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The Practice of Research in Social Work. Rafael J. Engel and Russell K. Schutt.

Edward Cohen
University of California, Berkeley

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Book Notes

Rafael J. Engel and Russell K. Schutt, *The Practice of Research in Social Work*. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 2005. \$74.95 papercover.

Social work is a practice profession. Nevertheless, most social workers will eventually be called on to evaluate some area of practice or agency performance, comment on the merit of existing policies, or participate in the planning of services. *The Practice of Research in Social Work* was written as a textbook for a graduate level social work students introducing the issues, concepts and methodologies of applied social work research. The co-authors bring expertise from social work and sociology, fields that share an interest in the "science" of the social sciences, along with attention to real-world problems and solutions.

The text provides a comprehensive overview of social sciences research with numerous examples from social work, including some from the authors' own research into mental illness and homelessness. The thirteen concise chapters are thoughtfully structured to support classroom teaching for a one or two semester course. Along with the main text, each chapter also includes a list of key terms, a highlight summary of the chapter, discussion questions, practice exercises, web exercises and three or four chapter-related assignments for writing a research proposal, typically required of students in research methods courses. A full glossary of terms is conveniently integrated into the index. Appendices include very helpful material on interpreting scientific articles and finding information.

A main strength of the book is the clarity with which the authors present complex topics. For example, statistical fundamentals (such as the normal distribution and probability) are presented within the context of sampling theory early on in the text, which lays the groundwork for the later chapter on quantitative data analysis, which discusses issues of central

tendency, dispersion, and statistical inference. The authors' presentation of experimental and quasi-experimental group designs is straightforward, departing from other texts in that the material is preceded by a thorough discussion of causality and research design rather than limiting the presentation of this material in the context of threats to internal validity, which is more typical in other texts. Another interesting difference from other textbooks is the inclusion of a section on ethical concerns in every chapter rather than devoting a separate chapter to the topic. This strategy relates ethical issues to every stage of research activity so that the ethical issues are given better conceptual foundation.

Culturally competent or sensitive research, while addressed in some areas throughout, could have been given more attention in the areas of sampling theory, measurement error, interpretation of data, and the role of social sciences research in society. While there are chapters on qualitative methods and data analysis, some introductory material about mixed methods would better represent the reality of most human services research, particularly in program evaluation. Occasionally some advanced topics, such as ordinary least squares regression, are introduced without enough preparatory information. Despite these few issues, the book is a concise introduction to research and a very good addition to the literature.

Edward Cohen, University of California, Berkeley

Susan Starr Sered and Rushika Fernandopulle, *Uninsured in America: Life and Death in the Land of Opportunity*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005. \$24.95 hardcover.

Discussion about universal health coverage has been prominent in the consciousness of many Americans in the last few years. With a poor economy, the rise in low-wage work, and decrease in manufacturing jobs, the proportion of Americans without health insurance is increasing. *Uninsured in America* provides an in-depth look at the men and women in America who do not have health insurance and provides