

Applying Critical Realism to Qualitative Social Work Research: A Critical Realist Approach for Social Work Thematic Analysis Method

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Abstract : Critical Realism (CR) has emerged as an alternative to both the positivist and constructivist perspectives that have long dominated social work research. By unpacking the epistemic weakness of two dogmatic perspectives, CR provides a useful philosophical approach that incorporates the ontological objectivist and subjectivist stance. The CR perspective suggests an alternative approach for social work researchers who have long been looking to engage in the complex interplay between perceived reality at the empirical level and the objective reality that lies behind the empirical event as a causal mechanism. However, despite the usefulness of CR in informing social work research, little practical guidance is available about how CR can inform methodological considerations in social work research studies. This presentation aims to provide a detailed description of CR-informed thematic analysis by drawing examples from a social work doctoral research of Korean migrants' experiences and understanding of trust associated with their settlement experience in New Zealand. Because of its theoretical flexibility and accessibility as a qualitative analysis method, thematic analysis can be applied as a method that works both to search for the demi-regularities of the collected data and to identify the causal mechanisms that lay behind the empirical data. In so doing, this presentation seeks to provide a concrete and detailed exemplar for social work researchers wishing to employ CR in their qualitative thematic analysis process.

Keywords : critical Realism, data analysis, epistemology, research methodology, social work research, thematic analysis

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