

Juha Hämäläinen

Department of Social Sciences
University of Eastern Finland

juha.e.hamalainen@uef.fi

SOCIAL WORK AS A RESEARCH-BASED PROFESSION: OPPORTUNITIES, PREREQUISITES, RESTRICTIONS

The concept of research-based social work is introduced and discussed from the point of view of preconditions for its realization. Attention is paid both to the academic research of social work and to opportunities of developing a knowledge-producing social work practice. Both of these are seen as essential elements of a research-based profession. On the one hand, the academic research is necessary for development of social work as a research-based professional system, and on the other hand, a knowledge-producing practice, conducted by research oriented practitioners, can only come true within such a system. Historically, social work has been partly developed as a knowledge-applying instead of a knowledge-producing profession, although the central founding pioneers emphasized the importance of an own knowledge basis and theory formation as well as the idea of knowledge-producing practice based on a corresponding professional identity. The future of social work as a professional system in the modern society may depend decisively on how it develops a research-based professional identity, not only in the sense of academic research but also through practitioners with research orientation. These are practitioners who are capable of research-based working in terms of creative knowledge production and in that way developing social work as a credible research-based profession. This can be created only through education in which development of necessary professional skills is linked to advanced academic meta-skills. There are good reasons to suspect that a three years education is too short for this.

Key words

social work profession, research-based social work, education of social work, social work practice