

Useful Knowledge, Research, and Innovation in Social Work Practice: Comparing Europe and the US

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The social work profession has a long-standing commitment to social innovation and to the production and utilization of knowledge to improve social work processes, practices, interventions and social welfare policy. To extend understanding of knowledge utilization in social work, this study compares the most highly cited U.S. and European social work articles in their contributions to a cumulative body of research and scholarship that is contributing to knowledge development and innovation in the field. Two notions guide the analysis: 1) that cross-national research and development in the social and hard sciences is flourishing, and 2) that there is little understanding of the types of research that meets the needs of social work practitioners. One hundred English-language articles were analyzed from a previous study, 69 U.S. articles and 31 European articles. To assess the types of knowledge social work readers and writers find most important, the articles were first classified by content. They were then categorized into non-research or research articles, with the research articles further delineated by their potential contribution to practice decision-making. The results show the majority of European articles were about the profession of social work itself or theory while U.S. articles report widely on populations, research, and intervention effectiveness. The majority of articles in Europe were non-research articles, whereas the majority of articles in the U.S. were research articles. Among research articles, 15% of U.S. articles report on intervention effectiveness, while 3% of European articles report on intervention effectiveness. Results are considered in terms of the historical, political and institutional contexts and in terms of the development of practice research in Europe and the US.