

The Impact of Research Anxiety on Research Orientation and Interest in Research Courses in Social Work Students

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Abstract : Social work professionals should underpin their decisions with scientific knowledge and research findings. Hence, research is used as a framework for social work education and research courses have become a taken-for-granted component of study programmes. However, it has been acknowledged that social work students have negative beliefs and attitudes as well as frequently feelings of fear of research courses. Against this background, the present study aimed to establish the relationship between student's fear of research courses, their research orientation and interest in research courses. We hypothesized that fear predicts the interest in research courses. Further, we hypothesized that research orientation (perceived importance and attributed usefulness for research for social work practice and perceived unbiased nature of research) was a mediating variable. In the years 2014, 2015 and 2016, we invited students enrolled for a bachelor programme in social work in Switzerland to participate in the study during their introduction day to the school taking place two weeks before their programme started. For data collection, we used an anonymous self-administered on-line questionnaire filled in on site. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and structural equation modelling (generalized least squares estimates method). The sample included 708 students enrolled in a social work bachelor-programme, 501 being female, 184 male, and 5 intersexual, aged 19-56, having various entitlements to study, and registered for three different types of programme modes (full time programme; part time study with field placements in blocks; part time study involving concurrent field placement). Analysis showed that the interest in research courses was predicted by fear of research courses ($\beta = -0.29$) as well as by the perceived importance ($\beta = 0.27$), attributed usefulness of research ($\beta = 0.15$) and perceived unbiased nature of research ($\beta = 0.08$). These variables were predicted, in turn, by fear of research courses ($\beta = -0.10$, $\beta = -0.23$, and $\beta = -0.13$). Moreover, interest was predicted by age ($\beta = 0.13$). Fear of research courses was predicted by age ($\beta = -0.10$) female gender ($\beta = 0.28$) and having completed a general baccalaureate ($\beta = -0.09$). (GFI = 0.997, AGFI = 0.988, SRMR = 0.016, CMIN/df = 0.946, adj. R² = 0.312). Findings evidence a direct as well as a mediated impact of fear on the interest in research courses in entering first-year students in a social work bachelor-programme. It highlights one of the challenges social work education in a research framework has to meet with. It seems, there have been considerable efforts to address the research orientation of students. However, these findings point out that, additionally, research anxiety in terms of fear of research courses should be considered and addressed by teachers when conceptualizing research courses.

Keywords : research anxiety, research courses, research interest, research orientation, social work students, teaching

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