Review of *International Social Work Research: Issues and Prospects.* Tony Tripodi and Miriam Potoky-Tripodi. Reviewed by Teresa Morris.

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Book Reviews

Tony Tripodi and Miriam Potocky-Tripodi, *International Social Work Research: Issues and Prospects*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. $ 55.00 hardcover, $ 24.95 papercover.

International research methods for the social sciences are usually discussed in the context of cross cultural research in disciplines such as Psychology and Anthropology. Social work research methods texts address cross cultural research but generally do not include international social work research. A book that addresses this gap is an eagerly anticipated read. This book begins with an overview of international social work: organizations, activities, publications, and definitions of globalization and international social work. A definition of social work research is then offered which lists methodologies and roles and gives a definition of social work research "...a compassionate, problem-solving, and practical endeavor..." (p. 13) and a list of knowledge objectives that mostly reflect the positivist paradigm: concept development, operationalization and description; hypothesis formation; and hypothesis testing.

After a brief discussion of social work research trends in a few selected countries, a typology of international social work research is given. This is the heart of the book. The typology offers three kinds of international social work research: supranational research with native born populations using a literature review from beyond that country and forming "implications" beyond that country; intranational research with immigrants using the literature from the country of origin and the host country and forming "implications" for both countries; and transnational comparative research that includes literature and compares populations from two or more

countries and forms "implications" about the countries includ-
ed in the study.

The rest of the book expands on these definitions giving
brief descriptions of methodologies for each approach and ex-
amples of studies from around the world that can be classi-
fied according to this typology. The section on supranational
research discusses methods for problem formulation, instru-
ment construction, research design, sampling and then data
collection, data analysis, conclusions and implications. Five
sample studies are described from Israel, China, India, Cyprus
and England. The intranational research methods section dis-
cusses basic concepts in international migration, social work
problems with immigrants and refugees, and the same meth-
odological topics as in the supranational section. Of the five
examples of intranational research, two come from the United
States and the rest came from Canada, Nicaragua, and Israel.

The transnational research section of the book has a similar
structure to the other two sections with additional discussions
of qualitative and quantitative comparisons. The first example
study in this section was carried out in the Ukraine but was con-
sidered transnational because there was collaboration between
U.S. and Ukrainian researchers. The other studies compared: a
U.S. sample and a Romanian sample; a New Zealand sample
with normative data from Canada and Australia; unemploy-
ment programs in 80 countries; and samples from 10 countries.
Interesting issues are raised about carrying out research in dif-
ferent countries and a framework for comparing studies is a
helpful critiquing tool.

The strength of this book is its discussion of internation-
al social work research methods and the conceptual tools it
offers for thinking about methodological issues and critiqu-
ing research. However, there are two main problems with this
book. The first is with the conceptualization and application of
the typology and the second is with the book's basic premise.
Regarding the typology, both supranational and intranation-
al research projects apparently can "generalize implications"
(page 59 and page 106) to a population that was not sampled.
The author is clearly skirting problems with violations of the
principles of sampling theory. There is some discussion of a
broader definition of generalization and of controlling threats
to external validity but the basic problem remains. With

these approaches to research it would be legitimate to study poverty in California and "imply" something about poverty in Mexico because the literature review included references from Mexico. Similarly, researchers studying Mexican immigrants in California could claim that their findings imply something about Mexican immigrants in Mexico. This would violate most of the premises underlying positivist research, the paradigm guiding this book

The second problem with the book is broader and more problematic. The premise of this book is that the definition of social work methods accepted by some social work researchers in the United States is accepted by the rest of the world. Imagine social workers in Chiapas wanting to carry out a critical theory study of the impact of NAFTA on services for poor families and communities. Imagine social workers in Darfur wanting to use a constructivist approach to developing and evaluating NGO sponsored community intervention programs for children who have been demobilized from a military fighting a war that crossed national boundaries. Imagine social workers in China wanting to build a post positivist theory of domestic violence in a country that is both a dictatorship and capitalist and both traditional and modern. This book offers such researchers: concept development, operationalization and description; hypothesis formation; and, hypothesis testing. There is no discussion of various world views or, for example, action research. The implicit assumption is that the experimental design is the gold standard of social work research. It assumes that all questions are causal or at least correlational. When discussing qualitative approaches to research it suggests that these are used to formulate theories and hypothesis that will later be tested by quantitative research. This would be challenged by grounded theorists who use qualitative data to build theory, not just to formulate it. This book begins the discussion of international social work research methods, and for that alone it is most welcome. Unfortunately, it does not acknowledge the infinite variety of world views and appropriate methodologies accepted around the world.

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