

The British Journal of Social Work: History, Discipline and Professional Field

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A history of the emergence, development and scholarly role of the British Journal of Social Work in the first forty years of its 'life'. Journals have played a central role in shaping and being shaped by shifts in the identity of the social work field, but little or nothing has been done to explore this. The BJSW seeks to act as 'a journal of record', and hence as a representative depository of the writing of the field, in particular in the UK. This study includes interviews with almost all former and present editors, and other key informants; a detailed content analysis using an extensive scheme for classifying research developed by one of us; a study of patterns and trends in styles of scholarly writing; and analysis of extensive editorial, publishers and journal Board archive papers. Analysis is a combination of thematic and narrative interpretive portrayals of editors' and key informants' accounts, set in conjunction with the archival history of contemporaneous documents; a form of content analysis; and an application of a discursive standpoint to scholarly writing styles. This presentation will focus on two themes: ways, patterns and trends in the content and 'style' of writing that illuminate social work as a field from 1971 to 2012; and the role of journal editors (and by implication reviewers) in 'shaping' the profile and image of social work as a field of practice and research - 'shaping' because we do not wish to presume a single direction of influence or power. Given the continued growth of social work journals across Europe and further afield, the study has implications for a critical appreciation by all social work stakeholders of the identity and continuing change and direction of the field.

Key words: journals; knowledge production; social work as a field