



# FOUNDATIONS OF EVIDENCE-BASED SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE



*Edited by*

ALBERT R. ROBERTS  
KENNETH E. GILBERT

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## *Preface*

For social work students as well as practitioners, this book provides the critically needed framework and foundation knowledge base in order to understand and conduct evidence-based practice. This volume, featuring chapters by prominent evidence-based research professors, includes how-to application chapters demonstrating the latest key elements, operational definitions, critical issues, concepts, and strategies in the application of evidence-based social work assessment measures and interventions.

This is the condensed companion volume and update to Roberts and Yeager's *Evidence-Based Practice Manual: Research and Outcome Measures in Health and Human Services*, a 104-chapter major reference text. The latter volume was published in 2004 and is multidisciplinary in scope. The current volume was specially prepared for evidence-based social workers and their students. It includes two specially written new chapters on step-by-step question formulation and how to conduct systematic reviews of the evidence with co-occurring disorders. It also includes 23 evidence-based social work articles reprinted from two special issues of the *Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention* journal in 2004, which focused on evidence-based mental health, or the *Evidence-Based Practice Manual*.

The goal of this textbook is to improve understanding, enhance at-risk clients' well-being and quality of life, and facilitate recovery from mental disorders, while preventing further harm. This goal can be facilitated by the acquisition of evidence-based knowledge and the application of evidence-based social work practice.

This book provides answers to the 15 most frequently asked questions by novice as well as experienced evidence-based social workers. The detailed answers to each of the following questions are provided by carefully reading the chapters in this book:

1. What is evidence-based practice?
2. How does the reader design, search for, find, and implement evidence-based social work studies?
3. What is the nature and extent of evidence for and against evidence-based practice?
4. What are the necessary sequential components in formulating evidence-based questions in social work?
5. How does the reader implement best practices and expert consensus procedures?
6. What are the concise standards of evidence-based practice?
7. What are the standard levels in the hierarchy of evidence?
8. What are the similarities and differences regarding the extent of implementing practice guidelines and evidence-based treatment by psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers?
9. What are the common indicators and outcome measures used in the delivery of evidence-based mental health treatment?
10. What are the specific steps and methods used in developing a systematic evidence-based search plan for a client with comorbidity?
11. Which assessment measures and treatment modality is most likely to reduce suicide risk based on evidence-based studies?
12. What are the elements of evidence-based practice with children and adolescents with a range of the most prevalent mental disorders?
13. What are the evidence-based treatments and interventions most likely to be effective with adults diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorders (OCD), depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, PTSD, and/or other disorders?
14. What are the most effective evidence-based treatments for persons suffering with comorbid substance dependence, suicide ideation, and schizophrenia?
15. What are the most effective evidence-based supported employment programs for the seriously mentally ill based on longitudinal research?

Social workers need to know what the most effective practice guidelines, treatment plans, and intervention methods are before they can decisively help their clients.

It is our hope that this evidence-based knowledge and skills textbook will provide the necessary foundation and stimulation for social work students and practitioners. We are lifelong learners and we invite the readers to join us on our preparatory journey for the future. We also encourage all readers to share their suggestions on chapters we should add to the next edition. Please e-mail us at: *prof.albertroberts@comcast.net* and *kyeager@adelphia.net*

The medical profession led the way with evidence-based studies in the early 1990s at McMaster University in Canada, the evidence-based articles published

in JAMA between 1993 and 2004, and the Institute of Medicine report on 93,000 medical errors. Social workers have begun to follow the important lead of medical scholars and practitioners. In recent years, social workers have embraced evidence-based practice and are establishing clinical care pathways and practice guidelines based on a synthesis and analysis of the evidence. Social workers have always been concerned with improving the quality of life and restoring psychosocial and family functioning for all clients, and in some cases saving lives. Therefore, given the growing emphasis on best practices and judicious and conscientious decision-making in social work practice, it is imperative for social workers to be prepared with the latest evidence-based practice protocols and research exemplars. We owe it to our clients and the social work profession to only use interventions that have systematic evidence of their effectiveness and efficacy.

This primer provides foundation skills, directions, and exemplars of evidence-based best practices, randomized controlled studies, outcome studies of manualized treatment protocols, systematic studies of mental health interventions, and cost-effectiveness studies. This book is also intended to provide practical guidance to those embarking on their first evidence-based systematic review. We are reasonably confident that this book includes the necessary tools and application chapters to inspire graduate students as well as seasoned practitioners to understand and be able to conduct evidence-based outcome studies. We hope this book serves as a catalyst to all social work students and practitioners in their quest for effective and efficacious evidence-based social work treatment in the important years ahead.

We sincerely appreciate the encouragement and guidance given by Dr. Phyllis Solomon (University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work), Dr. Ed Mullen (Columbia University School of Social Work), Dr. Elizabeth Plionis (Catholic University National School of Social Services), and Dr. David Springer (University of Texas School of Social Work at Austin). These evidence-based professor-scholars suggested a condensed version of the *Evidence-Based Practice Manual* and were instrumental in deciding which 25 chapters to include in this evidence-based social work primer. Finally, our editor Maura Roessner deserves special acknowledgment for her full support in facilitating an Oxford contract, launching this text, and reminding us about deadlines.

## Contributors

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## **Section I**

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Overview, Definitions, Practice Guidelines,  
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