**IASSW RESEARCH WORKSHOP NOTES**

**TITLE:*****Innovations in Social Work Research Approaches and Methods: Applications to Education and Practice***

**LOCATION:** *Joint World Conference in Social Work, Education and Social Development* (Seoul, June 2016).

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**ABSTRACT**

Over the last three decades, we have seen the rise of forms of social work that have breathed new life into an activity that once featured mainly statistical and experimental study. Indigenous worldviews, social development, participatory and community based research, narrative and arts-informed inquiry have entered into our social work research repertoires, bringing with them new hopes, insights, ethics and challenges. This is an exciting time to talk about research, a critical component of education and practice in social work and social development. It is also central to promoting the values of human dignity and worth as well as economic, environmental and social justice. In spite of its importance, why does research lack visibility in the international social work arena? While some definitions of social work research exist in the literature, there is no clear, comprehensive global statement on the role and significance of research in social work and social development. The purpose of this workshop is to move us toward this goal. At its Nairobi, Kenya meeting in June 2012, the Board of Directors of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) discussed the lack of visibility of research in the activities of the Organization. The Board established a committee to formulate a Statement on Social Work Research. The statement was intended to address several needs. First, it would provide a clear definition of social work research, one that distinguishes it from research in other disciplines and professions. Second, it would clarify the aims of social work research and its connection to the new IASSW/ICSW Global Definition of Social Work (2104) and the core values and ethical standards of the profession. Third, it would clarify the intricate relationships between social work research, education and practice. Finally, the statement would identify philosophical and methodological approaches that are congruent with social work. The Committee prepared a draft report in 2014. A newly established committee is now engaging in consultations and is conducting a survey in order to obtain feedback on the draft Statement. The primary purpose of the workshop is to engage participants in active discussions of the draft research statement in order to strengthen the document. In the process, participants will learn about the centrality of research to the profession, including the significance and roles of research in promoting the mission and values of the profession. They will also critically examine the conflicting philosophical and methodological orientations to social work research, in light of the mission and values of the profession. We expect participants to leave the workshop with a stronger appreciation for social work research and its importance in supporting social work and social development education and practice. They will also be able to identify research approaches that would be most suitable to support their research and practice initiatives. Feedback from the workshop will be incorporated into a final document, which will be prepared for approval by the Board of Directors of the IASSW. Target Audience: Researchers and consumers of research.

**WORKSHOP DETAILS**

About 50 individuals participated in the workshop. In this report, we summarize the process and the major workshop themes.

We began the workshop by providing participants with background information on the Research Committee and the *Social Work Research Statement*, which was adopted by the Board of Directors in 2014. We then presented an overview of the research landscape in social work education and practice (see PowerPoint presentation below). One of our objectives was to obtain feedback on the Research Statement, in order to strengthen it and to add comments. However, the participants suggested that feedback could be sought via email and/or through the web site. They were more interested in discussing research themes and priorities at local, national and international levels. As one of the participants stressed, we need to identify the “big ideas” and global issues to prioritize for research. The discussions were facilitated by forming several groups, each consisting of five to eight members. At the end of the group discussions, each group presented to the larger audience. The entire workshop was audio-recorded and transcribed by Tuula Heinonen.

**WORKSHOP THEMES**

The discussions focused primarily on identifying common ideas and interests for research. Several themes emerged:

1. DEVELOPING A RESEARCH NETWORK TO PROMOTE RESEARCH ACROSS THE GLOBE

IASSW could help by providing opportunities to share ideas and thoughts about research. The idea of creating a research network was discussed. The network would enable subgroups to be formed around common interests – to share ideas, discuss and collaborate on research projects. A first step could be to send the ideas generated from this workshop to the workshop participants.

The idea of a network was discussed at length; it would allow for groupings, based on particular research issues, topics and strategies. It would also enable participants to connect regularly, including meetings at the next conference. One of the tasks to be accomplished is to determine whether it is feasible to establish a network through the organization’s website portal. However, some of the participants may not be members of the IASSW and could not access the portal. In addition, it was identified that we need to work on clarifying the purpose, function and operationalization of the research network and groups.

2. SUPPORT FOR RESEARCHERS AND STUDENTS  
  
Participants stressed the need for greater research capacity overall. They identified the amount of institutional support for research, including the range of methods (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, anti-oppressive, arts-based, etc.) as issues. Further, participants stated that there is a strong need to build research capacity within social work programs across the globe. Initiatives could include bringing (more) graduate students into research, and finding ways to support PhD students. Finally, they identified the need for increased publishing of research via high-impact dissemination and open access.

3. RESEARCH IDEAS, TOPICS AND ISSUES

Several themes emerged from the discussions on issues that should be prioritized in social work research. Some of them overlap with social work curriculum and practice priorities. They are summarized thematically below:

a) Grand ideas/Global Issues

* Privatization, tied-aid and trade agreements and effects of trade deals and austerity measures on social work
* Social protection
* Migration
* Effective social policies and social work

b. Key social issues

* Poverty
* Reflection on social problems
* Homelessness, in relation to poverty,
* Older people/aging
* Migration
* Right to housing and social work
* Child poverty, including inter-generational child poverty
* Family violence and its underlying issues
* Political conflict

c. Key target populations

* Research about with children and youth
* Research about/with people at the margins of society

d. Practice Areas and Research

* Community building and social enterprise
* Client protection
* Social protection and environment
* Homelessness and social enterprise
* Gender empowerment
* Therapies with children
* Men’s development
* Mental health
* Immigration and integration
* Child protection

e. Curriculum Content and Research

* Promoting research, innovations, knowledge and opportunities in social work
* Social work research methods, including creative methods
* Democratizing knowledge
* Micro-level research
* Research that leads to action, supporting parents and families, child functioning
* Research in social work education
* Making research friendly for students
* Social work research curriculum questions at undergraduate and graduate social work levels

f. Coverage of Research in the Curriculum

* Strategies in common for teaching social work research and social work practice (e.g., in conjunction with interviewing in social work, ethics principles, research instruments and their use in practice)
* Participatory action research
* Linking research to practice in the field (e.g., profiling local communities and using secondary data)
* Critical review of evidence-based [informed] practice and bridging to field sites
* Equal treatment of qualitative and quantitative research
* Interdisciplinary and collaborative research (e.g., with social geographers)

g. Dissemination of Research Knowledge

* Sharing knowledge across academy and field [placement sites]
* More social work publishing on research, with high-impact dissemination and open access

h. Ethics

* Need to strengthen ethics in research, including practice research

i. Regulation

* Need for more research to understand how social work is regulated across the globe, including regulation, certification and registration.