated previously, the majority of respondents were enrolled in the undergraduate social work program on a full-time basis. This finding was not surprising given the majority of students in social work
have traditionally been enrolled in the School of Social Work on a full-time basis.

Although the majority of students enrolled in the social work program had no prior degree(s) or diploma(s) (see Table 1), a significant proportion (33%) had a bachelor's degree prior to their admission into the school. [This cohort of degree holders was, therefore, separated as a sub-group for subsequent statistical analyses]. This finding may be attributed to any one or combinations of the following factors: 1) students are not finding the jobs they had hoped for and, therefore, return to social work to improve employment prospects; 2) students are undecided about career choices and, therefore, complete a general degree first; or 3) the older aged students, are afforded the opportunity to pursue a variety of academic interests. Additionally, as one may surmise, this finding has implications for the educational experiences provided in the social work program.

An interesting finding derived from this sample was the predominance of first born children. This finding appears consistent with research in this area (Lackie, 1982, 1983; Rossi, 1965), which suggests that first-born females are most likely to go into occupations that are extensions of childhood experiences of nurturing and responsibility. Social workers are an appropriate population in the study of birth position as they are professional caretakers, specialists in acting responsibly. Indeed, as each child is born into a family, his or her position in its history influences learned responsibilities and values (Lackie, 1984).
II. Personal Attributes and Early Life Experiences

The sample responded to an 11 item inventory in which specific personal attributes were identified as motivating career choice in social work. These attributes are rank ordered on an 3 point interval scale and are presented in Table 3. The means for the attributes ranged from 2.91 to 2.31 on the scale with an overall mean of 2.75, and overall standard deviation of .42, resulting in minimal variability among the sample.
Table 3

The Ranked Means of Personal Attributes That Motivate Career Choices in Social Work (n=86-87)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Attributes</th>
<th>Ranked Means (*)&lt;br&gt;(X)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation&lt;br&gt;(S.D.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 'I care a lot about people and their problems'</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 'I am someone who people can trust and like to confide in'</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 'I'm a good listener'</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 'I am sensitive to people's needs'</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 'I'm a people oriented person'</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 'I think I have good interpersonal skills'</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. 'I like to help others solve their problems'</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. 'I feel that social work help me to do something meaningful with my life'</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. 'I feel that social work provides me with opportunities for personal growth and self-fulfillment'</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. 'I care a lot about society and its problems'</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. 'I have always been able to share my feelings and emotions with others'</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. (*) Scale means ranged from 1 = 'Not at All' to 3 = 'Very Much'
In regard to Table 3, in terms of the most and least endorsed items on the inventory, the item 'I care a lot about people and their problems' was endorsed by 90.8% of the sample, and the item 'I have always been able to share my feelings and emotions with others' was endorsed by 35.6% of the sample. With exception to items 10 and 11 on the inventory [in Table 3], approximately 75% or more of the sample endorsed the remaining categories. The inventory of personal attributes used in Table 3 was then psychometrically scrutinized. The following tests were conducted: 1) reliability tests; 2) an inter-correlational matrix; and 3) factor analyses (Blalock, 1960).

Two tests of reliability were conducted, one was an internal consistency reliability which determined the Coefficient Alpha (\( \alpha \)). This test yielded an alpha of \( \alpha = .61 \), \( (n=83) \). The second reliability test was the Guttman Split-Half where the 11 items on the inventory were split in half, and every other item was placed in one of two separate groups, then summed and correlated. This yielded an \( r=.52 \), \( n=83 \), \( p<.05 \).

For the inter-correlational matrix, the inter-correlational matrix of the 11 items in the scale was then computed. The number of \( r \)'s in the matrix were generally low and non-significant, however 10 inter-correlations occurred with item 4 ('I am sensitive to people's needs') and 6 ('I think I have good interpersonal skills') being the most frequently correlated variable with the most correlations in the entire matrix.

Based on the inspection of this matrix, the 11 item personal attribute inventory
was also analyzed to determine whether the theoretical factors coincided with the empirical data collected. The inventory was factor analyzed by using principle component factors with a Kaiser normalization and a varimax rotation. Four factors with an eigen value of \( \geq +1.0 \) were retained and rotated. Cumulatively, these explained 58.5% of the variance among the items on the inventory.

From this group, four factors were extracted as explaining the most variance, in other words, where there appeared to be much intercorrelation among the items. Factor 1 was labelled as 'caring attributes' accounted for 22.3% of the explained variance, Factor 2 was labelled as 'trusting attributes' accounted for 13.2% of the explained variance, Factor 3 was labelled as 'mixed attributes' accounted for 12.5% of the explained variance, and Factor 4 was labelled as 'interpersonal attributes' accounted for 10.5% of the explained variance. Fifteen mutually exclusive items loaded on these four factors. The majority of item factor \( r \)'s were positive and the criterion of \( r > \pm 0.45 \) was used for retaining the intercorrelated factor loadings (Nunnally, 1967).

Respondents were also presented with a ten item inventory which asked them about their previous life experiences on two levels: a) if they occurred; and b) if they occurred, to what extent did they influence the decision to pursue a career in social work. These data are reported in Table 4 and Table 5, respectively.
Table 4

The Ranked Percentages of Occurrence of Early Life Experiences (n=35-86)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Life Experiences</th>
<th>Frequency (f)</th>
<th>Relative Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Death of a Loved One</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Domestic Violence</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Serious Illness</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Alcohol Abuse</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Other</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Sexual Assault/Abuse</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Divorce/Separation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Poverty</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Drug Abuse</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Crime Victim</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As reported in Table 4, the responses ranged from 25.3% of the sample reporting that they had experienced the death of a loved one to 4.6% reporting that they had been a victim of crime early in life. Interestingly, 20.7% of the sample
endorsed the 'other' category, which was other experiences not identified in the inventory. These responses varied and included; 'dysfunction in peers', 'suicidal family member', 'learning disability', 'handicapped brother', 'having been adopted', 'low self-esteem', 're-discovering spirituality', 'cultural conflict', 'eating disorder', and 'discrimination by those in authoritarian positions'. The variability in sample size (n=35-86), was the result of the entire sample not responding to all of the life experiences on the inventory. In order to further explain these variables, the respondents were asked to identify if the life experiences on this inventory influenced their decision to pursue a career in social work. Table 5 identifies how much of these early life experiences were influential in their motivation to pursue a career in social work.
Table 5

The Ranked Means of Early Life Experiences That Influenced the Decision to Pursue a Career in Social Work (n=23-49)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Life Experiences</th>
<th>Ranked Means (*) (X̄)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation (S.D.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Other</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sexual Assault/Abuse</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Domestic Violence</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Serious Illness</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Poverty</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Alcohol Abuse</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Divorce/Separation</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Death of a Loved One</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Drug Abuse</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Crime Victim</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. (*) Scale means ranged from 2 = 'Very Significant' to 0 = 'Not at All Significant'.
In Table 5, the items that were the most highly ranked were the following: 'sexual abuse/assault' was endorsed by 11 respondents (12.6%) of the sample; the 'other' category was endorsed by 10 respondents (11.5%) of the sample and, 'serious illness' (physical, psychological, etc.) was endorsed by 9 respondents (10.3%) of the sample. Conversely, 'the death of a loved one' was endorsed by 5 (5.7%) of the sample, 'being a victim of crime' was endorsed by 3 respondents (3.4%) of the sample, and finally, the 'experience with drug abuse' was an item endorsed by 1 respondent (1.1%) of the sample. Table 6 illustrates the frequencies and percentages of the characteristics that best describe the perceived 'label' or role of the respondents in their respective families of origin.
Table 6

The Perceived Label or Role of the Sample in Their Respective Families of Origin (N=87)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label/Role</th>
<th>Frequency (f)</th>
<th>Relative Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 'None of the List Apply to Me'</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(No Label/Role)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 'Over-Responsible'</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 'Rescuer'</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 'Scapegoat'</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 'Irresponsible'</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>87</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the perceived roles or labels available in Table 6, the mode was 'none apply to me' with (33.3%) of the sample endorsing this item.
Discussion of Personal Attributes and Life Experiences

The most frequently reported personal attributes (see Table 3) identified in this study were; 'caring about people', the 'ability to be trusted', and being a 'good listener' (by the percentage of the sample). Social work has traditionally emphasized the need to focus on personal attributes and values that have guided the profession based on an ideology of humanitarianism and service for the welfare of all people. The findings in this study reflect those of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 1982) which suggested that admissions and student self-selection processes tend to attract persons whose basic values reflect the threefold mission of social work: caring, curing and changing (cited in Morales & Shaefor, 1989).

Prior research traces the foundations for helpers' career choices to their very early life experiences. A version of this explanatory line was advanced by Miller's 1981 exposition concerning psychoanalysts as Prisoners of Childhood. Miller's findings, which appeared relevant to the helping professions in general, described how sensitive children may be trained for caretaking roles by narcissitically needy parents. More specific to the profession of social work is the historical documentation of the education of students in the process of becoming social workers, which has been described for some as a potentially unsettling experience, "the constant involvement with the problems of others stirs up all manner of unconscious anxieties and increases instead of solves the conflicts" (Reynolds, 1942, p.66). This issue may pertain more specifically to those who choose social
work based on their desire (either consciously or unconsciously) to resolve current or past problems.

This study identified early life experiences and their possible influence on the decision of undergraduate social work students to pursue a career in social work. It was not surprising that 12.6% of the sample's decision to pursue a career in social work was influenced by sexual abuse/assault experiences early in life, due to the prevalence rates found in comparative studies exploring child sexual abuse (Bagley & Ramsey, 1886; and locally Hemrich, 1989). Specifically, at the University of Calgary, among a sample of 377, Bagley and Ramsey's (1986) prevalence rates for females reporting sexual assault during childhood was 21.7% (pp. 36-37). Hemrich's (1989) study of first year B.S.W. students at the University of Windsor revealed that the prevalence of contact and non-contact sexual assault during childhood for females (N=159) and males (N=30) was 36.5% and 30%, respectively. Ironically, Hemrich's (1989) study followed the trend of uncovering fewer childhood abuse experiences than the majority of community sample surveys. However, his survey uncovered a higher prevalence of childhood sexual abuse experiences than other comparable university studies conducted at that time.

In regard to the perceived 'label' or 'role' placed on students growing up in their respective families of origin, one begins to realize the impact these roles or labels may have in shaping subsequent development. Social learning theorists would contend that the rudiments of responsibility are first nurtured in the prospective
social worker through socialization by the family and the sociologically identifiable influences of religious values, political affiliation, and/or ethnic mores that subsequently shape the individual in their families of origin. The limited range of family roles identified in this study provide a useful context for understanding some aspects of an individual's developmental course. Although the majority of respondents reported that 'none of the roles/labels apply' to them, 31% of the sample endorsed the 'over RESPONSIBLE' role. The majority's endorsement of the 'none apply to me' category may have been due to the limited selection of roles/labels provided on the inventory, or due to the fact that one's label or role in their respective families of origin may change, as family's also change over time and redefine their roles.

III. Professional Opinions and Values

Table 7 identifies the ranked means and standard deviations for the perceived level of importance of professional values and opinions for undergraduate social work students in their decision to pursue a career in social work.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Opinions and Values</th>
<th>Ranked Means (*) (X)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation (S.D.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 'Through social work, I will be able to make an important contribution to people and society'</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 'The occupational versatility of a social work degree'</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 'Social work offers a great opportunity for self-expression and personal growth'</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 'A desire to enhance my potential for serving economically disadvantaged populations'</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 'Salaries and working conditions are generally good in social work'</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. (*) Means ranged from 1 = 'Very Unimportant' to 4 = 'Very Important'.

From the 5 item inventory, the percentage of endorsement of professional opinions and values ranged from 65.5% of the sample endorsing the first item 'through social work, I will be able to make an important contribution to individuals and society' to 3.4% of the sample endorsing the last item 'salaries and working
conditions are generally good in social work'. When the respondents were asked to rate the items most frequently endorsed as either their first or second choice, interestingly, the item most frequently reported, was also endorsed as the first and second choices amongst the undergraduate social work students sampled.

The level of importance of specific job characteristics related to social work were then identified in this study and these data are reported in Table 8.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Work Job Characteristics</th>
<th>Ranked Means (*) (X)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation (S.D.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 'It is important to have a job that allows me to work with social workers or other professionals as a team'</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 'It is important for me to help the most economically disadvantaged people in the community'</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 'It is important for me to work with highly motivated clients'</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 'It is important for me to earn an above average income'</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** (*) Means ranged from 1 = 'Very Unimportant' to 4 = 'Very Important'.

The data in Table 8 reflect the percentage of endorsement for each item which ranged from 36.8% of the sample endorsing the item 'working with social workers or other professionals as a team' as 'very important' in the decision-making
process to 8.0% of the sample endorsing the item 'earn an above average income'.

Table 9 reports the specific fields of practice that appeal to this sample of undergraduate social work students as they consider future job possibilities.

Table 9

The Level of Appeal of Working in Various Social Work Fields of Practice for the Sample (n=85-87)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fields of Practice</th>
<th>Ranked Means (*) (X)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation (S.D.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Counselling</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Client Advocacy</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Family/Marital Therapy</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Casework</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Protective Services</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Community Organizing</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Administration</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Program/Policy Design</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Research</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. (*) Means ranged from 1 = 'Low Appeal' to 4 = 'High Appeal'.
The percentage of endorsement of fields of practice that were identified in the inventory ranged from 'counselling' which was endorsed by 70.1% of the sample, to 'research' which was endorsed by 43.7% of the sample. Similarly, the sample selected specific client groups and endorsed the following top four items on the inventory: working with 'marital/family problems' was endorsed by 50.6% of the sample, working with 'teenagers' was endorsed by 36.8% of the sample, working with 'abused and neglected children' was endorsed by 39.1% of the sample, and working with 'teenage mothers' was endorsed by 35.6% of the sample. Conversely, working in 'gerontology' was only endorsed by 13.8% of the sample. If one considers the mission of the profession of social work, it is ironic that the fields of practice most frequently endorsed on this inventory do not reflect or coincide with the professed values of social work identified earlier, such as 'through social work I will be able to make an important contribution to people and society'. The literature in this area supports this finding where counselling and family/marital therapy are currently more attractive as career opportunities (Rubin & Johnson, 1986). Although a good portion of undergraduate social work curriculum are devoted toward indirect practice topics, the data in Table 9 suggests that students do not pursue careers in this area.

Discussion of Professional Opinions and Values

Moral and ethical values are the 'heart and soul' of social work (Sheafor, 1979,
p.37). The values and ethics of social work provide a rationale for social work actions as it relates to the world in which practice takes place, and expresses the importance of the task and function of social work as it is assigned to the profession by society (Levy, 1976). The commitment to the values of social work (shown in Table 7), is characteristically humanistic and Judeo-Christian with overriding faith in the basic goodness of people. This ideology has given particular meaning to social work as 'a cause and a calling', and has made the social work profession attractive to altruistic people with a need to be of service to others, as well as those with a desire to work for the betterment of society (Lubove, 1964).

Data in this part of the study indicated that the majority of social work students surveyed were interested in working to serve people and helping the most disadvantaged in society. These findings supported recent research in this area (Butler, 1990), however, were ironically contrasted by the reported client groups and fields of practice, such as counselling and family/marital therapy, that appealed to students, and emphasized the importance of professional identity and affiliation. Similarly, more recent research (Rubin & Johnson, 1986) reported that social work students wanted primarily to practice therapy and not work with the most helpless and vulnerable clients in society, which historically has been the thrust and base of the social work profession in general. Undoubtedly, employment prospects are such that altruistic motives (identified in Table 7) are often tempered by the reality of the job market.
IV) Other Statistical Analyses

Following the analyses of these descriptive data, specific trends were identified and variables were statistically tested with one another. Three types of inferential tests were used primarily to analyze the data at this level: 1) the Pearson Product Moment (PPM) correlational coefficient (r)² (Nunnally, 1967) was used to determine the strength of association between variables; 2) the Fisher's exact test³ was used to assess group differences; and 3) the chi-square statistic (X²)⁴ was used to determine the association between selected variables. The variables selected for this analysis were construed as both dependent and independent, and as a result were tested against each other in various combinations. The variables selected for this analysis were derived from either the literature review or a priori logic (that is, they were interesting and were related to one another). Although many variables were tested, only those that were central to the study purpose will be described. This presentation is organized according to: 1) independent variables and independent variables and; 2) independent variables and dependent variables.

Independent variables with other independent variables. The three main independent variables were significantly tested with other independent variables and yielded significant relationships between one another and are schematically presented in Figure 1.
**Figure 1:** Statistical analyses of socio-demographic variables with other independent variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC (INDEPENDENT) VARIABLES</th>
<th>INDEPENDENT VARIABLES</th>
<th>TESTS APPLIED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. AGE</strong></td>
<td>I. HOW STUDENTS LEARNED ABOUT SOCIAL WORK</td>
<td>(X²)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. EDUCATIONAL LEVEL</td>
<td>(X²)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III. MARITAL STATUS</td>
<td>(X²)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. GENDER</strong></td>
<td>I. AGE</td>
<td>(t)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. EARLY LIFE EXPERIENCES:</td>
<td>(t)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) ALCOHOL ABUSE</td>
<td>(t)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) SEXUAL ABUSE/ ASSAULT</td>
<td>(t)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) DIVORCE/ SEPARATION</td>
<td>(t)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. FAMILY TYPE</strong></td>
<td>I. EARLY LIFE EXPERIENCES:</td>
<td>(t)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) DRUG ABUSE</td>
<td>(t)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) CRIME</td>
<td>(t)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) OTHER</td>
<td>(X²)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. ENTIRE EARLY LIFE EXPERIENCE INVENTORY</td>
<td>(X²)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1 reveals that 3 socio-demographic variables (age, gender and family type) significantly related to other selected socio-demographic and independent variables. The age of the third and fourth year undergraduate social work students yielded 11 significant statistical relationships. In regard to Figure 1, statistical significance was found with the older students when learning about social work through; services received, work experience, or through a family friend ($X^2=22.85$, $n=87$, $p<.05$). This older cohort also had a significant statistical relationship with students' educational level, where they had attained a college diploma over a bachelor's degree or no degree/ diploma ($X^2=8.19$, $n=87$, $p<.05$). The variable age was dichotomously divided into two sub-groups; (21 to 24) years of age and, (25 to 52) years of age. The chi-square statistical test of significance was applied to the sub-group age (21 to 24 years) and (25 to 52 years) and marital status and yielded a statistical significant relationship. The majority of students who had never married were predominantly in the 21 to 24 year age range ($X^2=34.02$, $n=87$, $p<.05$). As well the sub-population of age (25 to 52 years), as compared to young age (21 to 24 years), yielded significant statistical relationships where there existed a significant number of males in the older population ($X^2=10.64$, $n=87$, $p<.05$).

Gender was another socio-demographic variable that yielded statistically significant relationships. As described earlier, there were more males in the older group of students. This finding was based on a comparison of means which showed that males in the entire sample were significantly older than the female cohort, with a mean age for males of 32.92 and females 27.18 and the $t$-test score
of \( t=2.14, \ n=87, \ p<.05 \). Statistical analyses also showed statistically significant relationships between females and **early life experiences** such as the experience with **alcohol abuse** \( t=5.21, \ n=86, \ p<.05 \), the experience of **sexual abuse/assault** \( t=4.50, \ n=85, \ p<.05 \), and the experience with divorce/separation \( t=4.10, \ n=45, \ p<.05 \).

**Family-type** was among the background variables that yielded several statistical significant relationships. Although students from **one-parent families** experienced significantly more divorce/separation than two-parent families \( t=4.46, \ n=86, \ p<.05 \), **two-parent families** experienced more **drug abuse** \( t=2.54, \ n=86, \ p<.05 \), more **crime** \( t=6.20, \ n=35, \ p<.05 \), and more 'other' early life experiences (e.g. problems with self-esteem, problems with peers, learning disability). Overall the chi square statistical test showed a significant relationship between family type and the early life experience scale which included all the life experiences listed on the questionnaire \( \chi^2=20.45, \ n=86, \ p<.05 \).

**Independent variables with main dependent variables.** These relationships were determined as follows: 1) socio-demographic variables with personal attributes variables, influence on career decision by life experience variables, professional opinions and values variables, job characteristics variables, and appeal of future field of practice and client groups variables. The relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variables and the tests used are schematically presented in Figure 2.
Figure 2: Statistical analyses of socio-demographic variables with dependent variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC (INDEPENDENT) VARIABLES</th>
<th>DEPENDENT VARIABLES</th>
<th>TESTS APPLIED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. YEAR OF STUDY</td>
<td>I. CAREER FIELDS OF PRACTICE:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) RESEARCH</td>
<td>(f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) PROGRAM/POLICY DESIGN</td>
<td>(f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. INFLUENTIAL LIFE EXPERIENCES:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) DRUG ABUSE</td>
<td>(f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) OTHER</td>
<td>(f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. AGE</td>
<td>I. PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES:</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) LEVEL OF SENSITIVITY TO PEOPLE'S NEEDS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) SOCIAL WORK ALLOWS YOU TO DO SOMETHING MEANINGFUL WITH YOUR LIFE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. PROFESSIONAL VALUES:</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) OCCUPATIONAL VERSATILITY OF SOCIAL WORK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III. PROFESSIONAL VALUES SCALE</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. GENDER</td>
<td>I. INFLUENTIAL LIFE EXPERIENCES:</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) DIVORCE/SEPARATION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) ALCOHOL ABUSE</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) SEXUAL ABUSE/ASSAULT</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) DOMESTIC VIOLENCE</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. CAREER FIELDS OF PRACTICE:</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) PEOPLE WITH AIDS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) TEENAGE MOTHERS</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. EDUCATIONAL STATUS</td>
<td>I. PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES:</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) I CARE ABOUT PEOPLE AND THEIR PROBLEMS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) I CARE ABOUT SOCIETY AND ITS PROBLEMS</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) I AM SENSITIVE TO PEOPLE'S NEEDS</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) PERSONAL GROWTH AND SELF-FULFILLMENT</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. FAMILY TYPE</td>
<td>I. INFLUENTIAL LIFE EXPERIENCES:</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) DEATH OF A LOVED ONE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) OTHER</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. PRIVATE PRACTICE</td>
<td>I. AGE</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. CAREER FIELDS OF PRACTICE:</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) COUNSELLING</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) FAMILY/MARITAL THERAPY</td>
<td>(a)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since several of the variables listed in Figure 2 were derived from various singular questions as well as composite questions and inventories, they require further clarification. Overall life experiences refers to the occurrence of divorce/separation, death of a loved one, drug or alcohol abuse, for example. Influential early life experiences refer to those life experiences selected form the inventory which were influential in the decision to pursue a career in social work. Personal attributes consist of a variety of attributes that range from 'I am someone people can trust and confide in' to 'social work will allow me to do something meaningful with my life'. Career fields of practice is also inclusive of a variety of practice areas, and include counselling, family/marital therapy, research and program/policy design.

The year of study (3rd or 4th year) yielded a significant number of statistical relationships. More specifically, the 4th year undergraduate social work students tended to have more significant associations with other dependent variables, as compared to 3rd year undergraduate social work students. For example, when comparing the means of the 3rd and 4th year student populations, a statistically significant relationship between 4th year students and the appeal of career fields of practice such as research (t=2.22, n=87, p<.05), and program/policy design (t=1.99, n=87, p<.05) were found. There also existed three significant statistical relationships between this sample of 4th year undergraduate social work students and influential life experiences. These influential experiences included drug abuse early in life (t=2.46, n=42, p<.05), and with 'other' early life experiences
(t=2.51, n=23, p=.05), such as peer problems, suicidal family member, low self-esteem and others.

The influence of life experiences in the decision to pursue social work as a career, and the appeal of specific fields of practice resulted in five significant statistical relationships when statistically tested with gender. When the means of both categories were compared, female students were significantly influenced to pursue a career in social work because of their experience with divorce and separation (t=4.19, n=45, p<.05), alcohol abuse (t=4.61, n=49, p<.05), sexual abuse/assault (t=5.05, n=47, p<.05) and, domestic violence (t=3.10, n=48, p<.05). Additionally, female students found working with people with aids more appealing than the male students (t=2.44, n=87, p<.05), as well as working with teenage mothers was significantly more appealing to female students (t=1.73, n=87, p<.05).

Four statistical tests of significance were found when comparing educational status to personal attributes. The data revealed the following: 1) part time students possessed the attribute 'I care a lot about people and their problems' more than full-time students (t=2.76, n=86, p<.05); 2) part-time students possessed the attribute 'I care a lot about society and its problems' more than full-time students (t=6.54, n=87, p<.05); 3) part-time students possess the attribute 'I am sensitive to people's needs' more than full-time students (t=3.92, n=86, p<.05); and 4) part-time students significantly believe that 'social work provides opportunities for personal growth and self-fulfillment' more than full-time
students (t=5.17, n=87, p<.05).

Two significant statistical relationships were found when the means of family type and influential early life experiences were compared. Two-parent families were more influenced than one-parent families to pursue a career in social work because of the death of a loved one (t=3.74, n=47, p<.05), and 'other' experiences (t=6.25, n=23, p<.05).

The remaining five significant relationships involved the desire to enter private practice at some point in the student's career. When the mean of this variable was compared with the means of age, it was found that those students above the mean age of 29.4 years feel they will enter private practice and those students under the mean age of 26.1 years feel that they will not enter private practice (t=2.00, n=87, p<.05). Additionally, the students wanting to enter private practice feel that social work will allow them to make an important contribution to people and society (t=1.95, n=87, p<.05). These students wanting to enter private practice also found counselling (t=2.14, n=87, p<.05), and family and marital therapy (t=2.40, n=87, p<.05) as appealing future fields of practice.

Discussion of these Variable Relationships. In examining the range of background variables which tested significant with other factors, age had more statistical relationships followed by gender, family type, year of study and educational status. It is evident that this sample had two distinct age groups of which the older group had more males, were likely to be married, and experienced
more influential early life experiences. Specifically, the older group was more likely to be influenced to pursue a career in social work by drug abuse and other experiences (such as, suicidal family member, problems with peers, cultural conflict, etc.). This raises the question as to whether distinct age groups of students are unique and have a defining set of characteristics, and also points to the fact that certain combinations of background variables notably age, gender, marital status, and family type, cluster together to similarly define unique cohorts of students.

Kadushin (1958) reviewed studies on the personalities and demographic descriptions of social workers and put together a ‘statistical fiction’ describing a typical social worker.

"A female of above average intelligence, of professional or middle-class parents, in a large northern city, whose occupational values and interests revolve around a desire to work with people in an effort to help them through the use of verbal skills." (p.22)

This description identifies an enduring and cohesive set of values and personality traits attributed to social workers. Among those descriptive factors is empathetic appreciation and concern for the needs of others.

Personal attributes and life experiences have significantly affected the students sampled in this study and motivated their decision to pursue a career in social work. The results of this study support the literature that assesses how such variables may influence the pursuit of a career in social work and find expression through a helping career. Polansky (1957) reported that social workers identified with the least privileged in society because of their apparent low ambition, and
Augustin (1985) found that personal characteristics and interests, self-development goals, and attributes and skills had a major influence on one’s choice of field of study. Overall, the personal attributes, which included 'I care a lot about people' and 'I care a lot about society' were the most frequently endorsed and tested statistically significant when compared to other variables. Interestingly, these apparently altruistic attributes applied more to the younger students and the third year students than the older cohort. The frequencies with which some early life experiences occurred, such as sexual abuse/assault, is supported by prior research (Hemrich, 1987), and raises questions about the likelihood that students in the profession of social work will re-encounter, both in training and in practice, issues related to their past life experiences. Interest in this area then extends to include how on an ongoing basis individuals re-address and adapt these early life experiences to their personal and professional life. Social work students especially need to be introduced to identifying if early life experiences and/or problems they are experiencing in daily living may cause them to be ineffective or create additional stress in their role as professional social workers. These data also identified the prevalence of divorce/separation, alcohol abuse, and sexual abuse/assault among the women in the sample as a factor that influenced the decision to pursue a career in social work. The findings in the analysis suggest that not only are students attracted to the profession of social work because of similarities between their own value orientation and the profession, but because of other personal, social and economic factors.
Given the attention devoted in the review of the literature to the significance of birth order and the role of the individual in their family of origin, it was surprising to find when the data was analyzed that the order of birth order within the families of origin of the respondents was found to be insignificant when statistically tested against other independent and dependent variables. However, the research ascribes a plurality among those who become social workers as they appear to have been assigned and to have played roles that promoted seeming self-sufficiency (i.e. the parentified child, the over-responsible child, the rescuer and the mediator (Lackie, 1983). Lackie’s (1982) study supported this notion when the majority of social workers sampled (two-thirds of the sample) described themselves in such terms vis-a-vis their families of origin.

This study also found that a majority of students were interested in entering private practice at some point in their professional careers. Although altruistic in their value orientation, students considered private practice as a future career plan. This data supports the current movement of social workers in general, into private practice. The influence of private practice has received popular endorsement in some regions of Canada as a desired professional goal, however its influence in shaping practice trends has not been as pronounced in the United States (Grossman & Perry, 1994). Sipurin (1989) noted that in recent years, this trend has resulted in a "slippage from the moral vision and idealism of social work ... and a disunity within the profession among social workers who have differing value commitments" (p. 51).
Conclusions

The final section of this study will be organized according to: 1) conclusions related to the literature review; 2) conclusions related to the findings of the research questions; 3) limitations; and 4) recommendations.

I. Conclusions Related to the Literature Review

When one examines the literature reviewed for this research, a considerable amount of this general level literature is theoretical and examines career/occupational choices of individuals exploring the reasons why people choose certain occupations/careers. The second mass of literature explored the profession of social work in general, with particular attention given to specific motivational factors. This body of literature focused its attention on the professional pursuits of individuals and devoted little attention to work aspirations. Overall, the literature was more American than Canadian, and where the general level literature was more theoretical, the literature related to the profession of social work was more empirical.

This study reviewed the motivational factors that influenced the choice of third and fourth year undergraduate social work students to pursue a career in social work. There is general consensus that occupations or careers tend to recruit and reinforce persons who possess the characteristics and values consistent with orientations of their particular chosen profession. Therefore, professions that are
guided by values that differ should attract individuals whose values are consistent with that specific profession (Segal, 1992). Just as individuals derive identity and meaning from their own specialization, families of origin, personalities, and value systems, professions are often evaluated by the types of people who are attracted to them.

This study reviewed the nature and development of motivational factors and noted that advances in acquiring knowledge about motivational factors have been slow to develop as interest in this topic has evolved sporadically. The literature reviewed in this study was divided into two main sections - the occupational/career choices of individuals and the motivation to pursue a career in social work. A discussion of each section follows.

A. The Occupational/Career Choices of Individuals

Literature in this area addresses an historical perspective, theories and models used, motivational factors and women and their career choices. Even though work and the motivation to work has changed, it clearly remains the principle activity of adult life. Although the nature of work is a multi-faceted concept, theorists and researchers from various disciplines have explored various aspects of occupational decision-making in an attempt to develop an adequate theory that explains how the multiplicity of factors within the environment, and forces within the individual, act and react on each other so that individuals arrive at a conclusion related to their occupational choice (Ginzberg, 1988).
An essential feature of the literature in this area is that educational/career decision-making is a developmental process where factors such as gender, social status, education, age, intrinsic values and environmental variables influence career choice (Farmer, 1985). Gender and gender bias is being studied more and more as interest in the research related to women and their career development is experiencing widespread growth (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987).

B. The Motivation to Pursue a Career in Social Work

The literature pertaining to the motivation to pursue a career in social work, emphasizes the profession's need to focus on values [that have guided the profession] based on an ideology of humanitarianism and service for the welfare of all people (Bartlett, 1954; Brill, 1990; DiNitto & McNeece, 1990; Gorden, 1962; Lubove, 1964). Only few research studies specifically addressing motivation and career choices in social work were found in a search of the literature as interest in the subject is cyclical and seems to surface in different decades.

With schools of social work being affected profoundly during the 1960s and 1970s with decreases in enrollment, Pins' (1963) landmark study attempted to answer the question 'Who Chooses Social Work and Why?' Researchers then began studying specific motivational factors to learn more about the people entering the profession. Lackie (1982, 1983, 1984, 1987) provided information on the subject of underlying motives such as birth order and the role of an individual in their family of origin. Lackie (1982) found a disproportionate number of social
workers studied, were first born children and saw themselves as having been assigned and accepting the role of the over-responsible child in their family. Other researchers, (Bedford & Bedford, 1985) studied personality traits in social workers and found social workers to have heightened tendencies toward self-blame and mistrust, and Rosenberg (1957) studied the values of professional groups and found social workers to value working with people as compared to valuing extrinsic rewards, status and money.

The research in this area allows one to better understand the derivatives of career choices. The ability of individuals in the social work profession to recognize past experiences and understand personality traits and characteristics, the more skilled one becomes in balancing personal and professional life.

II. Conclusions Related to the Findings of the Research Questions

This study is the first research study of its kind from the School of Social Work at the University of Windsor. A review of the limited amount of research available on this topic resulted in the generally accepted notion that students in social work are motivated to pursue social work as a career by a variety of factors. Any findings must be interpreted with a degree of caution given the sample size and the limitations of the study. However, overall the findings of this study were more similar to the literature than dissimilar, with exception of the birth order finding.

The research questions provided a conceptual and methodological framework
for this study and will be used as organizing principles for this section. These general conclusions can be derived from the study in attempting to answer these questions.

1. What is the background of undergraduate social work students enrolled in the school of social work?

Of the 87 undergraduate students who comprised the sample, 55.2% were third year students and 44.6% were fourth year students, of this total, 85.1% were female and 14.9% were male. Their ages ranged from 21 to 52 years, with the mean age of 28 years, and the mode, or the most frequently reported age was 21 years. The marital backgrounds of respondent were diverse with the majority never married. Almost all of the students attended school on a full-time basis, and the majority of the sample had no prior degree(s)/diploma(s) prior to entering social work.

The order of birth of the respondents in their respective families of origin ranged from being first born to being tenth born. The majority of students were born first, second and third born, and most came from two-parent families. The majority of these characteristics were found to be comparable to earlier studies of social work students conducted locally at the University of Windsor (Hemrich, 1987; Spezowka, 1991), and also nationally across schools of social work across (CASSW, 1992).
2. What are the personal attributes of undergraduate social work students that may have motivated their choice to pursue a career in social work?

The most reported personal attributes identified in this study were: 'caring about people'; the 'ability to be trusted'; and 'being a good listener'. It appears that these findings reflect the traditional notion of individuals attracted to the profession as being one who is sensitive and caring. These data are consistent with the literature in this area. Specifically, Morales and Shaefer (1989) reported that admissions and student self selection processes tended to attract individuals whose basic values reflect the three-fold mission of social work: caring, curing and changing.

3. What life experiences influenced career choice in social work?

Some examples of early life experiences from which students could select from in the 10 item inventory were; death of a loved one, sexual abuse/assault, divorce/separation/ poverty, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse. Interestingly, the occurrence of early life experiences and the life experiences that most influenced the decision to pursue a career in social work differed. For instance, the most reported life experiences were death of a loved one, domestic violence and serious illness, and the life experiences that most influenced the decision to pursue a career in social work were 'other' experiences (such as learning disability, problems with peers, cultural conflict, etc.), sexual abuse/assault
and domestic violence. The influence and occurrence of sexual abuse/assault was most interesting as it compared favourably to an earlier study (Hemrich, 1987) conducted at the University of Windsor that surveyed the relationship between childhood sexual assault and adult adjustment. Experiences in the families of origin of social workers has received the attention of researchers (Adler, 1959; Babcock, 1953; Bedford & Bedford, 1985; Bradley, 1968; Lackie, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1987; McCarley, 1975; Rossi, 1965), who propose that such factors as early life experiences, exposure to addictive or compulsive behaviours, and birth order in family of origin influence career choice in helping professions such as social work.

4. What are the professional opinions and values of the undergraduate students?

The undergraduate students had a variety of professional opinions and values to consider. From the inventory the majority of students endorsed ‘through social work I will be able to make an important contribution to people and society’, which reflects the historical thrust and base of the profession. These findings are similar to the literature in this area, such as Rosenberg (1957) who found that social workers rated highest in valuing work with other people and lowest in valuing extrinsic rewards such as status and money. Similarly, Pins (1963) national study found that in general students chose social work because they valued its goals and functions.
5. *What are the career interests of undergraduate social work students?*

Contrary to the professional values and opinions that were identified and were seemingly altruistic, the career interest of students reflect a professional identity and affiliation with fields of practice such as counselling and family and marital therapy. This finding is further supported by the fact that an overwhelming majority of students plan to pursue a career as a private practitioner. These findings as well, are consistent with the literature in this area (Grossman & Perry, 1994).

III. **Limitations**

There are inherent limitations with any research which have implications for this study. One problem relates to the accuracy of the information gathered through a paper and pencil survey was of a sensitive and personal nature. The obvious problem with recalling long term information from early life experiences is that perceptions of the experiences may be somewhat distorted, forgotten or changed. Similarly, but less obviously, recalling short term information about perceptions and value systems for example, may be distorted by more recent experiences.

In addition to recall, the accuracy of the information in the study may have also been effected by the respondents feeling that they could be identified, although every precaution was considered and taken by this researcher and her advisor to ensure the anonymity of all who responded. Other sampling methods were
considered in lieu of in-class sampling, such as having the questionnaire mailed to students where they could have completed the questionnaire in privacy, face-to-face interviews, or a telephone survey. Limitations of time and resources minimized the feasibility of these alternative methodological strategies.

Another problem, related to the accuracy of the information derived from the study, was the unique nature of the sample. It was a conscious decision on the part of the researcher and her advisor to select a specific population for this study. With a limited number of comparative studies, a limited amount of literature, and no other groups sampled as a comparison, it was difficult to generalize the findings or speculate about the results in contrast to other groups or studies. Studying other groups and having other comparable studies available may have provided a more substantial empirical base that would provide more credence to the data collected in this study.

Finally, another limitation relates to methodological problems in the questionnaire itself. Specifically, in some instances, the questions on the questionnaire had fixed choices which may have resulted in limited selection for the respondents. For example, in question 11 which asked for the respondents to select one category that best described their 'role/label' in their respective families of origin, the addition of other categories and the opportunities for respondents to select more than one category, may have resolved this problem. The interpretation of certain questions and the under-reporting of respondents are other problems pertaining to the questionnaire. Given the very nature of some of the questions
(e.g. identifying early life experiences), may have caused some respondents to withhold from answering these questions. Additionally, the lack of comparison groups raises questions about the reliability and validity of the sample, and the sample instrument. A follow-up study with specific sub-groups may add credence to these issues.

IV. Recommendations

Future research should be undertaken to corroborate the findings and to build on this data base. In particular, replication of this study in other schools of social work and possibly other schools in other fields such as business or science, etc., would be desirable and would provide a definition of this sample as either typical or atypical and would provide, as well as adding to the generalizability of the research.

Other areas that require further research are studying other methods or approaches that assess motivational reasons, for instance, talking to significant others, or examining the grade point average of students. Similarly, a longitudinal exploration of respondents would expand the continuum of research information collected over time. As well, future research could utilize alternative methods of approaching the sample, such as qualitative/open-ended questions.

Specific significant areas found in this study require future research: 1) further analysis of the older student population; 2) gender differences; 3) certain life
experiences that shaped the motivation of people to pursue a career in social work; the finding that students are more inclined to choose to work in direct practice, although ascribing importance to helping the most needy and disadvantaged in society; 5) through factor analysis on personal attributes it was found that sensitivity and the desire to help those in need are characteristic of students enrolled in the school of social work.

Several recommendations directed toward the school of social work surface as a result of a study of this kind. Namely, educating people and specifically those interested in the profession about social work occurs not only during the third and fourth year of the B.S.W. program, but at all levels, such as during high school through guidance and recruitment programs and during the initial years of university. More attention should be given to the introductory courses in social work and those students enrolled in these courses considering a career in social work. Student's perceptions can be shaped at this early stage by the type of education provided to these students. The teaching of these introductory courses by university professors rather than sessional instructors could significantly effect the type of information disseminated to vast numbers of students. Specific questions pertaining to early life experiences and the influence of those experiences on career choice is one example of strategies employed to monitor the types of students entering the B.S.W. program and their ability to separate their personal from their professional life.

Finally, the question on which this study was based, 'what factors motivate
career choice in social work?" raises other questions related to this area which can be further researched. These include: 1) Why do students continue to pursue career in social work when society is critical and often negative of the profession in general?; 2) What role does professional social work education have in socializing and training people? and; 3) Can and how do schools of social work screen people's motivations, and do they have a responsibility to be sensitive to motivations such as early life experiences.

In conclusion, this exploratory-descriptive study presented data, which for the most part, were supported by the literature in this area. The question of what motivates people to pursue certain careers seems rooted at the base of the profession itself. For any professional education or socialization to be effective, requires a fundamental understanding of who enters that profession. Hopefully this study shed some light on this phenomenon and in the true spirit of exploratory research added knowledge to the understanding of motivational factors and helped to better understand how to ask informed questions. It is the intended hope of the author that subsequent research in this area will be done to build on this level one exploratory study.
Appendix A

COVER LETTER

and

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
April, 1994

Dear Social Work Student,

I am a graduate student at the University of Windsor conducting a thesis in the Master of Social Work Program.

The purpose of this research study is to assess factors which motivate undergraduate social work students to pursue a career in social work. This study will fill a distinct research void in this area.

Your participation is requested because you know better than anyone, what factors influenced your choice. Please find attached a consent form and a questionnaire that I would like you to fill out on your own to the best of your ability. The questionnaire should require approximately 15 minutes of your time, and is completely voluntary.

Some of the questions in the questionnaire may deal with sensitive or personal issues. For this reason, your responses are anonymous. You can be assured that all the information you provide will be treated with the strictest confidence in accordance with the protocols safeguarding human subject research. No individual will be singularly identified in the reporting of the findings. All information will be analyzed in group data form only.

Thank you for taking the time to contribute to this important study.

Sincerely,

Gina M. Bulcke
M.S.W. Student
INFORMED CONSENT FROM RESPONDENTS

SURVEY OF UNDERGRADUATE SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

I, the undersigned understand that the purpose of this research is to collect
data and information about factors that motivated my choice to pursue a
career in social work.

I understand that the information collected from me will only be used as
part of a large amount of similar information provided by other equally
anonymous individuals and reported in group numerical or statistical form
only. Therefore, confidentiality will be safeguarded.

I, agree to voluntarily participate in this study by completing the attached
questionnaire.

I, understand that this survey is a research undertaking which is being
supervised by the School of Social Work and the Faculty of Graduate
Studies at the University of Windsor.

DATE: YEAR_____ MONTH_____ DAY_____ SIGNATURE:________________

- THANK YOU -

*Please note that this sheet will be detached from the questionnaire
upon receipt of the information.*
Appendix B

QUESTIONNAIRE
MOTIVATIONAL REASONS FOR ENTERING SOCIAL WORK

DIRECTIONS:
The purpose of this study is to assess the factors that motivate the choice to pursue a career in social work. The information will be treated with the strictest confidence. Please answer all the questions to the best of your ability by circling or writing the correct response.

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

This section asks for background information about you.

1. What is your present age? __________ (years)

2. What is your gender? 1 = male 2 = female

3. What is your marital status?
   1 = divorced
   2 = common-law relationship
   3 = married
   4 = separated
   5 = widowed
   6 = never married

4. How many dependent children live with you on at least a part-time basis?
   __________ (# of children)

5. What is your current educational status?
   1 = full-time student 2 = part-time student
6. Please indicate what post secondary degree(s)/diploma(s) you have received prior to admission to the school of social work.

1 = college diploma
2 = university baccalaureate degree
3 = university master's degree
4 = have not received a prior diploma or degree

7. Do you ever plan to further your professional education with a Master's Degree in Social Work?

1 = yes or 2 = no

8. Family Issues:

A) How many children were in your family of origin?

_________ (# of children)

B) What position did you hold in the order of age of your siblings?

1 = first born 6 = sixth born
2 = second born 7 = seventh born
3 = third born 8 = eighth born
4 = fourth born 9 = ninth born
5 = fifth born 10 = more than 9th born

C) What type of family did you primarily grow up in? Please circle the one that best applies:

1 = one-parent family or 2 = two-parent family
**SECTION 2: PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES**

This section identifies personal attributes which sometimes motivate individuals in career choice.

9. To what extent have these issues influenced your decision to pursue a career in Social Work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>check (√)</th>
<th>Very Much</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Not At All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) I'm a people oriented person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) I'm a good listener</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) I care a lot about people and their problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D) I like to help others solve their problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E) I care a lot about society and its problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F) I have always been able to share my feelings and emotions with others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G) I am someone who people can trust and like to confide in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H) I am sensitive to people's needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I) I think I have good interpersonal skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J) I feel that social work provides me with opportunities for personal growth and self-fulfilment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K) I feel that social work will allow me to do something meaningful with my life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION 3: LIFE EXPERIENCES

In this section I am interested in early life experiences that may have influenced your decision to pursue a career in social work.

10. The following are a list of common childhood experiences that may have influenced your decision to pursue a career in social work. Please indicate: a) If any were issues in your childhood?; and b) How significant an impact it had on your decision to pursue a career in social work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>check (✓)</th>
<th>check (✓)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A) Death of a loved one

B) Divorce/separation in your immediate family

C) Drug abuse

D) Alcohol abuse

E) Sexual abuse/assault

F) Domestic violence

G) Serious illness (physical, psychological, etc.)

H) Crime victim

I) Poverty

J) Other, please specify


11. Of the following characteristics, which one best describes your role while growing up in your family of origin?

1 = over-responsible
2 = irresponsible
3 = scapegoat
4 = rescuer, mediator
5 = none of these apply to me

SECTION 4: PROFESSIONAL OPINIONS AND VALUES

In this section I am interested in your opinions and values for the profession of social work.

12. To what degree of importance have the following had in your decision to enter the school of social work? Please circle the number to the right of each statement which applies.

1= very unimportant 2= unimportant 3= important 4= very important

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Very Unimportant</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) A desire to enhance my potential for serving economically disadvantaged populations</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) The occupational versatility of a social work degree</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) Social work offers a great opportunity for self-expression and personal growth</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D) Through social work, I will be able to make an important contribution to individuals and society</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E) Salaries and working conditions are generally good in social work</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>3 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. From statements [A through E above], rank the two choices that were most important in your decision to enter the school of social work.

1st choice: letter_____ 2nd choice: letter_____
14. Which one of the following statements best describes your present attitude about the goal of social work? Please circle the one that applies.

1 = Social work should devote equal attention and resources to all groups in society or
2 = Social work should devote most of its attention and resources to the problems of the poor

15. Please respond either 'yes' or 'no'. With a career in social work, I think I will experience less sexism than in other careers or professions.

1 = yes or 2 = no

SECTION 5: CAREER CHOICE AND INTERESTS

In this section I am interested in learning what interests you about a career in social work.

16. When did you first consider social work as a career?

1 = during high school
2 = during my first year of university
3 = during my second year of university
4 = I don’t remember

17. Please circle the one answer that best describes the major source from which you learned about social work as a career.

1 = services received from social worker or social work agency
2 = direct work experience in a closely related field
3 = university course or instructor
4 = high school guidance program
5 = family, friend or acquaintance who is a social worker
6 = fellow university student
7 = social work recruitment materials
8 = other
18. Did you seriously consider another career before deciding on social work?

1 = yes or 2 = no

19. Please rate the following job characteristics by circling the number to the right which best describes the importance of the categories listed below:

1 = very unimportant 2 = unimportant
3 = important 4 = very important

A) How important is it for you to work with highly motivated clients?

B) How important is it for you to earn an above average income?

C) How important is it for you to help the most economically disadvantaged people in the community?

D) How important is it for you to have a job that allows you to work with social workers or other professionals as a team?

20. Please rate the following fields of practice according to their level of appeal for you as you think of future job possibilities in social work. Please circle one number for each list below, which best applies.

A) ADMINISTRATION

B) CASEWORK

C) COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

D) CLIENT ADVOCACY

E) COUNSELLING

F) FAMILY/MARITAL THERAPY

G) RESEARCH

H) PROGRAM/POLICY DESIGN

I) PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Very Unimportant Very Important

1 2 3 4

Low Appeal High Appeal

1 2 3 4
21. Please rate the following client groups or fields of practice, according to their level of appeal for you as you think of future job possibilities in social work. Please circle one number for each list below, which best applies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low Appeal</th>
<th>High Appeal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>ABUSED/NEGLECTED CHILDREN</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>ABUSIVE PARENTS</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>GERONTOLOGY</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>THE PHYSICALLY DISABLED</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>MULTICULTURAL GROUPS/ISSUES</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>ADULT CRIMINAL OFFENDERS</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>YOUNG OFFENDERS</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>ALCOHOL OR SUBSTANCE ABUSERS</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>MARITAL OR FAMILY PROBLEMS</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>TEENAGERS</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>HOSPITAL/HEALTH CARE</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>PEOPLE IN POVERTY</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>HOMELESS FAMILIES</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>PEOPLE WITH AIDS</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>TEENAGE MOTHERS</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22. Finally, do you think that you will enter private practice at some time in your social work career?

1 = yes  
2 = no

- THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME -
Methodological Notes

The following serve as methodological points of clarification related to the analysis of the data. In a number of cases, data were sub-grouped in order not to violate the assumptions of these statistical tests used.

Note 1 (p.44). The personal attributes on the 11 item inventory were treated as interval level data (Blalock, 1960) where 1 = not at all, 2 = somewhat, and 3 = very much.

Note 2 (p.61). The Pearson Product Moment (PPM) correlational coefficient (r) was used when data sets were interval level.

Note 3 (p.61). The Fisher's exact test was used to compare group means both between and within groups of data which were interval level.

Note 4 (p.61). The chi-square test of statistical significance was used to determine the association between variables which were nominal and ordinal level.
References


Gina M. Bulcke was born in Windsor, Ontario on March 20, 1966. She attended elementary school and high school in Essex County and graduated from Ste. Anne's Roman Catholic High School in 1983. She received a Bachelor of Arts Degree with a Major in Communication Studies from the University of Windsor in 1988, and an Honours Bachelor of Social Work Degree (First Class Standing) from Lakehead University in 1989. Following graduation Gina was employed by the Children's Aid Society of Essex County from 1989 to 1993, and held various positions including; Intake social worker, Manager of Public Relations and Volunteer Services, and Director of the Children's Foundation.