

**Small Process Groups:
Would They Enhance the MSW Student Experience?**

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Summary:

Due to the emotional nature of the MSW curriculum, students experience triggers, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and/or extreme stress at a higher rate than other graduate programs (Black, Jeffreys, & Hartley, 2014; Hiles Howard et. al, 2015). This poster aims to present the findings from an anonymous survey of MSW students regarding their perception of the emotional experience, the current supports being offered by the school, and if processing groups are a viable solution to offset the emotional challenges that often occur for these students.

Abstract:

Research demonstrates a correlation between choosing a career in social work and having adverse childhood experiences (Rompf & Royse, 1994). These experiences enhance the likelihood that MSW students will experience triggers, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and/or extreme stress from topics covered throughout the curriculum and incidents that they may be exposed to during field placements (Black, Jeffreys, & Hartley, 2014; Hiles Howard et al., 2015). These negative effects are seen at an increased rate when there is a lack of support offered, or students do not feel equipped with effective self-care strategies to cope with the intense nature of the work (Newsom & Gruszka, 2012).

While many graduate programs provide individual therapy options and some even offer integrative seminars, there seems to be a lack of process groups offered despite their ability to

foster self-compassion, empathy, resiliency, and mutual aid. Group work is known to offset the emotional experiences that can occur in MSW programs and help an individual feel supported (Ying & Han, 2009). Unlike individual therapy and integrative seminars, process groups are an effective method for creating a safe space that allows individuals to explore and process their intrapersonal emotions within a social context and gain support from members who directly relate (Yalom & Leszcz, 2008).

Survey:

1. How old are you? (years)
2. What ethnicity do you identify with?
3. What gender do you identify with?
4. Currently, what level are you in the MSW program?
5. What is or will be your specialization(s) in the MSW program?

In this next section, questions are asked about your experience in the classroom and/or field work. We are interested in any emotional responses you had to material covered or experiences at your field placement(s) and your thoughts on having an outlet to further explore these.

6. At any point in the MSW program so far, have you dealt with a difficult emotional response resulting from *course content* that you had a hard time processing and/or coping with?
7. At any point in the MSW program so far, have you dealt with a difficult emotional response resulting from experiences at your *field placement(s)* that you had a hard time processing and/or coping with?
8. Do you feel that support groups would be beneficial for MSW students to help process and cope with difficult emotions that may result from experiences throughout the program?

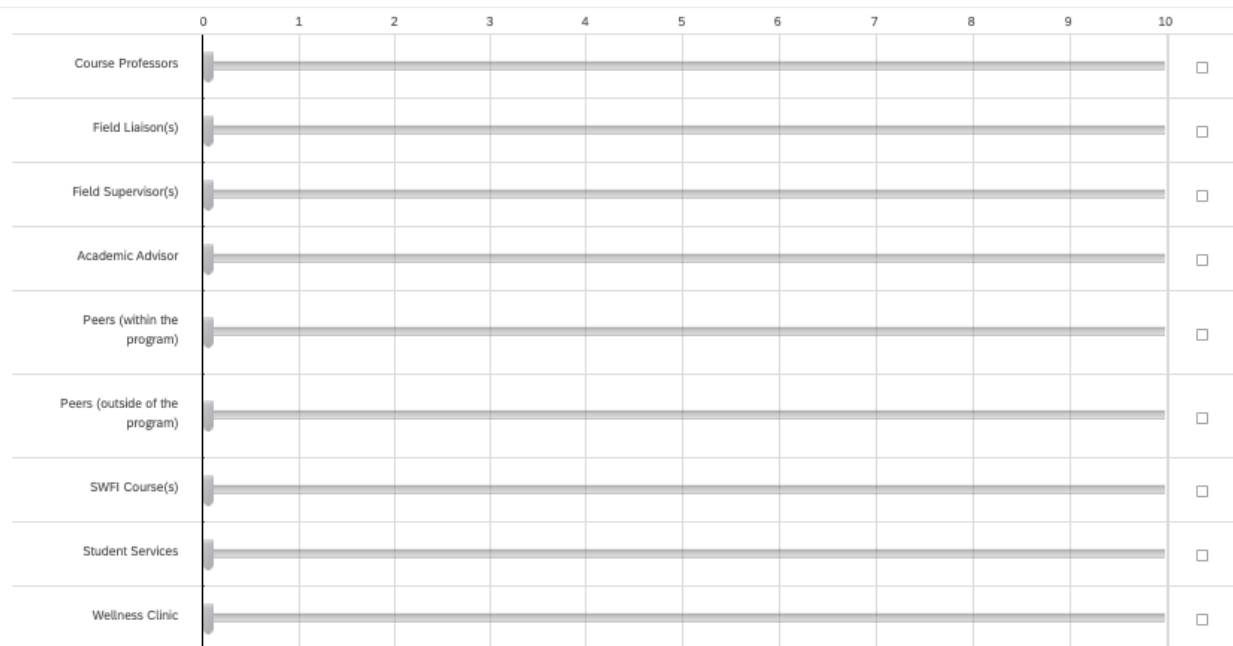
You indicated that you feel support groups could be beneficial for MSW students. Please answer a few questions regarding the level of support you have felt during your time in the program and provide insight on how you imagine the formation of the support groups.

9. Please individually rate the level of support you have felt from the below people and/or services in regard to processing emotionally intense aspects of the MSW program at Loyola University Chicago.

If any do not apply to you, please mark the box under "not applicable".

0 = felt a severe lack of support

10= felt extremely supported



10. Please explain why you or others would participate in this support group.
11. Should the group be short term, long term or ongoing?
12. What would be an ideal amount of members in each group?
13. How often should the group meet to feel supportive?
14. What would be your suggestions for where the group should take place?
15. Should the group be open to new members or a closed group once it is formed?
16. What would be your suggestion for who would lead such a group?
17. How should members be selected for each group?
18. Please explain what barriers might make you or others hesitant about being part of a support group during your time in the MSW program.
19. What else would be important to you regarding how this group should be conceived and conducted?

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