

**Post Qualifying Social Work
Research Methods Programme provided by
Ulster University and employer organisations**

Research and Evaluation Studies Undertaken

2017-2018 as part of the

**“ Research and Evaluation Methods in
Social Work ” (SWK 752 Module)**

&

**“Research and Evaluation to inform
Social Work” (SWK 754 Module)**

Abstracts

2018

Preface

Social Work Research Methods Programme

The Research Methods Programme provides two postgraduate, post qualifying modules for social workers approved by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council as part of the Professional in Practice Framework:

- The Evidence–Informed Professional and Organisation (SWK 751)
- Research and Evaluation Methods in Social Work (SWK 752)

The programme provides three modules for users of social care services and their families:

- Using Evidence to Inform Professionals and Organisations (SWK 753)
- Research and Evaluation Methods to Inform Social Work (SWK 754)
- Innovation and Co-production in Social Work Research (SWK 755)

The modules for social workers are accredited by the professional regulatory body, the Northern Ireland Social Care Council, and enable candidates to gain Requirements of the Professional in Practice Framework as detailed below. They require employer support and post-qualifying practice experience for entry. They are designed particularly for Senior Practitioners, training officers and other experienced social workers to gain knowledge and skills in using evidence to inform their practice and service development in their organisation. These modules achieve credit towards the Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma and MSc in *Professional Development in Social Work*.

The modules for service users and carers equip them to carry out roles in developing social care research, such as membership of research committees and grant awarding panels. These modules achieve credit towards the Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma.

All modules are 60-credit Level 7 (postgraduate) modules and are designed to develop knowledge and skills relevant to social work research-related activity and culture in Northern Ireland in support of the *Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Strategy 2015-2020* (Health & Social Care Board, 2015).

Research and Evaluation Methods in Social Work module (SWK 752) Research Evaluation Methods to Inform Social Work module (SWK 754)

These modules require the 'Evidence' Module (SWK751 or SWK753 or equivalent) as a pre-requisite for entry. Candidates build on the literature review undertaken during that module (or equivalent) to undertake a work-based research, service evaluation or professional audit project agreed with line management. Candidates develop knowledge and skills in designing and managing a project that will support robust, evidence-based development of professional practice and services. An additional booklet on the outcomes from these modules will be produced and placed on <http://www.ulster.ac.uk/dare>.

Learning Outcomes

- Demonstrate competence, leadership and initiative in negotiating and collaborating with a range of stakeholders and fostering reciprocal relationships in undertaking a research, audit or evaluation project relevant to their role.
- Create a focussed and answerable research, evaluation or audit question which addresses a practice issue, using informed judgement to select an appropriate methodology.
- Negotiate complex ethical and governance arrangements to secure approval for an innovative project and access to data.
- Gather relevant data in accordance with a rigorous research methodology.
- Analyse the data and interpret the findings in the context of current literature and policy by writing a postgraduate dissertation which makes worthwhile recommendations for service improvement in line with organisational and social work principles.
- Influence change through delivering an oral presentation to managers, professionals and service users which critically appraises and applies knowledge from the project to inform practice.

Both modules have identical, joint classroom teaching; require the same academic entry requirements, and require similar assessment. They are designed to contribute to improving our Social Work Services to individuals and families by improving knowledge and skills, service quality and the effectiveness of organisations delivering social care services. The module runs for one academic year from September to September each year.

This document provides full abstracts and contact details for those who undertook research and evaluation module of the post qualifying course between 2017/2018. To obtain copies of the research and evaluation studies please contact the individuals directly. Contact details are included on each abstract. Electronic versions of the abstracts are also available on the University website <http://www.ulster.ac.uk/dare>.

[Abstracts from the academic years 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 and the research and evaluation module 2016-2017 from the evidence modules are also available on this website.](#)

This report will also be placed on the Northern Ireland SCIE page under Evidence, Innovation and Quality Improvement.

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Title of Study **What works best when completing
Pre-Birth Risk Assessments?
Social Workers' Perspectives**

Abstract

Context

Research involving mothers and babies has been successful at linking ante natal maternal stress to foetal developmental risk (Guardino et al. 2014). This service evaluation is focused on gaining the perspectives and experiences of social workers within the South Eastern Trust in regards completing Pre-Birth risk assessments. This is aimed at identifying what is most effective when completing these assessments in a drive towards using a local evidence base to advance practice and improve outcomes for babies and families.

Methodology and Methods used

This service evaluation was informed by qualitative data which was gathered from a purposeful sample of fifteen participants. Participants were currently employed as social workers within the Gateway Assessment or Child and Family Teams and have recently completed a pre-birth risk assessment. The data was gathered through individual semi-structured interviews which were then transcribed and thematic analysis was applied through the use of Nvivo software. Common themes were then identified and discussed in line with current research, legislation and policies in order to draw conclusions and form evidence based recommendations.

Findings

Thematic analysis identified commonalities in the following areas;

- The current assessment process and pro forma is complex, lengthy and requires a higher level of practitioner ability and insight;
- The impact of practitioner ability, support and knowledge on the quality of the assessment; and,
- The parents' level of involvement with the assessment and knowledge of the needs of the unborn baby are integral to the quality of the assessment.

Discussion of results

There was a strong connection between the themes identified from this service evaluation and outcomes of a Systematic Narrative Review completed in regards to this area. Practitioner ability, completion of educative work with the parents and ensuring both parents were involved in the assessment process contribute to more positive outcomes for babies and families. Furthermore, practitioners identified that pre-birth risk assessments are often complex, benefit from being prioritised and started as early into the pregnancy as possible to promote the best outcomes for the baby and family.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The main findings of this Service Evaluation are discussed below:

1. Participants discussed the need for these assessments to be prioritised by managers.
2. Highlighted the requirement for practitioners to receive additional training and support.
3. Participants discussed the potential benefit of having a 'specialist team' or 'specialist practitioner' who would be dedicated to completing the pre-birth risk assessments.
4. Providing educative work to parents alongside the pre-birth risk assessment enhances the assessment and supports parents.
5. Where appropriate; involving partners in the assessment is beneficial to the outcomes for the baby and family.

Name of Reviewer	Jane Hindes
Organisation	South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust
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Title of Study	Does a Practice Learning Opportunity increase a Student Social Workers' Emotional Intelligence?
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Abstract

Context

Emotional Intelligence continues to develop as a concept within general society, but more importantly within the area of Social Work. The impact that emotions have on the actions and experiences of Social Workers, within their professional practice, would suggest that there may be a need to further investigate how we can develop the skills associated with Emotional Intelligence for both our current and future workforce.

Methodology and Methods used

This was a quantitative study using pre- and post-test questionnaires for relevant graduate social work students (RGR) (n=56) as they returned to their universities for their recall days during practice learning opportunities (PLO). To validate this research a control group was also created from under-graduate social work students (UGR) (n=22) who received classroom teaching during the assessment period.

Emotional Intelligence was measured using a standardised measurement tool and was broken down into the components of Self-Awareness, Managing Emotions, Motivation Oneself, Empathy and Social Skills.

Findings

There was a general increase in the measured components across both the relevant graduates and the undergraduates during the PLO with there being a statistically significant increase in the Empathy component for the RGR students.

Discussion of results

The PLO offers students the opportunity to work with social work teams and service users in a range of service provision areas to support the development of both their intra-personal (self) and inter-personal (social) skills.

The original hypothesis stated that the RGR students would benefit from the 'exposure to service-users' and that the classroom teaching for the UGR would not offer a similar opportunity. On further investigation it was found that the teaching components of the social work degree course during the measurement period involved the 'preparation from practice' module, which included role-plays with service users and the development of knowledge of 'self'. This research study may have been strengthened by using a more valid data extraction tool and by increasing the measured cohort of both RGR and UGR students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Further longitudinal research is required which focuses on the components of emotional intelligence and individual 'interventions' which may support their development.

There is also a need to standardise the PLO for all students in relation to their exposure to service users, the quality of the practice teaching they receive and the level of experienced practitioners who can support their placement.

Name of Reviewer	Robby Nelson
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Title of Study	An evaluation of social work in involving patients with Dementia in decisions related to hospital discharge
Abstract	
<p>Context</p> <p>Practice development needs were identified in relation to, involving patients with Dementia in decisions related to hospital discharge. This was supported by a systematic review of literature, 'Service User Involvement in 'Best Interest' Decisions During Discharge from Hospital; a Systematic Narrative Review'. To begin to address these needs, a service evaluation was agreed. The aim was to examine current practice in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) and to create practical ideas for practice development.</p>	
<p>Methodology and Methods used</p> <p>This is a qualitative study that incorporates the use of focus groups, to gather perspectives of professionals, in relation to their practice. Focus groups were completed with a representative group of social workers from Antrim Hospital and the six Community Mental Health for Older Peoples Teams, across the NHSCT. Information was gathered using a semi-structured interview style. The interviews were transcribed and coded for thematic analysis. The evaluation did not include interviews with service users however Dementia NI members were involved in the design of the project and focus groups.</p>	
<p>Findings</p> <p>The findings were categorised into seven main themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barriers to Involvement; • Communication; • Assessment of Preferred Level of Participation; • Preparation; • Advanced Care Planning; • Shared Decision Making; and, • Participation Tool. 	

Discussion of results

All participants demonstrated knowledge and values in involving Dementia patients in decisions related to hospital discharge. Professionals were able to discuss specialist practices that they have developed to overcome barriers to involvement, including time limitations and organisational pressures. Whilst there were some good practices already established, it was apparent that preparation for hospital admission in the community setting and advanced care planning' are fairly new concepts in practice in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The evaluation highlighted different practices between the acute and community setting. Both settings demonstrated pockets of excellent practice; therefore a recommendation would be shared learning across Teams. The evaluation also indicates that further research into the main findings would be of benefit, including possible piloting of advanced care planning in Dementia Care.

Name of Reviewer	Robyn Lennox
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Title of Study	Risk Factors for Self-Harm: Narratives from a sample of Young People in Northern Ireland
Abstract	
<p>Content</p> <p>Self-harm continues to be a growing concern within adolescence and is a globally recognised public health and social problem. Adolescents living in the community who self-harm are extremely common however less is known about these young people with the majority of research having been conducted with adult samples, psychiatric inpatients or by using questionnaires. This study focussed on capturing the voice of young people who engage in cutting behaviour to provide practitioners with insight into the risks associated with this phenomenon.</p>	
<p>Methodology and Methods used</p> <p>Single semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine adolescents aged 16-18 years who lived within one Trust area in Northern Ireland. Thematic analysis was applied to the transcribed interviews in which themes emerged.</p>	
<p>Findings</p> <p>The three subordinate themes of onset, persistence and ending of the behaviour encompassed six sub-themes which were further identified as risk factors for the behaviour. Risk factors identified were: - difficulties in support networks, exposure to self-harm behaviour, psychological issues, addiction to self-harm, hidden harm and support that hinders. These factors support the current literature base however individual and diverse explanations are highlighted which provide further depth, particularly around the concept of addiction to the behaviour.</p>	
<p>Discussion of results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescent self-harm is common in the community. • Onset age can be younger than 13 years. • Risk factors can interlink and correlate. • The more childhood adversities experienced, the more likely to experience poorer outcomes in adolescence. • Lack of communication and internalising issues limits opportunity for 	

support.

- Addiction services do not include behaviours like self-harm.
- Responses to self-harm can reinforce negative realities from the young person's past (i.e. lack of support).
- Substance misuse can replace behaviour and be used to help cope with the same underlying issues.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Recommendations for social work practice as well as future research are considered in view of the findings:-

- Assessment of risk in practice and early intervention;
- Practitioner creativity and timeliness when working with young people;
- Flexible service response;
- Support services for the addictive nature of the behaviour;
- Peer support groups or mentors, particularly those with direct experience of the behaviour to help support young people in distress;
- The quality of relationships in social work practice; and,
- Practitioners need to spend time listening to what those who self-harm say.

Future research may consider a wider and more diverse group of young people of mixed gender and potentially younger age given the identified age of onset. Multiple encounters may help to strengthen findings. Other forms of self-harm should be considered in future studies to identify whether risk factors correlate.

Name of Reviewer	Elaine Pollock
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Title of Study	A service evaluation to examine the impact of implementing a new Scaled Inspection Tool (S.I.T.) on inspectors.
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Abstract

Content

This service evaluation examined the impact of implementing Risk-Adjusted, Dynamic and Responsive inspection framework (RADaR) on inspectors, specifically a new Scaled Inspection Tool (S.I.T.) which is being piloted in Regulation Quality and Improvement Authority (RQIA).

Research on regulation in health and social care identifies inspectors' judgements, inspection approach and outcomes can be inconsistent. Studies have shown that consistency among inspectors regarding inspection outcomes is a complex issue. Providing a standard or measurement tool does not assure consistency. This service evaluation has taken those findings and applied them to the arrangements used by RQIA to inform and introduce RADaR and S.I.T. to a pilot group of inspectors.

Methodology and Methods used

The study gathered quantitative data using a questionnaire. The study group was made up of inspectors who were involved in the pilot of RADaR and a group of inspectors who were not (control group). The questionnaires gathered the inspectors self-reported measurements and views regarding RADaR and S.I.T. Two comparisons of the data were made which were: time one comparison (the control and study group) and time two (comparison of the study groups pre and post use of the S.I.T.).

Findings

The study compared data in the questionnaires to conclude whether inspectors' engagement in a series of information exchanges and the launch of RADaR led to higher levels of knowledge and confidence in the tools methodology and use of the tools in practice; compared to the control group who received no information. The data was compared using t tests which showed improvements in knowledge and confidence in the study group compared to the control group. However t tests did not show significant improvements in the study groups' knowledge and confidence after they had used the S.I.T.

All inspectors were asked to apply the S.I.T. methodology to a vignette and

report their results in the questionnaire. The results do not show consistent scoring across the control and study groups at time one or the study group at time two.

Analysis of individuals' scores showed two inspectors consistently recorded the same outcome, capacity to improve and total score at time one and time two.

Discussion of results

The study found the introduction of the tools and support given to inspectors at time one resulted in the study group self-reporting a high knowledge measurement and high confidence measurement compared to the control group who had not received the same level of intervention.

The study found a second measure of the study group did not report a significant increase in their knowledge and confidence when using the tools over time. The comparison of the time inspectors were spending on the S.I.T. and the vignette comparisons raised questions regarding how consistent can inspectors be expected to be when using inspection tools.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Inspectors reported the induction and information they received provided them with knowledge and confidence to use the S.I.T. during inspections. The study provided some useful insights into their use of S.I.T. and the impact is having on inspectors practice. Inspectors should be given a safe way to continuously report their reflections and experiences of RADaR and S.I.T. to ensure their feedback can be considered at future developmental stages

The service evaluation found consistency and reliable judgements cannot be assumed. Further use of Vignettes to measure for consistency should be considered; and inspectors should be assisted to apply their knowledge consistently.

Inspectors suggested areas of development for the S.I.T. and they should be encouraged to continue reporting their suggestions in relation to RADaR and S.I.T.

The outcomes and conclusions of the study have contributed to the further development of S.I.T. and RADaR. It is intended this is the start of RQIA using evidence based methods and practice to review inspection practices and processes.

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Research and Evaluation to Inform Social Work Module (SWK 754)

Title of Study

Does service user and practitioner training in co-production enable service improvement within health and social care?

Abstract

Content

The evaluation study was undertaken as part of a course of study in Research & Evaluation Methods in Social Work, service user Module SWK754. The author is a service user and patient advocate working with the Health & Social Care Board. The qualitative study sought to understand how knowledge transfer through co-learning and training in co-production has benefited service users and practitioners to effect service improvements within their respective organisations.

Methodology and Methods used

A purposive sampling method of the participants of the 2016/17 Involving People Programme. Ethical approval was provided through the Directorate of the Health and Social Care Board as sponsor and Commissioner for training. Participants were stratified across a geographical spread and were representative of both Statutory and Community & Voluntary sectors. Data collection was via semi structured interviews with all interviews fully transcribed and coded using Thematic Analysis.

Findings

The main findings identified 6 key themes that highlighted the key enablers and barriers of co-production and service improvement.

- Co-Production.
- Knowledge transfer.
- Change agent and Catalyst.
- Challenges.
- Organisational impact.
- Data Integrity.

Discussion of results

This was designed as a small scale, self-selecting study so it was never intended to be generalizable. The study did elicit many positives that provided both depth and detail that allowed conclusions to be drawn on the value of the co-production and co-training. These were:

1. Knowledge transfer and the value of co-production training.
2. Service user inclusion within the organisation and using experiential and professional knowledge to drive strategic change.
3. Supporting the change agent to enable change and service improvement.
4. Challenging the organisational barriers and engaging with the community and voluntary sector.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Co-production training did contribute to knowledge transfer and acted as a catalyst to help participants champion change. It recommends that:

- Leadership. - A new shared language based around a co-created and shared vision. Drive and champion co-production top-down.
- Increase Community engagement. Statutory sector should encourage flexibility and collaborative working with the community and voluntary sector – the champions for co-production.
- Holistic picture of co-production. Embed with the organisation's strategic plans.
- Ensure social values of diversity and inclusion are integral. Look to recruit a range of people who use health and social services, carers and communities, taking positive steps to include underrepresented groups.
- Invest in Co-production training that brings together co-production champions of Statutory, Community and Voluntary sector. This will be an iterative process.

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Research and Evaluation Studies 2017

Title	Reviewer	Organis- ation	Email address
Self experience and perceptions of assessing individuals with a dual sensory loss and learning disability	Liz Tanner	Southern HSCT	liz.tanner@southerntrust.hscni.net
Restorative approaches with families in elder abuse	Carole Kirk	Northern HSCT	carole.kirk@northerntrust.hscni.net
Developing team resilience as a strategy to prevent burnout and compassion fatigue in a statutory residential child setting implementing therapeutic practices	Adrian Graham	South Eastern HSCT	adrian.graham@setrust.hscni.net
Ageing out from foster care, the support and experience of young people	Franz Kavanagh	South Eastern HSCT	francis.kavanagh@yahoo.co.uk
Female care leavers' experience of the staff-child relationship while living in an intensive support children's home in Northern Ireland	Jenni Rice	South Eastern HSCT	jennifer.rice@setrust.hscni.net
Fitness4Survivors: A pilot study examining the impact of a 10-week CrossFit exercise program on fitness and quality of life with teenager and young adult cancer survivors in Northern Ireland	Simon Darby	Belfast HSCT and CLIC Sargent	Simon.Darby@clicsargent.org.uk

Research and Evaluation Methods in Social Work Module (SWK 752)

Research Evaluation Methods to Inform Social Work Module (SWK 753)

Contacts

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Improving and Safeguarding Social Wellbeing : A Strategy for Social Work 2012-2022 **Strategic Priority 3** adding value, delivering outcomes places a focus on continuous improvement and a focus on demonstrating outcomes and learning from practice.

The Social Work Research and Continuous Improvement Strategy 2015-2020

Priority 4 placed importance on recognising, valuing and maintaining the skill base of those social work practitioners who have already acquired academic credit for research.

Priority 6 is to ensure the experience and knowledge of social workers, service users and carers are used in research evaluation and audit.

Strategic Priority 7 is to ensure that research related activity promotes the principles and practice of personal and public involvement, equality and human rights. The Research Methods Programme utilises these skills through the provision of mentoring, supervision and the provision of teaching inputs on recognised courses for the benefit of other practitioners, service users and carers wishing to engage in research activity.

The Strategy is available at <http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/swresearch/>

The module supports the vision of the: Improving and Safeguarding Social Wellbeing: A Strategy for Social Work in NI 2010 - 2022) available at <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/improving-and-safeguarding-social-wellbeing-strategy-social-work-northern-ireland>

Notes: