

Core Group Work Skills Inventory (CGWSI-IC)

Technical Guide

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Abstract

Since the early 1980s, the Association for Specialists in Group Work has promulgated standards for training group workers (ASGW, 1983, 1991, 2000). Now in its third revision, ASGW has established competency standards for both knowledge and skills to be included in all core group work training programs (ASGW, 2000). The Core Group Work Skills Inventory—Importance and Confidence (CGWSI-IC) was developed as a standards-based instrument with scales to assess *importance*, an individual's valuing of the specified group work competencies, and *confidence* in being able to use the competencies in practice. This instrument, it is hoped, will facilitate future studies of the relationship between training variables and an individual's valuing and confidence in using ASGW's core knowledge and critical skills, and of the relationship between varying level of valuing and confidence and other group outcome phenomena.

Introduction

Since the early 1980s, the Association for Specialists in Group Work has promulgated standards for training group workers (ASGW, 1983, 1991, 2000). Like previous standards, the 2000 ASGW *Professional Standards for Training Group Workers* established a set of competencies for core group work training that describe the group work knowledge and skills which are held to be essential for every counselor to know. The Core Group Work Skills Inventory (CGWSI) is an outgrowth of this work.

Development of the CGWSI

Purpose. The Core Group Work Skills Inventory—Importance and Confidence (CGWSI-IC) was designed to be a content valid measure of the degree to which a respondent viewed each of ASGW's core group work knowledge and skill competencies as being important and the degree to which the respondent felt confident that he or she was able to use each skill.

Item Development. Items for the CGWSI-IC were written by three senior counseling faculty with advanced group work experience. The resulting pool of 30 items was then submitted to a group of five advanced master's degree counseling students who were asked to evaluate each item for clarity, freedom from stereotypic language, and consistency with at least one of the ASGW core group work standards. Flawed items were rewritten for clarity. The pool of 30 edited items was then submitted to a team of four doctoral students with advanced group work training and service as a supervised leader of at least two personal development groups. These doctoral judges categorized each item in the pool according to which standard it reflected and

reviewed item wording for clarity and freedom from stereotypic language. All items were unanimously matched with a training standard; however the item pool was reduced to 27 items to eliminate item redundancy.

Scaling. Consistent with the theory of change espoused by Rollnick and colleagues (Rollnick, 2004; Rollnick, Mason, & Butler, 2000), scaling for the instrument was based upon two motivational dimensions: perceived *importance* of the standards based competencies (e.g., “How important is encouraging participation of group members?”) and sense of *confidence* in being able to use them (e.g., “How confident are you in encouraging participation of group members?”). According to the theory of Motivational Interviewing, a trans-theoretical approach for helping people implement behavioral change, individuals who do not value the group work competencies described by the instrument’s items are important may be disinterested in learning or applying them while those who value the competencies, may be more eager participants in training. Likewise, those with low confidence in their ability to demonstrate the scales may be more open to skill training and confidence building (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). Scaling was defined with four-point Likert-type scales ranging from “very unimportant – very important” for the *importance* scale and “very unconfident – very confident” for the *confidence* scale.

Psychometric Properties

Design of the Study

Participants. The participants in this study were respondents to recruitment messages delivered by E-mail through ASGW’s electronic mail-lists and through an announcement posted on the home page of the ASGW organizational website. Over the course of approximately three months, 232 individuals visited the web-based questionnaire, and of these, 181 submitted complete responses to the CGWSI-IC. The respondents were drawn from 39 states, including the District of Columbia; eight states— Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas—each contributed ten or more respondents. The distribution by ethnicity was 80% Caucasian, 9% African American, 5% Latino/Latina, 1% Asian, and 4% other. Composition by gender was 24% males and 76% females. When asked about educational level, approximately 34% of the respondents indicated that they were currently enrolled in a masters program, 23% held terminal degrees in counselor education or related fields, 20% were masters level clinicians, 18% were currently enrolled in a doctoral program, and 4% were educators (unspecified). Approximately 60% of respondents indicated completing one or more advanced courses in group work, 34% indicated they had completed an introductory course in group work, and 6% admitted they had never enrolled in any courses in group work.

Procedure. The 27-item inventory was administered via a web-based survey site (www.surveymonkey.com). Demographic questions included questions about gender, ethnicity, state of residence, educational status, amount of group work training, and career maturity. Finally, respondents were asked a set of validity indicator questions which included: (a) How important is it for you to be a skilled group participant?, (b) How important is it for you to be a skilled group leader?, (c) How confident do you feel about your group participation skills?, and (d) How confident do you feel about your group leadership skills? A question asking the degree to which the respondent liked being in groups was also asked as a control question.

Results

Data analysis included studies of CGWSI-IC score reliability, studies of the correlation between CGWSI-IC scale scores and responses to the validity questions, and studies of differences in *importance* and *confidence* scores when levels of group work preparation and career maturity were compared.

Descriptive Information

Respondents tended to rate the *importance* of the core group work competences and their *confidence* in implementing the standards very high; mean *importance* was 3.34 ($s = .38$) while mean *confidence* was 3.14 ($s = .45$). For both scales, the median value was slightly above the mean and both scales yielded modest negative skew (-2.29 and -1.09 respectively), primarily due to a small number of respondents with very low scores. Approximately 25% of the respondents scored above a score of 3.56 for *importance* and above 3.44 for *confidence* on this four-point response scale. These descriptive statistics are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Psychometric properties of the *Importance* and *Confidence* scales of the *Core Group Work Skills Inventory* (n=181)

	Importance	Confidence
Scale mean (standard deviation)	3.34 (.38)	3.14 (.45)
25 th %ile, 50 th %ile (median), 75 th %ile	3.18, 3.41, 3.56	2.94, 3.18, 3.44
Skewness; kurtosis	-2.29, 0.18	-1.09, 3.68
Item homogeneity	.91	.95
Mean inter-item correlations	.29 (range: .03 - .53)	.43 (range: .16 - .65)

Item Homogeneity

As expected, mean inter-item correlations were higher for the *confidence* scale (.43) than for the *importance* scale (.29). Internal consistency (coefficient α) for both the *importance* scale (.92) and the *confidence* scale (.95) was very high. To determine whether any individual items detracted from the homogeneity of either scale, each item was removed from the scale in turn, and coefficient α was computed on the remaining items. Neither scale was improved by removing any particular item. Homogeneity statistics are listed in Table 1.

Validity Studies

Validity was assessed in two ways. First, the relationship between the two CGWSI-IC scales, *importance* and *confidence*, and the four validity indicator variables was assessed with correlational analysis. Then differences in *importance* and *confidence* mean scores between levels of group work training and career maturity were examined.

Correlations with validity indicator questions. Pearson product moment correlation coefficients were computed to measure the relationship between respondents answers to the validity indicator questions and their total scores on the *importance* and *confidence* scales of the CGWSI-IC. Partial correlations were also computed to control for the degree the respondent liked being part of a group.

As was expected, the two CGWSI-IC scales, *importance* and *confidence*, were strongly related ($r = .62, p < .01$), sharing about 36% common variance. The *importance* scale correlated most highly with the validity indicator, “How important is it for you to be a skilled group participant” ($r = .30, p < .01$) although it was only weakly related to “How important is it for you to be a skilled group leader?” ($r = .16, p < .05$). Even more gratifying, the *confidence* scale correlated highly with both its validity indicators: “How confident do you feel about your group

participation skills?” ($r = .42, p < .01$), and “How confident do you feel about your group leadership skills?” ($r = .52, p < .01$). Partialing out the effect of liking being in a group had negligible effect on the magnitude of any of these relationships. Zero order and partial correlations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Zero-order and Partial Correlations among Four Validity Indicator Variables and the *Importance* and *Confidence* scales of the *CGWSI-IC*.

	How important is it for you to be a skilled group...		How confident do you feel about your group...		CGWSI-IC Importance	CGWSI-IC Confidence
	Participant	Leader	Participation skills	Leadership skills		
How important is it for you to be a skilled group participant?	---	.38***	.22**	.15*	.30***	.23**
How important is it for you to be a skilled group leader?	.31***	---	.23**	.26**	.16*	.21**
How confident do you feel about your group participation skills?	.16*	.18*	---	.59***	.18*	.42***
How confident do you feel about your group leadership skills?	.08	.21**	.58***	---	.08	.52***
CGWSI-IC importance scale	.30***	.16*	.17*	.07	---	.62***
CGWSI-IC confidence scale	.18*	.17*	.40***	.50***	.62***	---
To what extent do you like being part of a group?	.35***	.28***	.21**	.22**	.04	.18*

Upper triangle: zero-order correlations (n = 175)
 Lower triangle: partial correlations (controlling for liking being in a group) (n = 174)
 * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Differences between levels of training. Respondents recorded the amount of group work training they had (an introductory group course, an advanced group work course, or two or more group work courses) and their level of career maturity (master’s degree student, master’s graduate clinician, doctoral student, or doctoral graduate counselor educator). It was expected that both perceived *importance* and personal sense of *confidence* would increase with increased training and career maturity.

Analysis of the interactive effect of training on *importance* and *confidence* revealed that although increased training resulted in modest increase for the degree of *importance* ascribed to the core group work skills, it had greater impact on the respondents perceived sense of confidence ($F_{2, 168} = 14.93, p < .001$). Across the three levels of group training, *importance* increased in near-linear fashion: “no courses” ($M = 3.26$), “one introductory group course” ($M = 3.30$), “one or more advanced group course” ($M = 3.38$). *Confidence* began lower and improved more dramatically: “no courses” ($M = 2.79$), “one introductory group course” ($M = 2.94$), “one or more advanced group courses” ($M = 3.14$). Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 3.

The test of the interactive effect of career maturity on *importance* and *confidence* yielded similar findings with an embedded anomaly. It was assumed that the levels of career maturity could be ordered: (a) “enrolled in a masters program,” (b) “enrolled in a doctoral program,” (c) “employed as a master’s prepared clinician,” (d) “employed as a doctorally prepared counselor educator.” In general terms, increased career maturity was associated with both increased *importance* and *confidence*. For *importance*, master’s prepared clinicians ($M = 3.23$)

unexpectedly rated the core group work skills lower than any of the other three groups: master's student ($M = 3.29$); doctoral student ($M = 3.37$), doctorally prepared counselor educator ($M = 3.49$), while for *confidence*, doctorally prepared counselor educators (3.49) scored higher than any of the other three groups: master's prepared clinician ($M = 3.14$), doctoral student ($M = 3.04$), master's student ($M = 2.95$) ($F_{3, 168} = 11.323, p < .001$). Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for *Importance* and *Confidence* of the *CGWSI-IC* by Level of Group Work Training and by Level of Career Maturity (n=181).

	<i>Importance</i>		<i>Confidence</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>s</i>
Level of Group Work Training				
Not enrolled in any group work courses	3.26	.14	2.79	.50
Completed one introductory group work course	3.30	.40	2.94	.32
Completed one or more advanced group work courses	3.38	.40	3.29	.46
Level of Career Maturity				
Master's student	3.29	.44	2.95	.40
Doctoral student	3.37	.26	3.04	.44
Master's prepared clinician	3.23	.44	3.14	.47
Doctorally prepared counselor educator	3.49	.30	3.49	.33

Discussion

The Core Group Work Skills Inventory was developed to assess the degree to which respondents valued the *importance* of the core group work skills specified by ASGW training standards (ASGW, 2000) and the degree to which they had *confidence* in their ability to use them. Items for the instrument were developed using standard content validation methods.

Psychometrics

Studies of item homogeneity revealed that both the *importance* and *confidence* scales were internally consistent and studies of the scale's relationships to validity indicator variables suggested each scale was measuring its intended construct. Validity studies supported the construct validity of both the *importance* and *confidence* scales. As expected, both *importance* and *confidence* increased in near-linear fashion with increased training in group work. When levels of career maturity were compared, *confidence* increased in near-linear fashion with increased maturity. However, an anomaly occurred when *importance* scores were compared. Although there was a near-linear increase in *importance* across master's students, doctoral students, and doctorally prepared counselor educators, master's prepared clinicians rating of the importance of the core group work skills fell below all other groups. While seemingly an anomaly, evidence from the weighting of the eight content areas in the National Counselor Certification examination (National Board of Certified Counselors, 2007) suggests that group work may be viewed as less important than other areas of counselor practice, and may be reflective of a devaluing of group work by public sector and non-profit service agencies wherein reimbursement schedules may favor individual over group treatment. While devaluation of group work skills by master's prepared clinicians interrupted the near-linear relationship between *importance* and increasing career maturity, these findings also add support to the contention that the *importance* and *confidence* scores reflect their intended constructs.

Application to Training

In group work training, a learner's motivation for acquiring group work expertise is generally increased to the extent that the learner perceives the training objectives to be valuable and achievable. Individuals who value and feel confident in their ability to perform training objectives may not be interested in further training or may seek advanced training to improve their skills (Table 4, Quadrant I). Those who value the training objectives but do not feel confident of their abilities are likely to be good candidates for introductory group work training. Among those whose lack of confidence derives from general low self-confidence, ancillary work to improve self-confidence may be required (Table 4, Quadrant II). Individuals who devalue the training objectives despite feeling confident they could apply them may profit from motivational work and examination of their disillusionment (Table 4, Quadrant III). While those who neither value the training objectives nor feel confident they could apply them most likely fit Prochaska and DiClemente's (1982) pre-contemplation stage of change, requiring motivational work before any attempt at skill training is launched (Table 4, Quadrant IV).

Table 4. Impact of Perceived Importance and Felt Confidence on Group Work Trainee Success

	Feels confident in ability to enact the group work competencies	Feels little confidence in ability to enact the group work competencies
Views the group work competencies as important	<p><u>Quadrant I</u></p> <p>Person values and feels confident in enacting the group work competencies; does not perceive self as needing training; may seek advanced training</p>	<p><u>Quadrant II</u></p> <p>Person values the group work competencies but does not feel confident in enacting them; most likely candidate for training program in core group work skills</p>
Views the group work competencies as unimportant	<p><u>Quadrant III</u></p> <p>Person does not value the competencies but feels confident in enacting them; most likely candidate for motivational work to increase sense of importance and explore disillusionment</p>	<p><u>Quadrant IV</u></p> <p>Person neither values nor feels confident in enacting the group work competencies; most likely candidate for motivational work to increase valuing of and instill hope in being able to learn the competencies</p>

Tailoring Scaling to Diverse Research Needs

CGWSI-IC may be viewed as consisting of two separate components—the group work competence items, and the scaling. Unlike many psychometric instruments, the items were developed to reflect the content of the ASGW training standards (Association for Specialists in Group Work, 2000). They were subjected to rigorous analysis by a panel of individuals who had both the training and the experience to serve as judges of their content validity. However, the choice of scaling was made because perceived *importance* and felt *confidence* are two salient dimensions in the Prochaska model of change (Prochaska, Redding, & Evers, 2002). Thus, our analyses of item homogeneity and correlation with “validity” questions are all specific to this set of items and our choice of scaling.

In other research, training, or practice settings, different scaling dimensions may be more salient. While keeping the content valid item set intact (a condition for use of the CGWSI items), a researcher, trainer, or practitioner might choose completely different dimensions to scale. For example, to replicate earlier studies of compliance with ASGW's training standards within counselor education programs, a researcher might substitute a scale assessing whether students

in the program are trained in each of the core knowledge and skill elements described by the items. Examples of alternative scale dimensions are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5. Alternate CGWSI scaling for diverse purposes.

Purpose	Dimension	Scaling
To study compliance with the ASGW training standards at various training institutions	Compliance	1: training standard completely met 2: training standard minimally met 3: training standard not met
To assess quality of an individual group member's or leader's use of the group work competencies	Quality	1: competent in use of skill 2: moderately competent in use of skill 3: incompetent in use of skill N: not exhibited
To assess frequency with which an individual group member or leader exhibits each of the competencies	Frequency	1: used skill frequently 2: used skill occasionally 3: did not use this skill

NOTE: Individuals who modify CGWSI-IC scaling should change the letters following the hyphen to denote their choice of scale.

Limitations to the Generalizability of the Findings

Generalizability of the findings of this study is limited due sampling. Participants recruited through the ASGW website and its electronic mail-lists were likely to be individuals with interest, training, or successful experience in group work. As a consequence, it is likely that the sample does not mirror the knowledge of group work, the skill in participating or leading groups, or the attitudes and values held regarding interpersonal relations held by the general population. Further, since no attempt was made to ensure representative sampling across diverse ethnic groups found in the United States, the sample is heavily overrepresented by majority culture volunteers.

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