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PRACTICE RESEARCH NEWSLETTER

Issue 2, May 2018

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Mark this date
a big event coming up!

PRACTICE RESEARCH - A MEETING POINT BETWEEN PRACTICE & RESEARCH

In our previous issue, we highlighted that the main purpose of practice research is to improve effectiveness in promoting positive client outcomes. This is done via systematic generation of professional knowledge that addresses practice questions. We have also showcased a study that collected data directly from clients.

In this issue, we are presenting two practitioner-led research projects that illustrate the use of knowledge, collected mainly at an organizational level, to enhance social work practice.

0 1 // CHARACTERISTICS

PRACTITIONER RESEARCH

1

Practitioners are substantially involved in setting its aims/ outcomes

2

Intended practical benefits for practitioners, service organisations and/or service users

3

Practitioners conduct a substantial proportion of the inquiry

4

Focuses on the practitioners' own practice and/or that of their immediate peers

5

Direct data collection and management, or reflection on, existing data

There are different approaches to practice research and it can be broadly grouped into practitioner-led research and academic-practitioner partnership research (Shaw & Lunt, 2018).

Practitioner research refers to social work practitioners' involvement in research to gain a better understanding of their practice and/or to improve service effectiveness (Shaw & Lunt, 2018; Uggerhøj, 2014).

0 2 // EXAMPLES



SINGAPORE PRISON SERVICE

The first project – a qualitative study involving focus groups – was conducted by practitioners from the Singapore Prison Service (SPS) who were interested in identifying challenges their colleagues faced when implementing the Integrated Criminogenic Programme (ICP).

The ICP was the first high intensity treatment programme rolled out on a large scale in SPS. In ICP, practitioners counselled inmates, who had a high risk of re-offending, two-to-three times a week over a nine-month period, with the aim of reducing their risk of re-offending and increasing chances of reintegration.

Over time, it was found that practitioners running the programme faced similar challenges in group and dealt with them in different ways. In addition to identifying the common challenges faced by practitioners when running groups and how it was effectively managed, this study also helped to provide a best practice guide for current and future practitioners who will run other high intensity programmes with a similar population.

Authors

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VIRIYA COMMUNITY SERVICES (VCS)



In the second project, which was a mixed-method study that involved multiple data collection methods, practitioners from Viriya Community Services (VCS) were concerned about clients' unmet needs.

Since the implementation of the National Code of Social Work Practice (CNSWP), Whispering Hearts Family Service Centre (WHFSC), part of VCS, has seen a significant decline in transfer rates from intake assessment to case service by practitioners. However, there were concerned feedback from clients and stakeholders, which indicated that community residents who had approached WHFSC were not getting the help that they had hoped for.

The research thus addressed this discrepancy, and sought to identify factors that led to a significant decline in transfer from case intake to case service since 2015.

Authors

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INSIGHT

INTERVIEW WITH PROJECT LEADS

1. What prompted you to embark on this research project?

SPS

Nazira & Jessveen

As practitioners, we felt strongly that we should incorporate practice research into our daily work. Those of us with an interest in research joined the research group, as it provided us an opportunity to explore an issue that we were interested in. This is also in line with SPS using an evidence informed approach in rehabilitation.

We hoped to address some issues that our fellow practitioners were facing when running high intensity groups for high risk inmates. We noticed that work conversations tended to be about managing difficult behaviours that the group members were displaying. Based on this, we thought that identifying common challenging behaviours of mandated high risk offenders and how these behaviours were effectively managed would be useful.

By pooling together the knowledge and practices about what worked, this provided a guide of best practices for current and future practitioners running other high intensity programmes.

Yes, Nazira had been involved in research projects since 2005 in various settings such as corporate and youth research before joining SPS in 2012. She has been involved in various research studies for SPS since then.

Jessveen had experience in conducting research for her Bachelors thesis and evaluating a programme within Prisons. She is currently involved in an evaluation project of her current unit.

As for the team members, a large majority of them had prior experiences conducting research. Even if a member didn't, members were more than willing to guide and assist to meet the study aims. Every member worked collaboratively and complemented each other well. We were also working towards a common goal of presenting at an international conference.

We came together and worked overtime to ensure that our study was completed within the stipulated deadline. This study would have also been impossible without the aid of the participants (i.e. our fellow practitioners). Their honest sharing enabled us to generate rich data and derive relevant themes to meet our study aims.

Lastly, we had continual support from our research advocate and advisor whose vast knowledge in research allowed us to question, reflect and reframe certain study components.

Tight deadlines, qualitative study design, conflicting work schedules and the idea of presenting at an international research conference were some of the stressors faced by the team.

To address the challenge of meeting tight deadlines, the team utilized technology to facilitate the exchange of information. The resilience of the team also helped us ride through the storm. Being a purely qualitative study, focus groups discussions (FGDs) were held and coordinating the FGDs was hard given that the practitioners were running groups at different times. Due to security concerns, we also had to ensure that the data we collected was properly secured. The rich data generated also required the analysis team to work in overtime and spend hours transcribing and coding their recordings. Being part of a large team with members from different branches, we had schedule conflicts. Holding monthly meetings became rather difficult, hence the team was further divided into sub-teams to better manage the work load and be more efficient. This worked in our favour as each team had a team leader who coordinated and motivated the team.

It was a huge team effort and the close bonds forged amongst team members enabled better work-relationships and friendships to develop. It was also a rare opportunity to work with so many colleagues from different branches. The focus group discussions were actually fun as we were talking amongst peers and they were very open and relaxed during the FGDs. Presenting at an international platform was also a highlight for us. Our study garnered interest and positive comments from foreign delegates and this made us proud. The experience generally was adventurous yet fulfilling.

The study highlighted some gaps in training and enabled us to address them to a certain extent, by ensuring that clinical supervision provides a platform whereby practitioners could seek advice on the challenges they faced. Training for specialists in terms of best practices in group therapy were also considered when designing training programmes. The findings also revealed the idea of having motivation or preparatory programmes upstream to better equip and prepare prisoners for programme placements and motivate them to take ownership of their rehabilitation.

VCS

Evelyn Lai

After the National Code of Social Work Practice was introduced, it was observed that the percentage of intakes being recommended for opening dropped drastically from 73.2% to 48.8%. At the same time, community stakeholders also provided feedback that residents who had approached the centre did not obtain the desired support.

We wanted to find out the reasons for the significant decrease in intakes being promoted to cases and to ensure that residents who needed help were attended to promptly and appropriately.

My previous research experience mainly focused on evaluation of programmes and services. This was a more structured form of practice research applied to explore a current issue.

The research project was supported by the external consultant to enhance competency to complete the study.

The research project provided new learning opportunities and another perspective to review our work.

The findings helped to address our concerns and the percentage of intakes being promoted to cases return to the usual rate. The findings also helped to streamline work processes and make work easier for the case workers.

0 3 // MATCH-MAKING

Intrigued by how practitioner research can help to enhance social work practice and improve lives of clients?

As a practitioner, are you keen to do practice research but feel clueless as to where to start?

We can "match-make" or connect you to a mentor!

TARGET GROUP

Yes! If you are a practitioner working in the social service or health sector, keen to do practice research yet have limited resources such as knowledge and expertise, then you are the one we are looking for!

We are a group of social work practitioners from various service organisations and public health institutions coming together to form a group, known as the "Match-makers", with the aim of facilitating and growing practice research in the sector.

The majority of practitioners do feel the need to conduct research to shape their practice. However, many also cite the lack of research confidence and expertise as barriers to do so.

Therefore, as part of promoting practice research, we the "Match-makers", are going to "match-make" or connect keen practitioners to mentors to help them embark on their own practitioner-led research projects.

These mentors will have experience in conducting social work practice research and will support keen practitioners in developing a research proposal that meets their practice needs – a first step in the research process!

MATCH-MAKERS

WHO WE ARE?



0 4 // DETAILS

OBJECTIVES

At the end of the "match-making" or mentoring sessions, participants are expected to achieve the following objectives:

- Define a practice-related problem, formulate a problem statement and objective of the research project;
- State the research question;
- Explain the approach that will be used to answer the research question;
- Present the research proposal at the next networking session.

MENTORING

To be held between August and December 2018.

At least four sessions (minimum of two in-person meetings)

MENTORS

Social work practitioners in either social service, healthcare, or rehabilitation sectors. We will have some awesome mentors eagerly waiting to meet you! :)

FEE?

Free! All you need to do is to first register, attend the match-making event and be connected to a mentor!

0 5 // KEY DATES

MATCH-MAKING

01 AUG 2018

REGISTRATION DEADLINE

17 AUG 2018

MATCH-MAKING EVENT: 2 to 5pm@NCCS

31 DEC 2018

COMPLETION OF RESEARCH PROPOSALS

01 MAR 2019

PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH PROPOSALS AT A NETWORKING SESSION

This initiative is supported by:

1. AMKFSC Community Services Singapore -- Sengkang Family Service Centre;
2. Care Corner Singapore Ltd;
3. KK Women's and Children's Hospital;
4. Ministry of Social and Family Development;
5. Monfort Care;
6. National Council of Social Service;
7. Rotary Family Service Centre;
8. Tan Tock Seng Hospital;
9. The Office of the Director of Social Welfare, Ministry of Social and Family Development;
10. Viriya Community Services

0 6 // REGISTRATION

Interested? Please email judith.chew.fh@kkh.com.sg the below by 1st August 2018:

Name (contact person):
Contact details (Telephone, email):
Organisation:
Team members (if any):

1. What is the area of research you are interested in? (e.g., families, children, elderly)

2. What do you want to find out? (e.g., clients' needs or experiences; programme effectiveness)

3. How will you collect your data? (e.g., survey, interview, focus group discussion)

4. Why is this research project important? / How will the findings help your practice?

References

Shaw, I., & Lunt, N. (2018). Forms of practitioner research. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 48(1), 141-157.

Uggerhøj, L. (2014). Learning from each other: collaboration processes in practice research. *Nordic Social Work Research*, 45(1), 44-57.

SEE YOU!