

The acquisition of scientific knowledge in children and youth services in Switzerland

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In theory the use of scientific knowledge is a characteristic of professional social work. Recent studies suggest a low use of scientific knowledge in social work practice. In this study the acquisition of scientific knowledge has been examined to gain more findings about the sources of scientific knowledge that are being used in practice. It answers the following research questions: How often and by which sources do social workers in children and youth services acquire scientific knowledge? How do individual and organizational determinants influence the frequency of scientific knowledge acquisition? An online survey was conducted in the field of children and youth services in three cantons of Switzerland (Aargau, St. Gallen and Zurich). The questionnaire was sent out to social workers in the fields of residential care, youth work and school social work. The response rate was 43% (total n=470, residential care n=146, youth work n=124 and school social work n=200). The data was analyzed by comparative analysis and logistic regression. The results show a low frequency of scientific knowledge acquisition for most of the examined knowledge sources. This might explain the low use of scientific knowledge in practice. Nevertheless there are significant differences between practice fields within children and youth services. The most frequently used sources are formal meetings, media (mostly internet) and informal conversations during work time. The logistic regression analysis shows that organizational determinants play a more important role than individual determinants. Especially the organizational culture towards science, the challenges in daily practice and the practice field have a significant influence on the acquisition of scientific knowledge. These results suggest that a positive organizational culture towards science enhances the acquisition of scientific knowledge.

Keywords: scientific knowledge acquisition, knowledge sources, professionalism