

1. Introduction

Haluk Soydan – School of Social Work, University of Southern California

This book concerns the lifetime contributions of Dr. Edward Joseph Mullen, the Willma and Albert Musher Professor Emeritus of Columbia University and a fellow of the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare, to social work research and professional practice. The book integrates contributions from an Inter-Centre Network for Evaluation of Social Work Practice (INTSOCEVAL) seminar and postseminar invitational contributions.

INTSOCEVAL is an informal and invitational network of European and American social work research centers. The network was founded in 1998 following a 1997 conference on evaluation as a tool in the development of social work discourse, organized by the Center of Evaluation of Social Services at the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare. INTSOCEVAL is an international network whose members meet annually. It embraces an informal approach and has served throughout the years as a platform for discourses on scientific and epidemiological questions of social work with explicit reference and pertinence to social work practice. The 2014 annual seminar took place at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano in Italy, April 13–14, 2014. This seminar was dedicated to the legacy of Dr. Edward J. Mullen. Here we are publishing contributions to this seminar. After the seminar, the editor of the book also invited other scholars who are not part of INTSOCEVAL to contribute to the book.

This collection of chapters transcends a single social work scholar's lifetime work and provides a window to historical events, milestones, and challenges of the science and practice of social work. This book has unique characteristics and attempts to capture unique historical components in the develop-

ment of social work, all inspired by Dr. Mullen's work as perceived by the contributors of this book. I would like to summarize my perspective on those unique characteristics of the book in four contexts of the science and practice of social work.

1.1 Social Work as Developed and Interpreted in the Old and New Worlds

This context is embedded in the nature of the structure of INTSOCEVAL and the background of several of the contributors, including the editor, of this book. Let me explain this context by briefly describing the scholarly history of the editor as an example. I wrote my doctoral thesis in sociology at the University of Uppsala, Sweden. Its mission was to interpret empirical data collected in 22 countries by an American psychologist, Charles E. Osgood, using the Osgood attitude measurement scale known as semantic differential, constructed to measure the subjective, affective meaning of words. The era, the early 1970s, was a time of advancement of the Marxist philosophy of science combined with and fueled by confrontations with functionalist, Weberian, and other schools of sociology. So I took the challenge of interpreting Osgoodian (positivist) empirical data from a Marxist conceptual and theoretical framework. Mission impossible, yes, but luckily I passed the exam! The point here is, however, not my doctor's title in sociology at a university older than 500 years, but the formation of a professional identity that mandated reading in all provinces of social science. Many years later I came to cofound the international Campbell Collaboration, a bastion of scientific evidence generated with experimental methods that has its roots in the philosophy of empirical sciences (some argue, positivist) and logical empiricism—emphasizing empiricism, verification of data, and rejection of metaphysics.

Similarly, the membership of INTSOCEVAL and the contributors of this book collectively represent a robust foundation on which diverse philosophies of science and methodological perspectives are fostered, confronted, and advanced. In a crudely generalized fashion, this book hosts perspectives that originated in the Old and New worlds, not always congruent and at

times at the odds with one another. This mix of perspectives colors the book, provides an attractive scholarly flavor, and invites further thinking in pursuit of developing a science of social work while concurrently making this science relevant to the needs of populations and communities.

1.2 Social Work's Trajectory toward Evidence-Based Practice (EBP)

A second characteristic of this book is triggered by the scholarly journey of Dr. Mullen and not necessarily that of the contributors. One of the main focuses of Dr. Mullen's career has been bringing rigorous science to service delivery organizations to promote better client outcomes. In other words, how should we measure outcomes of actions and interventions of social work practice to enrich and guide the profession to constantly improve its knowledge base and the tools of intervention? Similarly, how should we shield our professional actions from unverified information, arbitrary opinion, and simple ideology? In social work, it is not easy to find prominent examples of an entire scholarly career dedicated to bringing rigorous science to social work practice. However, Dr. Mullen's lifetime achievement is an excellent example.

The reader who comes to think of the controversy regarding social work as a science versus art might rightfully raise the question, "What about social work as art? Does Dr. Mullen's work disregard, or even as some opponents of EBP would suggest, diminish or reject its value?" Not at all. As evidenced by some of the contributions to this book, Mullen's work is very sensitive to "nonscientific" dimensions of social work, such as the importance of relationships, mentorship, and personal closeness between researchers and others.

On the other hand, as some of the chapters in the book describe, it is not a coincidence that Dr. Mullen became a pioneer of evidence-based social work practice. In fact, he was well prepared at the onset of the EBP movement. By having first studied deficiencies in our professional knowledge base and concluded that our interventions were poorly or not at all supported by rigorous evidence, and then having worked intensively on outcome

measures, he was a natural forerunner in pursuit of strong evidence for effective social work interventions. In the constitutive years of the international Campbell Collaboration, Dr. Mullen was an important voice of social work that supported the early development of the collaboration.

In sum, this book transcends Dr. Mullen's work and provides a perspective on the development of EBP globally.

1.3 Evidence-Based Practice is not the "End of History"

In the wake of an article published in the journal *National Interest*, in 1992 Francis Fukuyama published a remarkable book called *The End of History and the Last Man*. Inspired by the conclusion of the Cold War conflict between communism and Western liberal democracy, Fukuyama proclaimed the end of history, meaning that in liberal democracy humankind had achieved its final form of government. No other conclusion would have been such a fallacy, as evidenced by the ensuing political context of the world!

The end of history perspective has its echoes in science. At times, we tend to see new theories and approaches as the ultimate stage of knowing; this conclusion is also a clear fallacy, as elegantly demonstrated by Thomas Kuhn in his model of scientific paradigms. Similarly, there have been examples of EBP advocates who mistakenly argued that the EBP movement sees itself as the ultimate response of social work to everything, a sort of end of history approach. Edward Mullen has been an early pioneer of warning us about multidimensionality and the diversity of social work and urging us to recognize that EBP is not always the ultimate response to everything in social work. His 2015 piece in the *European Journal of Social Work*¹ is a culmination and further clarification of this position, warning that we all should abstain from making EBP a dogma.

1 Mullen, E. J. (2015). Reconsidering the "idea" of evidence in evidence-based policy and practice. *European Journal of Social Work*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/13691457.2015.1022716

1.4 Bridging Evidence and Practice

This book has another distinct uniqueness in its emphasis on the research–practice gap. A classic Greek philosopher, Aristotle was one of the early thinkers who constructed a typology of knowledge in which different types of information are related to a specific purpose. His types were theoretical, productive, and practical. Theoretical knowledge is related to obtaining truth for the sake of the truth, productive knowledge is related to the creation of an artifact or system, and practical knowledge has the purpose of gaining knowledge and wisdom to guide our actions, particularly in the public sphere.

When defining the purpose of knowledge in social work, social workers (researchers and practitioners) have often oscillated between favoring theoretical knowledge versus practical knowledge (with an element of what Aristotle called productive knowledge). In real-life situations and globally, this divide tended to be a constraint between knowledge producers (university-based researchers) and knowledge users (social work professionals) for social work practice. Indeed, this cleavage has been and is a major deficit in social work. Some social workers have clearly seen the negative effects of the conflict between evidence production and professional practice. Edward Mullen is one of those individuals. He has been a champion of trying to bridge this gap using innovative research and infrastructural constructs. His innovative means of bridging the gap brings a unique dimension to the message of this book. What is reflected as uniqueness in this book is the consistence and persistence with which Edward Mullen has addressed this issue throughout the years.

1.5 Contributions

In Chapter 2, Walter Lorenz analyzes social work as a product of modernity. He points out the ambiguity generated by modernity, emphasizing individual autonomy and dependence on organic solidarity at the same time. He suggests that with this historical backdrop, social work in its role of promoting social solidarity has oscillated between positivist science and hermeneutic models to understand human interaction. Indeed a dilemma!

Lorenz interprets Mullen's work in an attempt to overcome this dilemma in which social work finds itself.

In Chapter 3, Inge Bryderup describes how the evidence-based social work movement has influenced the Danish social policy context and social work research. She points out that different stakeholders understand and define evidence-based practice and research in different ways. She concludes that the evidence-based approach has not had a significant effect on social work practice and research in Denmark. A main reason for this lack of impact seems to be the Danish rejection of the idea of an evidence hierarchy, and as a counterpoint Bryderup seeks support in Mullen's challenge to reconsider the epistemological foundations of EBP.

In Chapter 4, Mike Fisher and Peter Marsh consider Mullen's work on practitioner–researcher approaches over two decades. They suggest that despite the substantial contributions of Mullen on this topic, EBP advocates remain unconvinced of the need to engage directly with practitioners to develop evidence.

Chapter 5, written by Mikko Mäntysaari, provides a perspective on EBP as perceived in Finland. His contribution is associated with one of the oft-repeated objections to EBP, namely the shortage of evidence. Mäntysaari discusses the question of how to work with a research-based orientation while lacking empirical evidence of the outcomes of interventions.

In Chapter 6, Soydan connects Mullen's early contributions to mapping the lack of evidence in understanding and evaluating outcomes of social work interventions. He relates these early publications to Mullen's later work on developing EBP. He also draws parallels to the development of the foundations of evidence-based health care and evidence-based social work.

In Chapter 7, another international perspective is provided. Karen Tengvald describes Edward Mullen's influence on the formation of the Swedish Centre for Evaluation of Social Services and its successor, the Institute for Evidence-Based Social Work Practice—two research and development institutions

established to compensate for the disengagement of university research institutions from producing knowledge with practice relevance.

In Chapter 8, Bruce Thyer characterizes Edward Mullen as a trailblazer by reviewing Mullen's half-century-long research career that justifies designating him as a visionary regarding the emergence of EBP as a major influence in contemporary human services and health care. In this pursuit, Thyer reviews the five steps of EBP and clarifies many misunderstandings related to EBP.

Chapter 9 is written by Dorian Traube, Jennifer Bellamy, and Sarah Bledsoe, former doctoral students of Edward Mullen and now highly regarded professors in their own right. In this chapter, they reflect on Edward Mullen's career as a mentor and apply a pragmatic controlled trial to examine this dimension of Mullen's contribution to the scholarly community. From a historical perspective, Edward Mullen's mentoring efforts and approach emerge as an exceptional dimension of his character.

In Chapter 10, Edward Mullen is given the opportunity to reflect and comment on what has been written about his lifetime work in the previous chapters. He does not always agree with what has been attributed to his work or EBP, and no opportunity is available in the context of this volume for the contributors to respond to his comments. If there is such a desire among any of the contributors, they will have to use other media to continue the debate.

Finally, this book contains a bibliographic summary of Dr. Edward Mullen's research and publications. To support the reader's access, the material it has been structured in topical areas that Edward Mullen has dedicated special attention to throughout the years.

Those who have contributed with specific chapters are colleagues and friends of Edward Joseph Mullen. Some of them have known him and his work over several decades. Many of them, including the editor of this book,

Haluk Soydan

have very much benefited from his mentorship, skills, and wisdom. We all are thankful for the opportunity to reflect on his career.

The University of Southern California School of Social Work has been a favorable and supportive environment for the preparation of this book; special thanks go to the dean of the institution, Dr. Marilyn Flynn, the 2U Endowed Chair in Educational Innovation and Social Work.

Bozen-Bolzano University Press has kindly peer reviewed and accepted the publication of this book; the process has been facilitated by Professor Walter Lorenz, rector of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, and Professor Silvia Nicoletta Fargion. Thank you Walter and Silvia.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the tireless and careful efforts of Eric Lindberg of the Hamovitch Center for Science in the Human Services in improving the editorial quality of this book. He certainly is a master editor.