Book reviews

Book review policy

The policy of Social Work Review is to offer books for review to ANZASW members in the first instance. New reviewers are welcome and any member who would like to be added to the list is invited to write (preferably by e-mail) or telephone the Book Review Editor. It would be helpful if you would outline your areas of interest. This may enable the Editor to offer you titles in your field, or consult you about your interest in certain titles before requesting a copy for review from the publishers. However, general inquiries, or specific ones that relate to one or more of the books listed below, are also most welcome.

Once a review is completed, the book becomes the property of the reviewer.

Publications available for review


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I have come to appreciate that there’s nothing quite like unpacking one’s own stories ... to become aware that there is a multitude of voices whispering, shouting, singing, moaning, rejoicing, weeping, laughing. It can be an unsettling time when you begin to focus on the range of perspectives, demands, and encouragements that you have internalised from others’, often uninvited, offerings. However, the fruits of your labour can be insightful and the rewards thus passed onto the families we work with can be enormous. Restorying Social Work Supervision offers a contextual framework within which to account for the multitude of voices ever present in the supervisory relationship/s through a constructionist approach.

This book consists of three main parts. The first part introduces the history of social work supervision. The author then examines the concept of social construction and its influence upon social work supervision. This involves identifying and critiquing the global and local influences that impact on supervision. Chapter four then considers how personal issues relate to supervision by locating clients, social workers, supervisors, managers, educators and other social service and health professionals involved in the supervision process, and discusses the influence each has in the social construction of social work supervision.

The second part of the book discusses and examines a contextual framework for social work supervision. Social work’s focus on the person and the environment highlights the complex nature that exists within this profession. Human rights, social justice, power, empowerment, anti-oppressive/anti-discriminatory practice and Te Tiriti O Waitangi are regarded as the key principles of the contextual framework within Aotearoa New Zealand. In order to deconstruct one’s own supervision story, one must be able to distinguish between the myriad of voices and account for social and personal implications that are ever present.

Finally, the reader is invited to revise their own supervision story by assessing where they are located in relation to others. Specific exercises and reflective questions are included to stimulate this personal examination. Given the constructionist argument that social work supervision is socially and personally constructed, the concluding chapter of the book challenges practitioners to develop their own personal practice theory using the contextual framework examined throughout the book.

Although some readers may struggle with the language of constructionist theory, I found this book to be a linguistic gem, that was inviting of reflective questions. It is aimed primarily at an audience of students, for whom the language is highly appropriate and in fact essential for encouraging professional development. I found this to be an excellent social work text set within the Aotearoa New Zealand context, and look forward to similar such literary works in the future, that will enable our profession to continue to evolve and develop.

Sally Dalhousie,
Supervisor.


This book has been written to address the question on the minds of many researchers and potential participants: ‘Will it make a difference?’ What is the point, of researching an issue or being involved in a study if it will not change the way the issues are understood and addressed? The emphasis of ethics committees is on protecting participants from harm and maintaining confidentiality. Research participants need to weigh up the risk of disclosure and emotional involvement against the perceived benefit of their involvement – both in terms of the value of being able to tell their story and feeling confident that the study will have value to others in the
same situation. This book argues that the positive outcomes of research should be given equal significance as potential negative impacts.

Robyn Munford and Jackie Saunders, both of Massey University’s School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work have edited a collection of chapters by researchers with a special interest in research about families. These authors come from a range of disciplines and are drawn from around New Zealand, Australia, Canada and Ireland. They focus on a wide variety of research projects aimed at bringing about some sort of change on an individual, family, community or organisational level.

There are several key issues addressed in the chapters. These include the development of indigenous research expertise; research with families who care for disabled children; and family and community research from a strengths perspective. Also covered are integrated evaluation within organisations to ensure best practice is developed and sustained; and practical research details such as gaining staff commitment to organisational research, training staff in data collection, effective recruitment of participants and client-controlled recording systems. Attention is paid to giving a voice to families and helping participants to take on leadership roles within their communities; and developing effective partnerships between family agencies, university researchers and funding organisations. The potential of comparative family policy research to add to other research programmes is identified.

The book is relevant for researchers, teachers and students in the social sciences and related disciplines. It will also be of interest to members of ethics committees, policy makers who use research and those interested in family research, including Maori research. It is written in an accessible style, while covering a wide range of research topics and approaches. As most of the contributors come from Aotearoa New Zealand, it is clearly relevant to social research in this country. For social workers and organisations who have hesitated about getting involved in research, this book acts as a major encouragement to get involved with family research, in order to make social work practice more effective, appropriate and responsive.

Anna Thorpe,
Christchurch.


William Housley states in the opening chapter that the aim of this book is to ‘look at how the discursive links between multidisciplinarity and team working is characterised by three concepts crucial to the process, knowledge, communication, interactional structures and roles’ (p. 5). Housley’s research aims to explore the ways in which various dimensions of practice differ from the theoretical recommendations and commentaries on how multi-disciplinary teams should look.

Housley views multidisciplinarity as offering a solution to the compartmentalisation of knowledge, by providing a systems solution that views disciplines as distinct systems each producing ‘truth’ but not the whole truth. Within each chapter, Housley critiques an extensive range of literature and research.

Chapter 2 outlines the team Housley used for his research – its scope of work and the roles of its members, as well as the method employed for the research (observation and documentation of regular team meetings). The methodological approach utilises ‘Conversational Analysis’, ‘Categories in Context’ and ‘Membership Categorisation Analysis’, with Housley’s goal being to understand interaction in multidisciplinary teams as a methodological commentary on interaction in formal and institutional settings.

Chapter 3 looks at the methods through which multidisciplinary team meetings are socially and interactionally achieved through examining talk-in-interaction, turn taking and topic change.

Chapter 4 analyses the concept of ‘role’ within multidisciplinary team practice, and its place as
an interactional device and resource.

Chapter 5 analyses knowledge and knowledgability in multi-disciplinary meetings and re-
specifies knowledge as the ‘detailed and methodic interactional and discursive work of team
members’ (p. 99).

Chapter 6 analyses story formulation in team talk-in-inter-action and looks at how stories
contribute to the local organisation of a team meeting and are embedded in the task of carrying
out the activity of the team.

Chapter 7 summarises the analyses contained in the book, and Housley provides some
reflections of his own. Housley describes his study as a ‘collection of detailed descriptions of
occasioned singularities of talk and interaction within multidisciplinary meetings’ (p. 123). He
asserts that analysis of communicative and interactive activities within meetings provides a
means through which practitioners can reflect on and analyse their own practice.

I chose to review this book because I am in the process of restructuring, which requires
looking at how multidisciplinary teams function and can be improved. I had hoped that this book
would provide some relevant information for this process. Unfortunately I was wrong. Not only
did I not find anything useful for looking at multi-disciplinary team functioning, but I also
struggled to understand what was being said (even with a dictionary beside me). This could be a
reflection on my limited vocabulary and also the fact that I do not have a strong social sciences
background, which means that I found the method and terms used confusing. I also struggled to
find an actual conclusion from the research.

If you are from a social sciences background and have an interest in ethnomethodological and
discourse analytic research then I would recommend this book to you, because you will probably
understand what Housley is talking about. For the rest of us it is probably better to leave it on
the shelf.

Nikki Watkins,
Senior Social Worker, Waitemata DHB.

Resilience and Vulnerability. Adaptation in the context of childhood adversities. Edited by

Resilience and Vulnerability is a compilation of papers by leading researchers on risk situations
experienced by children and youth. The first part of the book deals with family adversities (such
as maternal drug abuse and child maltreatment) and the second part addresses community
stressors, such as poverty and neighbourhood violence. Each contribution considers the criteria
for resilience, relevant risk and protective factors, the limits to resilience, and the policy and
programme implications of the particular risk that is studied.

The text’s foremost message is the centrality of the parent-child relationship to young people’s
adaptive functioning and well being. Indeed, risk circumstances can be characterised depending
on the degree to which they disrupt supportive and responsive parenting. Accordingly, child
maltreatment is probably the most serious, since, by definition, it is a radical distortion of the
primary relationship. For similar reasons, maternal depression is a major threat to dependents
and its ill effects are described as ‘ubiquitous, tenacious, and robust’ (p.120).

Dose effects, or the increasingly deleterious outcomes associated with greater amounts of risk,
are another salient theme in Resilience and Vulnerability. For example, New Zealanders Fergusson
and Horwood show that children in their longitudinal study who were exposed to six or more
negative factors had 2.4 times the externalising disorders (e.g. violence), and 1.8 times the
internalising disorders (anxiety, depression, suicidal behaviour), compared to young people with
low exposure to adversity. Dose effects also appear to be related to age of onset, chronicity, and
even physical proximity. Gorman-Smith and Tolan report research on a school playground
shooting which found that children in the playground were the most traumatised, followed by
those in the school building, and followed again by those not at school.
In a previous review article, Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker (2000) comment that biological influences on development are typically ignored in resilience research. The present volume redresses the balance with instructive chapters by Curtis and Nelson, and Rutter. The biological dimension adds further depth and complexity to the risk and resilience paradigm, encompassing as it does neurological and endocrinal influences and change as well as genetic contributions. Rutter highlights the importance of heredity while emphasising that the environment mediates genetic effects, and that outcomes are probabilistic rather than deterministic.

*Resilience and Vulnerability* is resplendent with insights but there is a strong sense that much of the critical work has yet to be done in this field. Throughout the volume there are calls for research on the processes and mechanisms that transact resilience. Two responses can be made to these injunctions. Firstly, as Seidman and Pedersen suggest in their chapter, the contextual quality of resilience may be essentially inimical to the generation of universal laws of behaviour. The second point is that it is probably timely for the field to rediscover qualitative research. Doll and Lyon (1998) see qualitative analyses as having the potential to illuminate resilience processes.

Carefully designed qualitative studies that attempt to provide insight into the phenomenological world of resilient individuals, including personal reflections, attributions, and perceptions about negotiating risk situations may prove invaluable in elucidating mechanisms and processes used to overcome adversity (p. 359).

The contributors to *Resilience and Vulnerability* collectively argue for early and comprehensive family-focused interventions that also acknowledge the wider conditions of risk. The parent-child relationship is the heart of the matter and the well-being of caregivers is a highly significant secondary consideration. In a chapter on the organisational model of human development, Yates, Egeland, and Sroufe refer to attachment-oriented interventions that deal with influences from the caregiver’s own childhood (‘ghosts in the nursery’), that encourage parental sensitivity to an infant’s cues, and that reduce the symptoms of maternal depression. Luthar and Zelazo suggest that self-sufficiency (emotionally, behaviourally, socially and in daily living terms) is an important goal for parenting programmes.

It is likely that we regularly underestimate the necessary breadth and depth of interventions for children and families who are seriously at risk. Again, contributors Luthar and Zelazo comment that professional involvements tend to emphasise externalising issues and give scant attention to internalising aspects, and emotional distress that is ignored can give rise to a range of other personal difficulties. Curtis and Nelson compare laboratory studies of enrichment with major social initiatives like Head Start and the Abecedarian Project and they contend that the latter have failed to realise the promise of the former because they do not reach necessary critical intensity thresholds. Further, as researchers Sameroff, Gutman and Peck conclude, in a critique of simplistic answers concerning difficult human situations:

> The proverbial magic bullet may turn out to be as multidimensional as the modern army. The major implication of multiple-risk models is that interventions need to be as complex as development itself (p. 388).

*Resilience and Vulnerability* is an important milestone in the development of the risk and resilience response to the problems experienced by young people. It enhances our understanding of the complexities of behaviour and circumstance while illuminating the necessary focus and quality of intervention efforts.

**References**


Peter Stanley
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