

Research Café

Generating ideas for possible collaborative team research

Research Cafe #3

Date: 26 June 2015 (Friday)

Time: 3.30 pm – 5.00 pm

Venue: GH237



Topic: The Boundaries of the Social Work Relationship Revisited: Towards a Connected, Inclusive and Dynamic Conceptualization

This presentation examines professional boundaries and presents an alternative conceptualization of boundaries in social work relationships. The model emphasises connection rather than separation, advocating a process that encourages mutuality. Links will be made with other therapeutic concepts that can be developed for application to social work relationship will be examined. Implications for social work research, education and practice are also examined. An update on current research on the how Hong Kong and Australian social workers conceptualise professional boundaries will be provided.

Background

In all professional relationships there are power imbalances and the potential for discrimination and exploitation. To safeguard against such violations the concept of professional boundaries is advocated, yet the construction of these boundaries is presented as if it is rudimentary for everyone. Historically, the professional boundaries created within the field of social work have been influenced by other professions, most notably medicine. Integral to these traditional models are professional boundaries that separate the professional from the client and concentrate on what the boundary is, rather than why it is needed and how it is created. As a consequence the professional boundaries within social work have become increasingly incongruent with developments in the profession's unique theoretical and value base. Despite the widespread acceptance of the importance of professional boundaries scant attention has been paid to their construction and the degree to which they reflect the ethos of the social work profession.

About the speaker

Professor Patrick O'Leary is a social worker and an internationally recognised researcher with significant expertise in child protection, gender-based violence, long-term impact of child sexual abuse (especially in men) and socially excluded young people. Over the last ten years he has conducted a number of complex research projects in Australia, USA, UK, China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Albania, Sudan, Nepal and Lebanon for international clients including Terre des hommes, Islamic Relief Worldwide, and UNICEF. Professor O'Leary's work has influenced international domestic violence and child protection policy and practice. His work in the area of social work has examined the boundaries of the social work relationship as well as the therapeutic and theoretical use of concepts such as 'hope' in micro and macro practice. Professor O'Leary has held academic positions at the University of Bath, University of Southampton and the University of South Australia. Most recently he served as Head of the School of Human Services and Social Work at Griffith University, where he is now a Research Professor. Currently Professor O'Leary is commissioned as an Expert Academic Advisor to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse with a particular focus on male victims and the long-term effects.



David Ip
DRC Chair, APSS