



Pergamon

Children and Youth Services Review, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 375–378, 1995
Copyright © 1995 Elsevier Science Ltd
Printed in the USA. All rights reserved
0190-7409/95 \$9.50 + .00

0190-7409(95)00022-4

Editorial

On Becoming a Core Journal

Duncan Lindsey

University of California, Los Angeles

About two decades ago I conducted a study of journals in the fields of social work, sociology and psychology. The research began with an attitudinal survey of journal editors in these three fields. This work was later supplemented with an examination of the editorial board members of these journals. The research indicated that social work editors, during this period, were less favorably disposed to quantitative research methods than editors in sociology and psychology. But what was most surprising was the difference in editorial board composition. I examined the research records of the editorial board members in these three fields. For both psychology and sociology membership on editorial boards appeared to be related to a record of distinguished contribution to knowledge development as measured by publication of research and citations to that research. For social work, however, this did not appear to be the case. In fact, there were editorial boards that included no one who had ever published an article in a refereed journal (see Table 1).

I was particularly struck by the fact that *Child Welfare* had only one board member who had ever published research (and that consisted of one article). At that time *Child Welfare* was the major and only important journal for the field. I shared the results of this research with the editors and received mixed reactions. I believed the child welfare field needed a journal to promote empirical research and serious critical inquiry regarding the effectiveness and approach of services designed to serve children and youth. I discussed the idea with Pergamon Press which led to the launch of *Children and Youth Services Review* seventeen years ago.

In the latest issue of the *Journal of Social Work Education* L. Allen Furr (1995) reports on his study of the relative influence of social work journals. Previous studies of the influence of journals have focused on "impact scores" compiled by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) (Lindsey & Kirk,

Reprint requests should be sent to Duncan Lindsey, Professor, School of Public Policy and Social Research, Department of Social Welfare, 247 Dodd Hall, University of California at Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1452 USA [ijr1jdl@mvs.oac.ucla.edu].

TABLE 1
Measures of the Research Productivity and Quality of Editorial Board
Members in Psychology, Social Work, and Sociology.

	<i>n</i>	Adjusted total articles	Adjusted total citations
Psychology			
<i>Journal of Abnormal Psychology</i>	20	12.8	39.5
<i>Journal of Applied Psychology</i>	21	15.8	68.5
<i>Journal of Counseling Psychology</i>	26	11.1	10.8
<i>Journal of Educational Psychology</i>	15	20.8	41.0
<i>Journal of Pers. & Soc Psychology</i>	19	12.6	59.5
Overall	101	13.0	39.3
Social Work			
<i>Child Welfare</i>	10	.1	.1
<i>Clinical Social Work Journal</i>	17	2.4	3.3
<i>Journal of Educ. for Soc Work</i>	19	1.1	.9
<i>Social Casework</i>	14	.9	.8
<i>Social Work</i>	26	2.9	2.0
<i>Social Service Review</i>	7	7.0	6.0
<i>Urban & Social Change Review</i>	15	.1	.1
Overall	108	1.0	1.0
Sociology			
<i>American Sociologist</i>	10	6.3	24.8
<i>American Sociological Review</i>	26	8.5	42.5
<i>Journal of Health & Social Behavior</i>	23	6.0	15.0
<i>Sociology of Education</i>	20	7.1	18.7
<i>Social Forces</i>	11	9.0	27.2
<i>Social Problems</i>	24	10.9	32.9
Overall	114	8.1	26.0

Source: Lindsey (1977, Table 1, p. 801).

1992). These measures indicate the relative impact articles in various journals have in the development of a knowledge base as measured by how often they are cited in subsequent published work. The frequency with which an article is cited is viewed as an indicator of its impact. Furr suggests that a limitation with the "impact factor" scores reported by the *ISI* is that they include citations to articles both within and outside their field. What is more germane is the "core influence" journals have in their particular field. In this regard he

TABLE 1
Social Work Journals Ranked by Core Influence, 1991

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Journal</u>	<u>Core Influence</u>	<u>Source Items</u>
1	<i>Social Work</i>	4.96	67
2	<i>Children and Youth Services Review</i>	3.46	11
3	<i>Social Work Research</i>	3.42	19
4	<i>Social Service Review</i>	3.21	33
5	<i>Child Welfare</i>	2.93	40
6	<i>American Journal of Orthopsychiatry</i>	2.66	58
7	<i>Child Abuse and Neglect</i>	1.98	56
8	<i>Families in Society</i>	1.88	67
9	<i>Smith College Studies in Social Work</i>	1.30	10
10	<i>Public Welfare</i>	1.14	28
11	<i>Social Work in Health Care</i>	1.00	27
12	<i>Journal of Social Work Education</i>	.85	27
13	<i>Clinical Social Work Journal</i>	.81	27
14	<i>Social Work with Groups</i>	.76	29
15	<i>Administration in Social Work</i>	.70	27
16	<i>Journal of Marital & Family Therapy</i>	.69	29
17	<i>Family Relations</i>	.57	65
18	<i>British Journal of Social Work</i>	.37	35
19	<i>Child & Youth Care Forum</i>	.23	31
20	<i>Indian Social Work Journal</i>	.13	38

Source: Furr (1995, Table 4, p. 42).

assessed the "core influence" of journals in the social work field. The results of his study for the top twenty journals in social work are reported in Table 2.

The most influential journal is *Social Work* which is distributed to more than 143,000 members of the National Association of Social Workers (Mendelsohn, 1992). To my surprise and delight, the second most influential journal was *Children and Youth Services Review*. Apparently, over the years we have developed a journal which is making an important contribution to the field. It should be noted that there is a negligible difference between *Children and Youth Services Review* and the next journal on the list, *Social Work Research*. For that matter, the difference between these two journals and the fourth journal on the list, *Social Service Review* is probably not significant.

Over the years journals in social work strengthened their editorial boards in terms of appointing members with stronger records of contribution to research and scholarship. For instance, *Child Welfare* now includes a number of scholars and researchers on its editorial board. Pardeck (1992) replicated my earlier study and found that although social work journals have made gains there is still room for improvement:

Apparently the current criteria for an appointment to a scholarly journal editorial board within social work appears to be based on something other than a successful track record of academic productivity... It is difficult to see how the historically weak knowledge base of social work ... can be improved if those who serve as gatekeepers to the profession's scholarly journals are not themselves active contributors to this process. (pp. 493-494)

The study of journals has a purpose that extends beyond assessing the relative influence of individual journals. It serves to allow scrutiny of this vital institution.

The Main Point

The strength of social work's voice will be determined, in large part, by the advances achieved in developing expert knowledge through research and rigorous scholarship. In this effort social work journals play a major role. Every effort to eradicate the vestiges of cronyism and insure the highest standards of science are required. Guardians of the old system will no doubt resist the efforts to change. However, compromise with untenable patterns of appointment to editorial boards cannot be tolerated. To allow this to continue will harm more than the effort to build a knowledge base for effective practice, policies and programs. It will hobble the profession's ability to make a difference for its clients.

References

- Furr, L.A. (1995). The relative influence of social work journals: Impact factors versus core influence. *Journal of Social Work Education, 31*, 38-45.
- Lindsey, D. (1976). Distinction, achievement, and editorial board membership. *American Psychologist, 31*, 799-804.
- Lindsey, D., & Kirk, S.A. (1992). The role of social work journals in the development of a knowledge base for the profession. *Social Service Review, 66*, 295-310.
- Mendelsohn, H.N. (1992). *An author's guide to social work journals*. 3rd Edition. Washington, DC: NASW Press.
- Pardeck, J. (1992). Are social work journal editorial boards competent? Some disquieting data with implications for research on social work practice. *Research on Social Work Practice, 2*, 487-496.