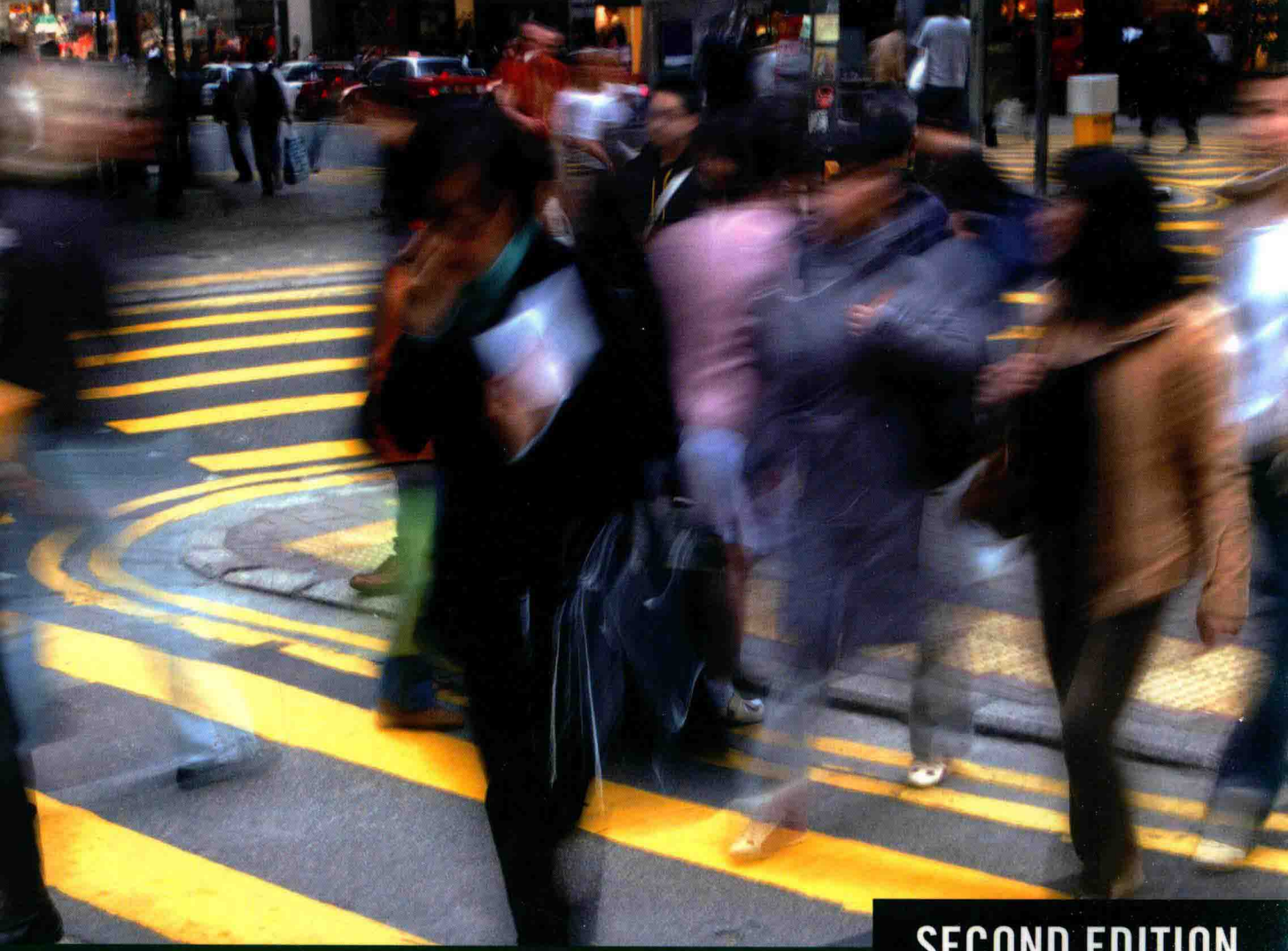

SECOND EDITION

FUNDAMENTALS OF SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH

RAFAEL J. ENGEL
RUSSELL K. SCHUTT

Fundamentals of Social Work Research

Second Edition

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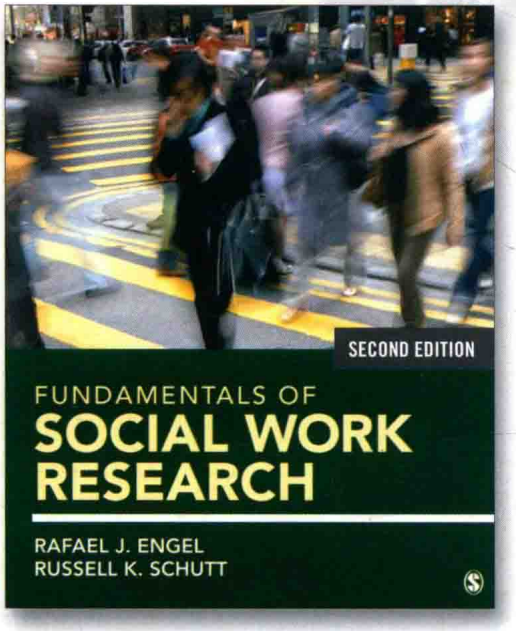

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Fundamentals of Social Work Research

Second Edition

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Preface

There has been tremendous progress by social work professionals and educators in building the profession's research infrastructure. There are now national research centers, federal and foundation research initiatives, institutional support, and dissemination efforts by organizations such as the Council on Social Work Education and the Society for Social Work Research. These accomplishments provide new opportunities for our graduates and make their research training even more critical.

Whether you are eager to take an introductory course in social work research or you are wondering why you have to take this course as all you want to do is work with people, we hope that by the end of the course, you will understand how important research is—how it can contribute to your understanding of social problems, the human condition, and to micro and macro practice. We use different examples such as domestic violence, homelessness, poverty, child welfare, and aging that cut across the domains of social work practice.

By the end of this book, you should have the skills necessary to critically evaluate the research articles that you read in your courses. You should not just accept findings because they appear in print; rather, you will learn to ask many questions before concluding that research-based conclusions are appropriate. What did the researchers set out to investigate? How were people selected for study? What information was collected, and how was it analyzed? Can the findings be applied to populations not part of the study? To different settings? Communities?

Another goal of this book is to prepare you to actually evaluate social work practice. The various examples demonstrate the methods used by social work researchers to discover the efficacy of interventions, to identify needs, and to test the impact of social policies.

Social work research often includes studies with vulnerable populations and diverse populations. Throughout the text, you will read about the ethical issues associated with particular topics and considerations to keep in mind to become culturally aware consumers and doers of research.

Achieving Social Work Core Competencies

You will also find that the book achieves many of the core social work competencies identified by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2008). We have placed a matrix on the inside back cover noting these core competences as well as a detailed matrix on the book's website that identifies these competencies and where they are achieved in the book. Many of the chapters contribute to achieving five core competencies in particular:

1. *Educational Policy 2.1.6—Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research* (p. 5). This book prepares you to actually evaluate social work practice—your own and that of others. The various examples demonstrate the methods used by social work researchers to discover the efficacy of interventions, to identify needs, and to test the impact of social policies. Every chapter has this focus.
2. *Educational Policy 2.1.3—Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments* (p. 4). This book provides you with the skills to appraise knowledge, whether it derives from research using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods or from practice wisdom. You will learn to ask many questions before deciding whether conclusions are appropriate to use in your practice settings. What did the researchers set out to investigate? How were people selected for study? What information was collected, and how was it analyzed? Throughout this book, you will learn what questions to ask when critiquing a research study and how to evaluate the answers. These types of questions are found in 11 chapters.
3. *Education Policy 2.1.4—Engage diversity and difference in practice* (p. 4). This book addresses diversity and its implications for social work research through substantive sections and examples. You will come to recognize that there are questions to ask about social diversity in every stage of the research process, from asking a question to reporting and discussing the implications of the research. The book guides you to ask: Are these findings relevant for the type of clients with whom I work, or are there cultural biases? Such content is explicitly found in 11 chapters.
4. *Educational Policy 2.1.2—Apply social work principles to guide professional practice* (p. 4). A major focus of this book is the ethical conduct of research. You will learn that the ethical conduct of research is comparable to the ethical issues of practice and the ethical conduct of research is an obligation incorporated into the National Association of Social Workers (2008) *Code of Ethics*. In addition to a separate chapter on research ethics, 8 other chapters include content on ethics.
5. *Educational Policy 2.1.10(d)—Evaluation: Social workers critically analyze, monitor, and evaluate interventions* (p. 7). This book emphasizes the importance of monitoring and evaluating interventions through its many examples and offers the knowledge and skills to actually engage in evaluation. Related content is found in 9 chapters.

Organization of the Book

The first three chapters introduce the why and how of research in general. Chapter 1 shows how research has helped us understand homelessness and its consequences. This chapter introduces evidence-based practice and the importance of understanding research in our diverse society. Chapter 2 illustrates the basic stages in research and describes differing philosophical traditions. Chapter 3 introduces the ethical considerations that should guide your decisions throughout the research process. The next three chapters describe how researchers design and evaluate their measures (Chapter 4), draw their samples (Chapter 5), and justify their statements about causality (Chapter 6's first half).

Chapters 6 through 9 present the four most important methods of data collection: experiments, single-subject design, surveys, and qualitative methods (including participant observation, intensive interviews, and focus groups). The substantive studies in these chapters show how social work researchers have used

these methods to improve our understanding of the effectiveness of different treatment modalities, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy with different population subgroups, as well as our understanding of social work issues with different age groups, including youth and the elderly. Chapter 11 explains how researchers using mixed methods combine both qualitative and quantitative methods into a single study as well as how researchers combine published quantitative or qualitative studies into a single summary analysis. In Chapter 12, we illustrate how these primary methods may be used to learn about the effects of social programs and the need for other programs.

Chapters 12 through 14 address data analysis and reporting information. Chapter 12 provides a basic grounding in preparing quantitative data for analysis and using descriptive statistics. While we introduce inferential statistics, we encourage students to read more about inferential statistics on the text's web site, http://www.sagepub.com/fswr2e. Chapter 13 then reviews major analysis techniques that are used by researchers to identify and understand data collected in qualitative research investigations. Finally, Chapter 14 finishes with an overview of the process for reporting research results and a second examination of the development of research proposals.

Distinctive Features of the Second Edition

To prepare for this new edition, we have incorporated valuable suggestions from faculty reviewers and students who have used the book. The content and modifications also reflect the first author's experiences when using the book to teach foundation-level social work students. It benefits from the increasing research literature on the effectiveness of social work practice. You will find all of this reflected in innovations in approach, coverage, and organization. These enhancements include:

- *A separate chapter (Chapter 3) that provides the foundation for research ethics.* Chapter 3 introduces research ethics by focusing on a research study that is controversial to this day. This chapter provides the basis for the chapter-specific discussions of research ethics. This chapter also introduces specific ethical issues associated with the use of the Internet as a research tool and research site.
- *Introduction of mixed methods in social work practice.* Chapter 10 describes the types of questions that may be answered using mixed methods and the design choices commonly available. The philosophical basis for mixed methods is described in Chapter 1.
- *Expansion on the implications for evidence-based practice.* In Chapter 1, we describe the steps associated with the evidence-based practice decision model and the challenges of implementing evidence-based practice at the agency level.
- *Questions to evaluate qualitative research.* We have added a new appendix (C) with questions that should be asked when reading a qualitative research article as well as an example of an analysis (Appendix D).
- *Content on diverse populations.* We continue to update and expand diversity content and add new research-related examples throughout the text. In addition, we have added sections related to data analysis and on the use of appropriate language when reporting results.
- *Community-based participatory research.* In Chapter 8, we describe community-based participatory research.

- *Emerging research efforts using the Internet and other electronic media.* We describe the use of electronic surveys and qualitative studies of the Internet discussion groups.
- *Examples of research in the real-world settings of social work practice as well as macro examples.* We continue to provide new and up-to-date studies of homelessness, domestic violence, child welfare, welfare reform, aging, and other pressing social concerns. For example, Chapter 1 uses examples from coauthor Russell Schutt's exciting new book with Harvard University Press, *Homelessness, Housing, and Mental Illness.*

As with the first edition, this text offers other distinctive features:

- *Infusion of content on diverse populations.* Every step in the research process has different implications for different population groups. We identify concerns and strategies to make research culturally relevant throughout the book.
- *Implications for evidence-based practice.* Each chapter has a special section detailing the implications of the chapter material for evidence-based practice.
- *Ethical concerns and exercises on ethics.* Every step in the research process raises ethical concerns, so ethics should be treated in tandem with the study of specific methods. Ethical issues are reviewed in the context of each method of data collection, data analysis, and reporting. There are practice exercises on ethics at the end of each chapter.
- *Thorough and up-to-date coverage of qualitative methods.* In our chapters on qualitative research design and data analysis, you will find an engaging presentation of qualitative methods appropriate to the field of social work. We include a section on Photovoice, which is increasingly being seen as a research method to enable participants a greater role in the research process.
- *Emphasis on doing research.* Many different exercises and activities are included to prepare students to conduct research and evaluation.
- *Aids to effective study.* Lists of main points and terms provide quick summaries. Definitions of key terms are highlighted in bold face and are defined both in the text and in a glossary. The text's website offers a variety of aids including practice quizzes and articles

Ancillaries

Instructor Teaching Site

A password-protected site, available at **www.sagepub.com/fswr2e**, features resources that have been designed to help instructors plan and teach their courses. These resources include an extensive test bank, chapter-specific PowerPoint presentations, lecture notes, student project ideas, links to SAGE journal articles, web resources, and more.

Student Study Site

An open -access study site is available at **www.sagepub.com/fswr2e**. This site includes eFlashcards, web quizzes, web resources, interactive exercises, data sets, links to SAGE journal articles and more.

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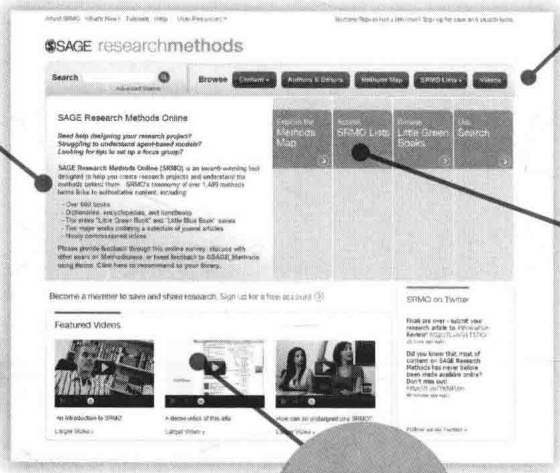

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CSWE Competencies Matrix

Chapter	Professional Identity	Ethical Principals	Critical Thinking	Social Diversity	Social & Economic Justice	Research and Practice	Human Behavior and Social Environment	Policy Practice	Societal Contexts of Practice	Practice Skills
1	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X
2	X		X	X	X	X	X			X
3		X								
4			X	X		X				X
5			X	X		X				X
6		X	X	X	X	X		X		X
7		X	X	X		X				X
8		X	X	X		X				X
9		X	X	X	X	X			X	X
10			X			X		X		
11		X	X	X	X	X		X		X
12		X		X		X				
13		X				X			X	
14		X		X		X				

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