



# Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance

ISSN: 2330-3131 (Print) 2330-314X (Online) Journal homepage: <http://tandfonline.com/loi/wasw21>

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To cite this article: Marcela Sarmiento Mellinger (2014) Do Nonprofit Organizations Have Room for Advocacy in Their Structure? An Exploratory Study, Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance, 38:2, 158-168, DOI: [10.1080/03643107.2013.859197](https://doi.org/10.1080/03643107.2013.859197)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03643107.2013.859197>



Accepted author version posted online: 18 Nov 2013.



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# Do Nonprofit Organizations Have Room for Advocacy in Their Structure? An Exploratory Study

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Advocacy as a practice strategy has been part of social work since its inception. However, our knowledge of the advocacy structure within organizations is limited. Guided by institutional theory, the purpose of this study was to explore factors that impact the structure of advocacy within human service nonprofits. Frequency of advocacy participation was also explored. Results showed that formalization and knowledge of the lobbying law increase the odds of an organization having an advocacy structure. Frequency of advocacy participation, however, was low even among those organizations that reported having an advocacy structure. Implications for research, practice, and education are discussed.

*Keywords:* advocacy, advocacy structure, human services, macro social work practice, nonprofits

## INTRODUCTION

The use of advocacy as a practice strategy has been part of the social work profession since its inception. The profession's Code of Ethics requires that social workers challenge social injustice and seek to bring about social change (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). However, although advocacy has been part of the profession's discourse, many questions still remain about advocacy participation, especially at the macro level of practice.

Although advocacy seems to have a place in the profession, the paucity of research on this area has been documented in the literature (Berry, 2003; Nicholson-Crotty, 2007; Salamon & Geller, 2008). This lack of research is perhaps the most evident regarding the structure of advocacy within organizations. Although it has been suggested that advocacy should be part of organizational structures, a scarce number of empirical studies address the factors that can influence advocacy structure or the impact this structure can have in operating human service nonprofit organizations (NPOs).

Some have suggested that advocacy should be incorporated into the organizational structure as a program and service (Donaldson, 2008; Gibelman & Kraft, 1996; Taylor, 1987). This is important, they argue, because advocacy is too often a marginal function, employed in a reactive mode when issues arise (Taylor, 1987). Advocacy can often be a peripheral and ineffectual function, which lacks consistency and coherence (Gibelman & Kraft, 1996; Schneider and Lester, 2001). In order for this to change, an advocacy agenda should be developed as part of a planning process, along with the allocation of resources and staff to move advocacy efforts forward (Donaldson, 2008; Gibelman & Kraft, 1996).

In spite of the suggestions given about advocacy's place within NPOs, little is known about the factors that can potentially influence the structure of advocacy. In an effort to add to the limited knowledge on this issue, this study sought to understand factors that predict the structure of advocacy within human service NPOs.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

When it comes to advocacy, the literature has provided support for its value within human service NPOs (Boris, 2006; Hasenfeld, 2010; Hoefler, 2012; Suárez & Hwang, 2008). However, questions have been raised regarding planned and structured participation in advocacy versus participation precipitated by crisis (Austin, 2000). Schneider and Lester (2001) state that many organizations do not have advocacy structures and often use isolated advocacy efforts executed by the board or administrators with limited success. Additionally, Taylor (1991) posits that advocacy will not be successful if it is carried out as an ad hoc activity. She states, "advocacy will not be pursued within an agency when no one is responsible for it" (p. 141).

There is some conceptual discussion in the literature regarding the benefits of having a structured advocacy strategy, a specific staff person dedicated to advocacy, and even advocacy programs (Bass, Arons, Guinane, & Carter, 2007; Berry, 2003; Donaldson, 2008; Gibelman & Kraft, 1996; Netting, O'Connor, & Fauri, 2007; Taylor, 1991). Reisch (1990), in one of the few empirical studies available on structure, reviewed the relationship between advocacy and organizational structure in 125 organizations. He found that organizations that were effective in conducting advocacy were more likely to have formal organizational structures, were more likely to use official communication between leadership and staff, and were more likely to allocate resources for advocacy. Furthermore, they were "more likely to have established a structured goal-setting process . . . and to have maintained consistent goals over the past five years" (p. 73).

Berry (2003) stated that if organizations do not see advocacy as a top priority, they may not see the need to build this practice intervention into the "design of the organization" (p. 133). He found that conventional organizations (those that do not report lobbying expenditures on their 990 tax return) were less likely to have a designated person to do advocacy, compared to those who report lobbying expenditures as H electors. He viewed this difference as an indicator that conventional NPOs do not see advocacy the same way as those organizations that choose to report their lobbying activities to the government. He also stated that conventional organizations that have someone responsible for advocacy are rewarded with more contact with government through calls and requests for information. He speculated that this contact encourages NPOs to formalize their policy advocacy efforts within the organization.

Donaldson (2008) presented six building blocks for developing an advocacy program. Among them are the need for full leadership support, diversifying funding for advocacy, and having full-time staff devoted to advocacy. She concluded that more research is needed to assess the factors that relate to the structure of advocacy within human services. Gibelman and Kraft (1996) also argued that advocacy must be incorporated as an ongoing program and service within human service organizations. They viewed advocacy as a "realistic and essential response to the external environment in which human service agencies function" (p. 46) and advised against using advocacy as an ad hoc intervention. Within their recommendations to implement a successful advocacy program were the need for staff that specifically focus on advocacy and the need for leadership and board support. They concluded that an advocacy program can help achieve agency goals, provide opportunities for participation in social justice for all those interested, build cohesion within the organization, and gain social justice victories at various levels.

Taylor (1991) argued that human service organizations must have a structure through which advocacy can be processed. If structure is lacking, social change would be merely a conversation topic,

and no action would take place. She outlined a model where the organization, with an advocate on staff, pursues social change. In order for this effort to succeed, she argued, board, staff, and community support is necessary. She stated that a structured effort provides complete agency awareness and commitment before an issue is adopted as an advocacy cause, it provides a clear understanding of the advocacy role within the organization, it ensures accountability at every organizational level, and it provides documentation of the work.

In agreement with Taylor's (1991) model, Netting and colleagues (2007) suggested a formal organizational structure for advocacy is needed for it to be a legitimate channel for funding. Additionally, they proposed that social change and advocacy language should be translated into program planning language to receive the needed support. They also argued that staff with specific skills is needed to carry out the goals of the program.

Some research supports the integration of advocacy and service provision. Crutchfield and Grant (2008), in their study of successful NPOs, identified six practices that help organizations achieve their desired outcomes; this integration of advocacy and service provision was one of these practices. High-impact organizations provided programs to serve their communities, but at the same time advocated for system change at the local, state, and national levels. A notable finding from this study was that organizations that successfully incorporated advocacy with direct service increased their credibility, influence, and funding. The authors concluded that when policy is informed by direct services, organizations are more effective at both micro and macro levels of practice. They also stated that top leaders were highly engaged in policy advocacy; however, no details were provided regarding the structure of advocacy within these organizations (Crutchfield & Grant, 2008). However, it is important to note the organizations included in this study were large organizations with resources that allowed them to establish an advocacy structure. Although these large organizations are not representative of the majority of human service NPOs, integrating advocacy with service provision is not a new concept. Taylor's (1991) model, which included an established advocacy structure, was successfully implemented in a mid-size human service organization (budget < \$3 million) for over 30 years (personal communication, P. Wolf, September 23, 2013).

The literature suggests that investing resources in advocacy pays off in many ways, including affording organizations access to decision makers (Berry, 2003). However, a review of the literature leads us to reasonably conclude that further exploration of how organizations manage and structure advocacy is needed. Staff with specific advocacy responsibilities is one indicator of potential formal structures; however, additional areas such as a strategic plan for advocacy approved by leadership and board, as well as the presence of a formal advocacy program should be explored. To this end, the purpose of this study was to explore the influence of institutional factors on the structure of advocacy among human service NPOs. These results report a section of a broader study that addressed several areas of advocacy conducted by human service NPOs; additional details on the sample and on institutional theory can be found in Mellinger and Kolomer (2013). The main question that guided this quantitative exploratory study was: what institutional factors predict the structure of advocacy within human service NPOs? Additionally, the frequency of advocacy participation among human service NPOs was explored.

## METHOD

### Sample

A convenience sample of human service NPOs providing services in a southern region of the United States was utilized for this study. Organizations included in the study had 501(c)3 status, provided services to individuals and families, and sought to promote the individual, social, economic,

and psychological wellbeing of their clients (Mosley, 2010). Organizations that provided solely educational and medical services were excluded. Executive directors were asked to respond to the survey; however, some reported asking their staff or board members to respond.

The area sampled consisted of 12 small counties that have been grouped together by the regional developing commission. These counties compose one of 12 regions in the state, believed to fit together because of their geographic proximity, their economics, their proximity to a larger city in the area, and their proven ability to work together.

With Institutional Review Board approval, an electronic survey was sent to 345 organizations; 98 responses were received (28.4% response rate). Because not all responses were complete, the final sample consisted of 72 cases or a 20.9% response rate. Although the response is relatively low, it is considered average for online surveys (Andrews, Nonnecke, & Preece, 2003). The sample was derived from a database of 2,400 programs maintained by a local human service organization with support from United Way. The database contained an array of organization, including animal rescue services, health providers, and educational institutions, in addition to human service organizations. After eliminating organizations that did not meet the criteria and those for which no updated contact information could be obtained, a list of 439 organizations emerged. Of these organizations, 94 were eliminated from the sample because they no longer provided services in the area, were government organizations listed as nonprofits, or were duplicate programs listed as separate organizations. In order to increase the response rate, two reminders were sent after the initial request for participation. Additionally, organizations that had not accessed the survey were contacted by phone after the reminders were sent. Of these organizations, 55 agreed to complete the survey, however, only 31 actually accessed the survey.

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The closed-ended questions in the electronic survey focused on the organizations' background (such as age, budget, revenue sources, number of employees, educational background of employees), advocacy participation, advocacy structure, four indicators of institutionalization, and the targets of advocacy. For results regarding targets see Mellinger (2014) and Mellinger and Kolomer (2013).

Because of the paucity of research regarding the structure of advocacy within human service NPOs, the literature was used to operationalize this concept. Having an advocacy structure was defined as having one or more of these components: an advocacy program, a specific person in charge of advocacy, or a formalized advocacy strategy approved by the board of directors. This variable was measured dichotomously, with organizations that had one or more of the three items coded as yes and those with none of them, coded as no.

Four institutional factors, derived from institutional theory, were measured; they were formalization, clinical orientation, restricted funding, and knowledge of the lobbying law. Formalization was measured through a five-item scale (Mosley, 2010) with scores ranging from 0 to 5; Cronbach's alpha for this study was .64. The total number of positive responses was used to score the scale, with higher scores showing more formalization.

In this study, the assumption was made that the professionalization toward clinical work and the tendency of human service NPOs to offer clinical services have influenced advocacy participation. Therefore, the clinical orientation of leadership was measured by asking one question, "Do you professionally identify as a clinician?" According to institutional theory, professions regulate the behavior of organizations by controlling beliefs systems and constructing frameworks that define arenas within which they claim jurisdiction (Scott, 2001). The professionalization of human services has been addressed in the literature as one of the factors that has moved organizations toward the provision of individual practice and away from policy advocacy or other broad interventions to seek social change (Andrews & Reisch, 2002; Salamon, 1995). Additionally, research has shown

that specific practices, such as therapy, counseling, or psychotherapy, can become institutionalized, displacing other forms of practice from an organization's structure (Zilber, 2002).

Restricted funding was measured as the percentage of income the organization received which had a specific purpose defined by the funders. These funds could not be used in any other way by the organization. Lastly, because the law is considered a major institutional factor that influences the behavior of organizations (Frumkin & Galaskiewicz, 2004; Scott, 2001), knowledge of the lobbying law was measured by an eight-item quiz (Berry, 2003). The total number of correct answers was used for the analysis.

A scale was utilized to measure the level of advocacy participation. Participants were asked to determine how frequently (none, extremely low, low, medium, and high) the organization used each specific advocacy tactic. Means and standard deviations for legislative tactics and non-legislative tactics were calculated; the scale ranged from zero to four. The tactics were selected based on literature that indicates they are used to advocate at the macro level. Legislative tactics were defined as those that directly target elected officials at the local, state, and federal levels. The goal when using these tactics is to change or create a law or government regulation, and it is done by elected officials. Non-legislative tactics are those that target administrators, the legal system, and the community. They aim to identify needed changes in program policies (rules and regulations) and practices (procedures, outcomes, etc.) and seek to influence agencies to make needed modification in these programs in order to benefit clients (Ezell, 2001). Individuals targeted with these tactics are not elected officials. Tactics directed at the legal system seek to influence the implementation of laws or legal rules that impact clients; and targets aimed at the community, seek to change the attitudes and assumptions made about vulnerable populations (Ezell, 2001). All seek to bring about broad level change.

Legislative tactics included items such as: 1) Does your organization monitor the legislative process at the federal, state, or local level? 2) Does your organization testify in legislative hearings? 3) Does your organization work with legislators or local elected officials through the legislative process or establishment of local ordinances? 4) Does your organization make phone calls to elected officials to voice your opinion on specific issues? 5) Does your organization provide testimony in legislative committee meetings or hearings? Non-legislative tactics included items such as: 1) does someone from your organization meet with appropriate staff from public agencies in order to advocate for positive changes for clients? 2) Do you meet with public administrators with the goal of changing existing policies, regulations, or practices negatively impacting you clients? 3) Does your organization petition the courts for needed services to be provided or improved? 4) Is your organization ever an expert witness in cases where social justice for a group of people is at stake (versus individual cases)? 5) Do you organize public events to raise awareness on an issue impacting clients? 6) Do you meet with influential community member to advocate for issues impacting clients?

Size and age of the organizations were used as control variables. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze data. Logistic regression was used to analyze the structure of advocacy.

## RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for the sample are shown in Table 1. The majority (57%) of the organizations surveyed had relatively small annual budgets (\$500,000 or less). Budgets ranged from \$11,980 to \$15,000,000. Age was measured as the number of years in operation and the mean was 32 ( $SD = 32.5$ ), with a range of one year to 187 years.

Executive directors with a graduate degree comprised 50% of the sample. Additionally, 41.2% of the sample completed a bachelor's degree, 1.5% an associate's degree, and the remaining 7.3%

TABLE 1  
Nonprofit Organizations' Characteristics (N = 72)

Variable	Value	Number (%)	Mean (SD)
Type of NPO	Non-faith-based	63 (87.5%)	
	Faith-based	9 (12.5%)	
Age of organization (years in operation)	Range 1-187		32.1 (32.5)
Total annual budget (size)	Range \$11,980–\$ 15,000,000		\$2,144,288 (3796947)
Budget categories	Small < \$500,000	41 (57%)	
	Medium \$500,001–\$3,000,000	16 (22.2%)	
	Large > \$3,000,001	15 (20.8%)	
*Income source (percentage of total income)	Government		32.5 (32.8)
	Individual donors		21.8 (26.1)
	Fees		13.8 (25.7)
	Fundraising events		11.5 (16.0)
	Other		20.4 (21.9)
*Number of staff (professionals only)	Full-time professionals		10.5 (17.3)
	Part-time professionals		4.3 (11.4)
*Educational background of executive director	Doctorate	3 (4.4%)	
	JD	3 (4.4%)	
	Masters	28 (41.2%)	
	Bachelor's	28 (41.2%)	
	Associate's	1 (1.5%)	
	High school	2 (2.9%)	
	No degree	3 (4.4%)	
*Social work education of executive director	Social work degree	11 (15.9%)	
	None social work degree	58 (84.1%)	

\**n* = 68.

having a high school degree or no degree at all. The majority (84.1%) of executive directors did not have a social work degree (*N* = 68).

In this sample, organizations indicated they were highly formalized (*M* = 4.2, *SD* = 1.2), with 76% scoring a four or above on the self-rated scale (values from 0 to 5). The majority (88.9%) of respondents said they did not identify as a clinician, and 83.3% reported they did not have a professional license. Respondents indicated that 45% (*SD* = 33.3) of the revenue the organizations received was restricted. Regarding respondents' knowledge of the lobbying law, the mean score (in an eight-item quiz) was 4.3 (*SD* = 2.5). Half (50%) of the sample answered five or more questions correctly and 9.7% of participants answered all questions incorrectly.

The level of advocacy participation among this sample was low. When asked if they used specific advocacy tactics, in a range from zero to four (none, extremely low, low, medium, and high), the mean of participation for legislative tactics was 1.02 (*SD* = .95) and the mean of participation for non-legislative tactics was 1.2 (*SD* = .93). Furthermore, over half (54.4%) of participants said they never use legislative advocacy tactics or use them with extremely low frequency. For non-legislative tactics, this included 41.4% of participants (see Table 2).

Advocacy structure was measured as a binary variable (having an advocacy structure versus not having a structure). The majority (54.2%) of the organizations said they had at least one of the three components needed to be classified as having an advocacy structure. Results from examining these components individually showed that 40% said they had an advocacy program, 32% reported having a specific staff person in charge of advocacy, and 31% had a formalized advocacy strategy approved by the board. Furthermore, the majority (52.8%) said advocacy was part of the mission of the organization.

TABLE 2  
Level of Advocacy Participation (N = 70)

<i>Frequency of advocacy participation</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Legislative Advocacy		
Never	12	17.1%
Extremely Low	26	37.1%
Low	21	30%
Medium	9	12.9%
High	2	2.9%
Non-Legislative Advocacy		
Never	13	18.6%
Extremely Low	16	22.9%
Low	21	30%
Medium	17	24.3%
High	3	4.2%

TABLE 3  
Logistic Regression Analysis for Advocacy Structure

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Wald's <math>\chi^2</math></i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Odds ratio (95% CI)</i>
Formalization	.896	.329	7.431	1	.006*	2.45 (1.286–4.668)
Clinical Identity	.484	.873	.308	1	.579	1.623 (.293–8.975)
Restricted Funding	.007	.009	.564	1	.453	1.007 (.989–1.024)
Knowledge of the lobbying law	.261	.123	4.489	1	.034*	1.298 (1.020–1.653)
Total budget	.000	.000	.069	1	.793	1.000 (1.000–1.000)
Age of organization	-.001	.008	.018	1	.892	.999 (.983–1.015)
Constant	-5.931	2.356	6.336	1		–
<i>N</i>		72				
$\chi^2(6,72)$		21.489				
Nagelkerke $R^2$		.345				
<i>p</i>		.001				

Note:  $p < .05$ .

The logistic regression for advocacy structure showed the model was statistically significant (Table 3),  $\chi^2(6,72) = 21.489$ ,  $p = .001$ . The model was able to correctly classify 84.6% of those organizations that said they have a structure of advocacy, and 57.6% of those that said they did not, for an overall success rate of 72.2%. The model showed that formalization was a significant predictor ( $p = .006$ ) of structure. The odds ratio (2.45) for this variable indicated that when holding all other variables constant, for each unit increase in formalization, the odds of having an advocacy structure increased by 2.45. Knowledge of the lobbying law was also significant ( $p = .03$ ), with

the odds ratio also showing an increase on advocacy structure by 1.29 for each unit increase in knowledge. The pseudo  $R^2$  (Nagelkerke  $R^2$ ) for the model was .345.

## DISCUSSION

The findings from this study support previous research and add new information to our knowledge of advocacy among human service NPOs. Previous research has shown that NPOs say they do participate in advocacy (Bass et al., 2007; Salamon & Geller, 2008), which was supported by this study. Although the frequency of advocacy participation is low (legislative advocacy  $M = 1.02$ ,  $SD = .95$ ; non-legislative advocacy  $M = 1.2$ ,  $SD = .93$ ), organizations do perceive some of their activities as advocacy. These results also confirm previous studies showing that although advocacy takes place, its use is modest at best (Berry, 2003; Child & Grønberg, 2007).

Organizations in this study were highly formalized ( $M = 4.5$ ;  $SD = 1.2$ ), which reflects their tendency to adopt and preserve procedures they believe to be important to the organization (Leiter, 2005). Institutional theory suggests that institutionalization is rooted in conformity and that at times structures are set in place and left in place regardless of their value to the organization (Anheier, 2005). The results of this study confirm this theoretical assumption since higher levels of formalization led to higher odds of having an advocacy structure. However, this structure does not speak to the value given to advocacy or the amount of advocacy that actually takes place within an organization; it simply speaks to organizational composition.

In spite of the paucity of empirical research regarding the structure of advocacy, the literature does suggest that in order for advocacy to occur, an advocacy structure must be present in the organization (Donaldson, 2008; Gibelman & Kraft, 1996; Taylor, 1987). This study provides preliminary support for this assertion; however, the assumption that advocacy structure will lead to advocacy participation needs further exploration. It is possible that organizations with an advocacy structure are more willing to do advocacy because they have a system in place that allows them to advocate. However, how much advocacy participation actually results from this structure should be explored. Results in this study showed that having a structure does not equate with a high level of advocacy involvement. Organizations in this study did participate in advocacy, but with low frequency.

One area that deserves future exploration, and one that could give us a different perception of advocacy participation by these organizations, is their involvement in coalitions or associations. Studies have shown that memberships and collaborations with other organizations increase advocacy involvement at least at the policy advocacy level (Bass et al., 2007; Donaldson, 2007; Salamon & Geller, 2008). Although an attempt was made in this study to explore this relationship, over half of participants (51%) did not respond to the question addressing membership in coalitions or associations. Because no reasonable assumptions could be made based on data that had over half of the responses missing, this variable was not included in the model for this study. However, this is an important topic that should be addressed in future research, especially when studying smaller organizations that may depend on these associations or memberships to make their voices and that of their constituents heard.

Knowledge of the lobbying law was also a significant predictor of advocacy structure. This relationship was positive indicating that organizations with knowledgeable leadership on their staff were more likely to have an advocacy structure. Again, this finding simply points to the issue of structure and not to the actual use of advocacy by these organizations. Even though organizations may have an advocacy program, a specific person in charge of advocacy, or a formal advocacy plan in their structure, they may still spend more time, energy, and resources on the services they provide and not on advocating for broad level change.

The literature has acknowledged that nonprofits organizations are not always clear regarding how much lobbying and advocacy they can do (Bass et al., 2007). Because these two terms, although not

the same, are often used interchangeably, some have suggested that fear of lobbying also prevents organizations from advocating (Berry, 2003). However, having accurate knowledge of what organizations are able to do could have a positive impact on organization's advocacy. These results show that knowledge of the lobbying law can at least give organizations the confidence to have some type of advocacy structure in place. Additional research is needed to determine the relationship between having this formalized structure and the actual frequency in which advocacy is utilized within the organization. Although it would seem logical that organizations that have an advocacy structure would frequently advocate for broad level change, that was not the case in this sample. When frequency of participation for only those who have an advocacy structure was examined ( $N = 39$ ), the means were higher than for the overall sample ( $N = 72$ ); however, they were still low. The mean for legislative advocacy was 1.3 ( $SD = .86$ ) and the mean for non-legislative advocacy was 1.6 ( $SD = .98$ ), still within the extremely low to low categories in the scale.

The two predictor variables that showed no statistical significance were clinical identity and restricted funding. Although the literature has shown that the professionalization of social work and its tendency to invest more resources into direct services has impacted advocacy, this study did not support those claims. It is important to note that the majority (86.1%) of executive directors in this sample did not have a social work degree. This is an issue that should be explored in future research. Regarding funding this study provided no support that funding impacts the structure of advocacy within human service NPOs.

Although no studies addressing the factors that influence advocacy structure were found in the literature, other studies have shown that size and age of an organization can impact organizations' advocacy participation (Bass et al., 2007; Child & Grønbjerg, 2007; Donaldson, 2007); consequently, they were used in this study as control variables. Results showed that size was not a significant predictor of advocacy structure. One possible explanation is that organizations may view advocacy as a philosophical commitment; if they are committed to doing advocacy, having a structure and doing some advocacy (regardless of how often or how much) may feel as fulfilling this commitment. The fact that over half (54.2%) of the respondents said they have an advocacy structure provides support to this assumption. The size of the organization's budget did not necessarily affect the apparent commitment to doing advocacy. However, it is also possible that the wide range in organizations' budgets could have hindered the ability to see the impact of size on the outcome variables. In the case of age, these results confirmed previous studies that have shown that there is no relationship between the age of an organization and advocacy behavior (Child & Grønbjerg, 2007; Schmid, Bar, & Nirel, 2008).

## LIMITATIONS

Although this study provides some insight into the advocacy structure of human service NPOs, several limitations should be mentioned. The sample utilized in the study was small, which should lead to a cautious interpretation of the results when thinking of the overall human service NPOs population. Additionally, because no tools to measure the structure of advocacy were found, a measure was constructed based on conceptualizations of advocacy structure from the literature; this measure needs further exploration. The study utilized a convenience sample, which also limits the generalizability of the results. Lastly, advocacy was defined for participants thus not allowing their own interpretation of advocacy. These limitations notwithstanding, the study does contribute important information to the understanding of advocacy by human service organizations by examining the structure of advocacy, a concept rarely found in the literature. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of having an advocacy structure in order for human service NPOs to achieve their goal to promote social and economic justice.

## IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Some believe that human service NPOs' ability to represent their constituents can be improved by creating structures that allow them to share their views with the wider community (Guo, 2007). This may be true in some cases; however, this study demonstrated that having a structure is not enough. A majority (54.2%) of organizations in this sample said they had an advocacy structure and that they participated in advocacy, yet results confirmed what previous research has shown—advocacy participation may occur among nonprofits, but it is not used frequently (Berry, 2003; Salamon & Geller, 2008). These results point to the fact that although advocacy may be taking place, the lack of depth in advocacy participation may compromise organizations' presence and visibility in their communities. If organizations choose to be silent about the issues impacting their constituents and the services they provide, they are in danger of not being acknowledged or even known by those making decisions (Mellinger & Kolomer, 2013). This is an issue that needs additional attention as it has implications for social work practice and education.

As mentioned earlier, it is possible that human service NPOs have an advocacy structure as a response to the philosophical commitment to social and economic justice. Having this structure should be commended as it can contribute to the use of advocacy as a practice strategy that can enhance the services these organizations provide. However, it is obvious that this needs to go beyond a philosophical commitment to social justice. One place to begin helping advocacy regain its place in the profession as a legitimate practice strategy is the classroom. Training of future human service leaders should include models for successful advocacy, as well as empirical evidence that shows the benefits of having a strong and active advocacy presence. This training needs to happen within social work programs, but it also needs to go beyond our profession; as this study demonstrated, social workers are not the only ones at the helm of human service NPOs. This could be addressed by making use of interdisciplinary collaborations so we can incorporate advocacy into the curriculum of any discipline training human service NPO professionals.

Because of the void in the literature regarding advocacy structure, additional research is necessary to understand how advocacy is incorporated into organizations' formal structure. Having a structure that supports advocacy as a valuable practice can allow human service NPOs to be at the forefront of issues impacting their constituents and the services they provide. It could potentially help organizations to not be reactive, but proactive in seeking social change.

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