

Chapter 1

Toward Evidence-Based Practice

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, the relationship between research and social work practice is reviewed. Social workers have tended to rely on such unreliable sources as supervisors’ opinions, logic and common sense, tradition, and authority to provide the knowledge they required for making practice decisions. Social workers now advocate and acknowledge the value of EBP, and use research findings as a component of practice decision-making. Research methods, which are classified as descriptive, predictive, and prescriptive are reviewed. Basic research and applied research and their use in practice decisions are discussed,. Differences between quantitative and qualitative research also were described. Finally, the current environment for social work research and its challenges, are reviewed. These challenges will require social work researchers to be sensitive and diplomatic and also willing to learn new and creative ways to evaluate and improve social work interventions.

CORE COMPETENCIES IN THIS CHAPTER

Competencies in bold are addressed significantly in this chapter.

Professional Identity	Ethical Practice	Critical Thinking	Diversity in Practice	Human Rights & Justice
Research Based Practice	Human Behavior	Policy Practice	Practice Contexts	Engage, Assess, Intervene, Evaluate

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

- After completing the chapter, students will be able to:
- Discuss the historical context of social work research and how it is an important contributor to evidence-based practice;
 - Define scientific knowledge and how it differs from other types of knowledge;
 - Point out the differences between descriptive, predictive and prescriptive knowledge;
 - Explain the importance of both quantitative and qualitative research as contributors to the practice knowledge base.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Do social work practitioners have a responsibility to conduct research in their practice? If a social work practitioner does not conduct research in their practice what might be some of the consequences. Are there times or circumstances in which social work practitioners should not conduct research on their practice?
2. Have each student discuss how they might use research as a social work practitioner. How might they go about finding that research?
3. Why might board members or administrators of an agency be fearful of research conducted in their agency? What can a social work researcher do to allay their fears.
4. Should social work practitioners rely more on applied research or basic research? Describe the benefits of both types of research for the social work practitioners.
5. How can research improve the services that social workers provide to their clients? List specific services (after school programs, social skills training, etc.) and the populations that might benefit

SUGGESTED CHAPTER ACTIVITIES AND ASSIGNMENTS

1. Ask students to read an article that is a research report in a social work journal on a topic that interest them and determine if the knowledge developed by it is primarily descriptive, predictive or prescriptive in nature, and if the major method of study was primarily qualitative or quantitative. Ask students to discuss if the study was primarily applied research or basic research. Discuss how the findings may expand what we know or influence what we do in social work practice. Have the students list the ways in which social work values and ethics are present or not in the research article.
2. Have each student bring in a copy of a social work research article from a journal. From its abstract and its methodology section, discuss whether the methodology was primarily quantitative, qualitative, or a combination of the two. Give examples of what makes it quantitative or qualitative. If it was primarily quantitative, discuss how more qualitative methods might have been used, and vice versa. Have students note any biases of the research or the researcher that is present.

3. Watch "Research-Based Practice: Engaging in Research Informed Practice" located in mysocialworklab. What research or sources does the social worker use to begin working with his client? Can you think of other sources or other research that would have been helpful to use? How might the social worker go about finding those other sources?

SUGGESTED TEACHING TIPS

Chapter 1 provides an opportunity to deal with some of the fears, misconceptions, negative attitudes and biases that social work students often bring to a course on research. You can offer the ways that research-based knowledge contributes to evidence-based practice. You may also wish to emphasize the similarities between social work practice methods and the research process and note that some of the same attributes that help us to be effective practitioners are the same ones that help us design and implement research studies. You can also emphasize the importance of both qualitative and quantitative research methods for building knowledge for social work practice.

ASSESSMENT FOR IN-CLASS USE

The following assessment has been created for in-class use. This assessment may be available through Pearson's MyTest website—allowing for easy access for creating your own tests. This assessment may also be offered in a Blackboard/Angel/D2L/WebCT package. *Please contact your local Pearson sales representative to learn about the options available. Visit, <http://www.pearsonhighered.com/replocator>.*

Multiple Choice Questions

Difficulty: 1 = Easy; 2 = Medium; 3 = Challenging

Choose the BEST possible answer for each of the following.

1. What would be an example of “applied research”?
 - A. a program evaluation to determine if a county job-training program should continue to receive federal funding
 - B. a study to determine whether or not social workers who take a course on psychopathology are more likely to pass their state licensure exam than those who do not
 - C. a study to measure the level of status that social workers enjoy in medical settings within the United States
 - D. a study to learn if clients convicted of child neglect who come voluntarily for counseling have a better success rate than those who are court-ordered to undergo counseling

Answer: D

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Critical Thinking

2. The first step in the research process should be:
 - A. selection of a data collection instrument.
 - B. problem identification and specification.
 - C. selection of a research design.
 - D. formulation of the research hypothesis.

Answer: B

Difficulty: 1

Competency: Research Based Practice

3. What is a definition of a social work research problem?
- A. A statement of a relationship between variables.
 - B. An unanswered question such as, "Is ADHD real?"
 - C. A gap in knowledge that causes social work practice to be less effective than it could be.
 - D. A difficulty in social functioning that affects many people.

Answer: C

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Research Based Practice

4. How might we best describe the degree of similarity between research task and practice task?
- A. Not at all alike
 - B. Only slightly alike
 - C. Similar, but not identical
 - D. Identical

Answer: C

Difficulty: 1

Competency: Practice Contexts

5. Knowledge that can tell us what we should say or do to be effective in our interventions is referred to as:
- A. empirical
 - B. descriptive
 - C. Predictive
 - D. Prescriptive

Answer: D

Difficulty: 1

Competency: Research Based Practice

6. Reliance on "traditional sources of knowledge" that are not based on sound research can result in:
- A. stereotyping of people
 - B. more individualized interventions with clients.
 - C. a better understanding of client services
 - D. helps to better understand marginalized clients.

Answer: A

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Critical Thinking

7. Historically, the antagonism between researchers and practitioners that has existed within social work could be attributed to:
- A. researchers, but not to practitioners.
 - B. both researchers and practitioners.
 - C. practitioners, but not to researchers.
 - D. social work students.

Answer: B

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Practice Context

8. What is generally not used by social workers who engage in evidence based practice?
- A. the findings of scientific research
 - B. their practice experience and expertise
 - C. their knowledge of individual clients and their values and preferences
 - D. traditional service practices

Answer: D

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Practice Context

9. In science, the phrase "public way of knowing" refers to a researcher's obligation to:
- A. publish the findings of the research as soon as possible.
 - B. conduct the research in an ethical manner.
 - C. describe the research methods used so others can try to replicate the findings.
 - D. review all related knowledge before collecting data.

Answer: C

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Research Based Practice

10. What does it mean when we say "in science, all knowledge is provisional"?
- A. Scientific knowledge cannot be trusted.
 - B. Scientific knowledge should be regarded as tentative; subsequent research may prove it wrong.
 - C. Scientific knowledge cannot be trusted as much as other sources of knowledge such as common sense.
 - D. Producing scientific knowledge is the responsibility of all social workers.

Answer: B

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Research Based Practice

11. Social work research has many characteristics, which of the following is not a distinct characteristic of social work research?
- A. Derived from the scientific method
 - B. Strives for objectivity
 - C. Produces provisional knowledge
 - D. Adherence to an ethical code is good, but not necessary.

Answer: D

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Research Based Practice

12. Studies that employ quantitative methods are characterized by, or attempt to employ, the following:
- A. Careful measurement of variables
 - B. Relatively small selected case samples
 - C. Control of other variables through reviewing it carefully
 - D. A wide variety of data collection methods

Answer: A

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Research Based Practice

13. The sequence of events that includes; specification of a theory; statement of a hypothesis to test the theory; observation (data collection); and confirmation (or disconfirmation) of the theory, indicates what type of research method.
- A. qualitative
 - B. quantitative
 - C. inductive
 - D. unethical

Answer: B

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Research Based Practice

14. Quantitative methods have their limitations as methods of research. It would be best not to use quantitative methods when:
- A. you are interpreting phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.
 - B. you are trying to describe the incidence of some behavior
 - C. you are searching for evidence of a relationship
 - D. you are studying a subjective phenomena

Answer: D

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Research Based Practice

15. Research that emphasizes understanding of social phenomena through direct observation is best described as:
- A. qualitative
 - B. quantitative
 - C. deductive
 - D. using the scientific method

Answer: A

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Research Based Practice

16. The most important reason that ethics is critical in social work research is:
- A. the NASW Code of Ethics mandates it
 - B. it promotes social work as the best researchers
 - C. it guards against biases in studies
 - D. it prevents social workers from being fined by IRB boards

Answer: C

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Human Rights and Justice

17. A characteristic of the scientific method that sets it apart from other ways of acquiring knowledge is:
- A. it is best used for validating a phenomenon that cannot be directly observed
 - B. that it strives for subjectivity
 - C. provides provisional knowledge
 - D. promotes creativity and imagination in developing procedures

Answer: C

Difficulty: 1

Competency: Research Based Practice

18. Knowledge that evolves from the accumulation of descriptive knowledge, which reveals consistent reoccurring patterns is:
- A. Descriptive
 - B. Predictive
 - C. Prescriptive
 - D. Empirical

Answer: B

Difficulty: 1

Competency: Research Based Practice

19. Qualitative Research would best be described as:

- A. Large sample size
- B. High ability to replicate
- C. Statistical analysis
- D. Probing Questions

Answer: D

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Research Based Practice

20. Selecting or formulating operational definitions of key terms; development of a method for sampling; and identification of variables would best describe what kind of research:

- A. qualitative
- B. quantitative
- C. inductive
- D. participant observation

Answer: B

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Research Based Practice

21. The organization responsible for the accreditation of BSW and MSW programs, specifies that research content and skills must be taught in both undergraduate and graduate social work education programs. This organization is:

- A. NASW
- B. ASWB
- C. CSWE
- D. SSWAA

Answer: C

Difficulty: 1

Competency: Professional Identity

22. Task such as selecting a field site; participant observation; and focus groups would likely represent what type of research?

- A. qualitative
- B. quantitative
- C. deductive
- D. empirical

Answer: A

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Research Based Practice

23. The best research method for obtaining research to inform social work practice is:
- A. qualitative
 - B. quantitative
 - C. both qualitative and quantitative
 - D. scientific method

Answer: C

Difficulty: 1

Competency: Research Based Practice

24. Raul practices as a social worker at the local hospital. When he was a student in a social work research class he did not see the need for research because he wanted to go into direct clinical practice. Raul has been reading studies related to some needs of his clients and incorporating those into his practice. This would be an example of:
- A. Inability to understand client behavior
 - B. differences between social work practice and research
 - C. similarities between social work practice and research
 - D. helping to explain the phenomena.

Answer: C

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Professional Identity

25. A social work student is reviewing the needs of the county's programs for women and children. The review shows that there are very few programs for women and children, especially for women with older children. What type of empirical evidence has the student found?
- A. The county does not care about women and children
 - B. Services are limited for women and children
 - C. Mothers with older children are not able to get the services they need
 - D. More funds would resolve the issue

Answer: B

Difficulty: 2

Competency: Research Based Practice

Essay Questions

1. A social worker is preparing to discuss the treatment options with a patient and his parents. What topics might the social worker look for in the social work research literature? Would it be better to look for qualitative or quantitative research?
2. How might you use qualitative research methods to study the homeless population in your city? How could you use quantitative methods to study the same population? What is one strength of each type of research? What are some of the forms of oppression and discrimination that might need to be considered?

3. List three ways in which research has impacted your life, both as a social worker and personally.
4. When reviewing research findings how important are cultural considerations? What are some of the questions that you might need to address?
5. What are three things that administrators could do to encourage social work practitioners to use research findings in making their practice decisions?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books

Council on Social Work Education (2008) *Educational policy and accreditation standards*. Alexandria, VA: CSWE.

Gibbs, L., Gambrill, E. (1996) *Critical thinking for social workers: A workbook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press..

Geyman, J. P., Deyo, R. A., & Ramsey, S. D. (Eds.). (2000). *Concepts and approaches*. Boston: Butterworth Heinemann.

Straus, S.E., Richardson, W.S., Glasziou P., Haynes, R. B. (2005). *Evidence-based medicine: How to Practice and Teach EBM*. Edinburgh, U.K: Churchill Livingstone.

Journals

Ferguson, H. (2003). Outline of a critical best practice perspective on social work and social care. *British Journal of Social Work*, 33, 1005-1024.

McNeece, C. A., Thyer, B. A. (2004). Evidence-based practice and social work. *Journal of Evidenced-based Social Work* , 1 (1),7-25.

Rosen, A., (2003). Evidenced based social work practice: Challenges and Promise. *Social Work Research* 27, (2), 197-208.

Websites

Differences between Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods [http://www.orau.gov/cdcynergy/demo/content/activeinformation/tools/toolscontent/soc_qual_quant_chart.htm]

- This website offers a quick glance at the differences between Qualitative and quantitative research methods.

EBBP. *Bridging Research and Practice*. [http://www.ebbp.org/index.html]

- The EBBP.org website creates training resources to help bridge the gap between behavioral health research and practice. Professionals from health disciplines are collaborating to learn, teach, and implement evidence-based behavioral practice (EBBP).

National Institutes of Health, Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research. *Social Work Research*.

[http://obssr.od.nih.gov/training_and_education/annual_Health_Services_Research_on_social_work/hsr.aspx]

- The NIH website offers social work researchers intensive exposure to issues and challenges in the field of social work research.