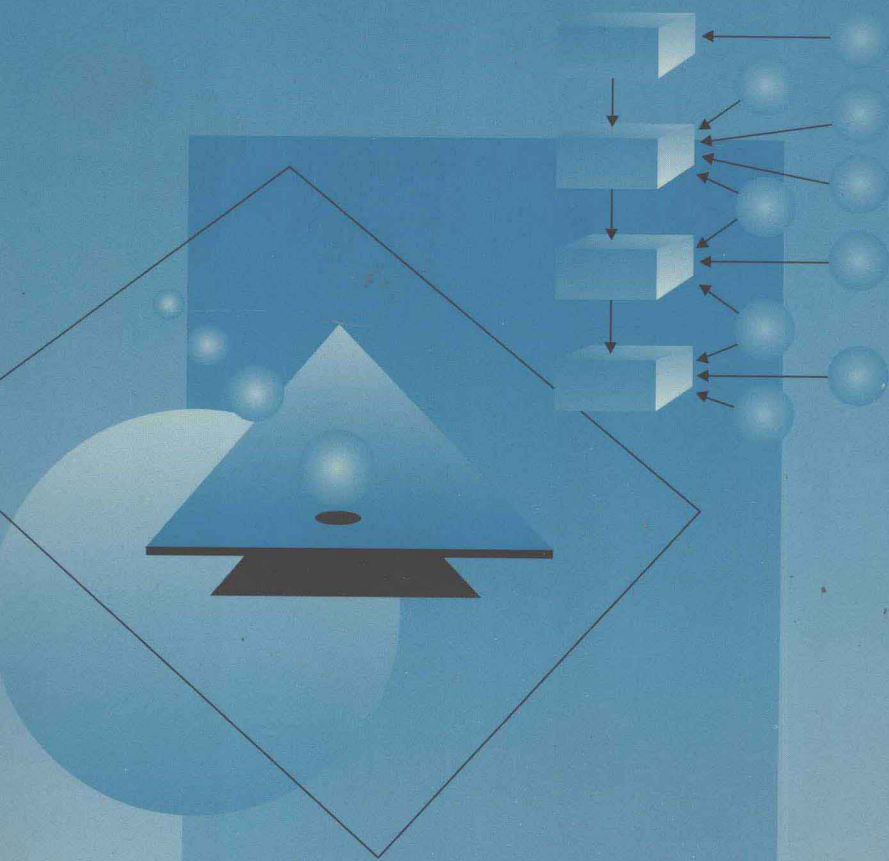


Research in Social Work

A n I n t r o d u c t i o n



S e c o n d E d i t i o n

Margaret Williams Leslie M. Tutty Richard M. Grinnell, Jr.

Research in Social Work

An Introduction

Second Edition

Margaret Williams
Leslie M. Tutty
Richard M. Grinnell, Jr.

*Faculty of Social Work
The University of Calgary*



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Preface

THIS BOOK is the second edition of *Research in Social Work: A Primer*. With the help and encouragement of a new coauthor, the revisions became so extensive that we decided to retitl the book in order to more accurately reflect its contents. Nevertheless, the intended audience remains the same as in the first edition—the generalist BSW student taking a one-semester (or quarter) beginning social work research methods course.

GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

Our goal has been to write a “user-friendly,” straightforward introduction to social work research methods couched within the positivistic research tradition—the approach most commonly used to generate relevant social work knowledge.

To accomplish our goal, we strived to meet three simple objectives. Our first objective was to include only the core material that is realistically needed in order for the BSW student to appreciate and understand the role of research in social work. Our guiding philosophy was to only include research material that a BSW student needs to know to function adequately at an entry-level social work position; information overload was avoided at all costs. Our second objective was to prepare BSW

students to become beginning critical consumers of the professional research literature. Finally, our third objective was to provide the BSW student with a solid foundation for more advanced social work research courses and texts.

What This Book Does Not Do

With the above goal and objectives in mind, we have eliminated research material that an undergraduate student in social work does not need to know. First, we do not prepare the BSW student with the necessary knowledge and skills to actually conceptualize, operationalize, and carry out a research study—no introductory research methods text can accomplish this. We believe this task is best left to graduate-level social workers who have obtained those skills from intermediate or advanced research methods books that were geared toward the graduate level.

In introductory social work research methods texts that are on the market today, authors state that their books can be used at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. However, we are of the opinion that a single book that can be utilized at both levels is doing our students and our profession a disservice. We firmly believe that there should be two levels of research methods books: those such as this one, that provide an introduction to research methods written for BSW students, and those that provide more substance and intermediate (or advanced) theoretical discussions of research methodology that were written for MSW and PhD students.

Second, we neither attempt to present an “original” integration of the various ways of knowing nor attempt to “blend” quantitative and qualitative research approaches to form a “unique research continuum” of some kind or another. There are other books on the market that do this. More importantly, we are of the belief that the breath and depth of these tasks extend far beyond what a BSW student needs to know, to appreciate, to understand, as well as to become a beginning critical consumer of the research literature—the objectives of our book.

In addition, some of the other “postpositivistic” approaches to social work research, such as the heuristic approach, *have not yet* generated practice-relevant findings that are of any practical use to social work practitioners. We feel that a BSW student needs to thoroughly understand and appreciate one tried and proven research approach (the positivistic approach) before he or she can begin to understand how other nonpositivistic research approaches can be useful in the generation of practice-relevant social work knowledge. We are of the opinion that increasing the students’ capacity for critical thought via the positivistic research approach will improve their readiness to take additional research courses and to read more advanced research methods books.

THEME AND ORGANIZATION

Like the original, this edition is organized to reflect the four phases of the problem-solving method. The major theme is that knowledge of the problem-solving process enhances the effectiveness of professional social work practice. The material presented in this book is explained in terms of social work examples that BSW students will appreciate. Many of the examples center around women and minorities, in recognition of the need for social workers to be knowledgeable of their special needs and problems. We have given special consideration to the application of research methods to the study of questions concerning these groups.

In this spirit, we begin where every researcher begins—that is, with finding a meaningful problem area to study within a social work context (Chapters 1-3) and developing middle-range theories and initial hypotheses (Chapters 4 & 5). We proceed from measuring variables (Chapters 6 & 7), constructing research designs (Chapters 8-12), and collecting (Chapters 13 & 14) and analyzing data (Chapter 15) through proposal and report writing (Chapter 16).

LEARNING FEATURES

We have incorporated a number of learning features in our book:

- Each chapter contains ten study questions that can be used to assess the readers' mastery of the material.
- Each chapter contains extensive up-to-date advanced readings that can be helpful in obtaining more information about a chapter's content.
- Boxes are inserted in each chapter to complement and expand the text; these present interesting research examples, provide additional aids to learning, and offer historical, social, and political contexts of social work research.
- A glossary of all key terms contained in the chapters is provided at the end of the book.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We have been teaching social work research methods for quite some time. We thank the countless number of BSW students whom we have had the privilege of teaching (and learning from) as they have directly contributed to the conceptual development of this book.

We would like to thank our dean, Ray J. Thomlison, Faculty of Social Work at The University of Calgary. Without Ray's support and encouragement, this book would have never seen the light of day. We are proud

to be among the few authors who have the privilege of working with, and for, a competent dean. Our thanks to Ray for providing us with an academic atmosphere in which to work and for establishing one of the finest social work faculties that we have seen.

Our thanks go to Terry Teskey for copy editing the initial drafts of the manuscript and to John Beasley for copy editing the final draft. We would be remiss not to mention that the people at F.E. Peacock Publishers have been more than supportive in our second adventure, and it is once again a privilege to publish under the Peacock banner.

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A LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE

Research courses in undergraduate social work education are continuing to grow and develop, and we believe this edition will contribute to that growth. A third edition is anticipated, and suggestions for it are more than welcome. Please send your suggestions directly to Richard M. Grinnell, Jr., Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2N 1N4, or call (403) 220-6154 or FAX (403) 282-7269.

MARGARET WILLIAMS
 LESLIE M. TUTTY
 RICHARD M. GRINNELL, JR.

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Part I

Foundations

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THE TWO CHAPTERS OF PART I introduce readers to the place of research in social work. More specifically, Chapter 1 presents the basic ways of obtaining knowledge and describes the characteristics of how social work research studies are done using the problem-solving model. It also discusses the various research roles that social workers can undertake in contemporary practice. Chapter 2 elaborates on Chapter 1 by presenting an in-depth discussion of the various factors that affect social work research studies. In overview, Chapter 1 presents how research is relevant to social work while Chapter 2 discusses the personal, ethical, political, and social considerations that shape how it is performed.