

# **3rd SOCIAL SERVICE RESEARCH NETWORK (SSRN) “Transforming Research into Solutions”**

**Tuesday, 16 February 2016  
Lecture Theatre, Level 2  
Lifelong Learning Institute**

# Surviving and Thriving on Research at Ground Level – Reflection of a practitioner- initiated, academic-facilitated model

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**Surviving and Thriving on Research at Ground Level  
– Reflection of a practitioner- initiated- academic-  
facilitated model**

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- Vision of the senior management for engaging in practice research
- Invitation as research mentor to practitioners
- Rationale for the involvement

## **Chronicles of the collaboration from the academic perspective...**

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- Beginning effort – Teaching/Refresher for practitioners on Action Research
- Mentoring started on reflecting practitioners' curiosity on their own practice
- Two teams of practitioners – Counselling team and Social Work team
- The reflective practice was re-ordered as far as possible within the rigor of research methodology. This is in contrast to a more conventional academic research approach where the process begins with a hypothesis and seeks the practice environment to explore the question

**From the academic perspective...**

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## **Social Work Team**

- Identifying a target population and practice issue that is meaningful to all team members
- Low income blended families – help seeking and experience of receiving help from MPFSC
- Combing through case files to identify clients who fall within the parameters for this study
- Moving from practice wisdom and passionate interest to a research question and process

**Reflecting on practice by social work team...**

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- 2013: “**Research for Reflective Practice – Towards the Professional Development of Social Work and Counselling Practice**”

**Paper 2: “*Resilience of Low-Income Blended Families Served by the Marine Parade FSC*”**

*Purpose:*

- *Understand key factors behind positive adaptation of blended families facing adverse financial circumstances.*
- *Understand low-income blended families internal & external strengths that contribute to resilience.*
- *Traits in families that show signs of positive coping*



## **Montfort Care examples of research by practitioner-researchers**

- Challenges in obtaining common time slots for discussion
- Social workers' nature of work does not naturally have goodness of fit with such systematic reflective research endeavor
- Clients uncontactable as participants for the study
- Data collection collection mainly conducted by two social workers (voluntary) with guidance from mentor

## **Challenges faced in practice research...**

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- Unfamiliar with qualitative methodologies
- Analysis of data conducted mainly by one social worker with close guidance from mentor
- Time consuming – had to do it after hours and weekends

## **Challenges faced in practice research...**

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## Counselling team

- Curiosity of higher number of men seeking marital and relationship counselling
- Moving from practice wisdom (casual observation) and passionate interest in the issue of male clients to a research question and process
- Less difficulties in recruiting participants for this practice research

**Reflective practice of counselling team...**

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- **2013: “Research for Reflective Practice – Towards the Professional Development of Social Work and Counselling Practice”**

**Paper 1: “A Study of Male Clients’ Perceptions of and Experience of Relationship Counselling at the Marine Parade FSC”**

A curiosity about the phenomenon of men coming for counselling . Purpose: wanting to understand

- Factors that facilitate or hinder men from seeking help;
- Their experiences & what they found helpful or not;
- Shifts in their perception after counselling;
- Male clients’ suggestions for improvement



**Montfort Care examples of research by practitioner-researchers**

- Non-evaluation study\*
- Instead: what did we do right?
- Implications on service quality

- Need to calibrate expectations (time famine)
- Managing steep learning curve in methodology and data analysis with mentees
- Very close guidance to be expected
- Cheering mentees on as the going get tough

## **Challenges faced by mentor...**

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- World conference on Social Work and Social Development, Stockholm, Sweden by counselling team lead (2012)
- Publication of book by Montfort Care
- Presentation by mentor in 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Practice Conference, Hunters College, NY (2014)
- Publication of data mined from Social Work team study to address a more abstract concept in an academic journal Social Work a publication of NASW)
- What's next? Continuing research energy in **organic** form

## Dissemination of findings...

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## Vulnerable Families as Active Agents of Their Own Change Process: A Bidirectional Perspective

*Esther C. L. Goh*

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The literature on successful practice with vulnerable families reports social workers' efforts in forging therapeutic bonds with clients, their ability to both recognize clients' strengths and pain and support them as they work through adversity. Vulnerable families' own contributions to their change process, however, have remained largely opaque. This article offers concrete conceptual tools to consider both social workers and clients from vulnerable families as active agents in the change process. Empirical evidence collected by practitioner-researchers through in-depth discussions with 10 vulnerable families illustrates clients' agentic capacities for autonomy, construction, and action as well as joint construction and maintenance of the helping relationships with social workers, thereby illustrating their active contribution to the process of change.

KEY WORDS: *bidirectionality; change process; client's agency; relationship as contexts*

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**T**he challenges social workers face in working with vulnerable families have been well documented by scholars and practitioners (Krumer-Nevo, 2003a; Krumer-Nevo, Slonim-Nevo, & Hirshenzon-Segev, 2006; Morris, 2013;

stories, we introduce the constructs of bidirectional relationship context, and the ontological assumption of social workers and clients as “equal agents,” as conceptual tools for understanding the process of successful change. It is thus the goal of this article to

# Research At Ground Level



- Build a Culture of learning within organization
- Identify staff keen in learning about and doing research & grooming interest and abilities
- Doing research in small, manageable ways like literature review for programs or services, program evaluation
- Support from Board and management – listen to passions of staff & create space e.g. research on issues of interest & has relevance to work/service
- Building research into roles (e.g. Principal Social Worker) to create space and time rather than on top of other duties/in ‘own time’ –
- Generating platforms where sharing of research findings can be conducted (agency supported )

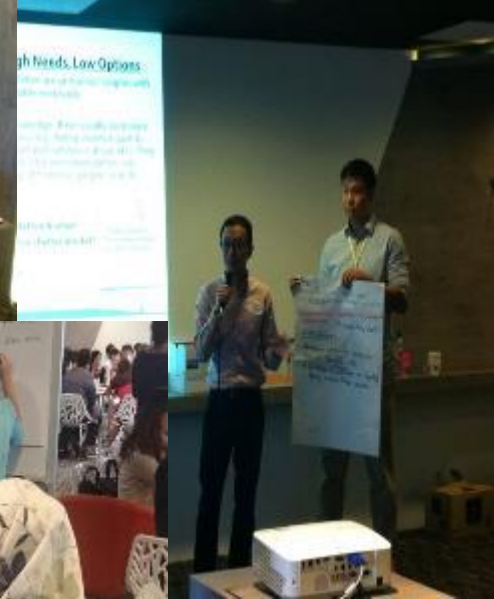


- Garnering support for research in Voluntary Welfare Organisations – seen as ‘good to have’ rather than useful or beneficial to practice and helping to increase professionalism
- Building buy in from colleagues –who may perceive it as additional work (e.g. having to do profiling, provide clients for interview) on top of usual workload ; or who do not see the how it will benefit their work or clients
- Disseminating research findings: how to do this effectively & cultivating interest to read & understand research findings and implications for practice
- Utilising research findings: Transferring findings & applying learning from research back into practice – strengthen the link between the academic and practice

# Challenges for practitioner-researchers

# Montfort Care examples of research by practitioner-researchers

- 2014: “Let’s Talk Homeless!” A Sharing on A Profile Study of the Homeless In Singapore by MPFSC & Agency Practice with Homeless” by Mr Chan Xian Jie
- Presented to partners (MSF, HDB, N’Parks, other FSCs)
- Purpose: To share findings about homeless that MPFSC out-reached to & worked with, learning points, profile of families, challenges faced by homeless families & creating awareness of issue of homelessness & dialogue on how partners can work together



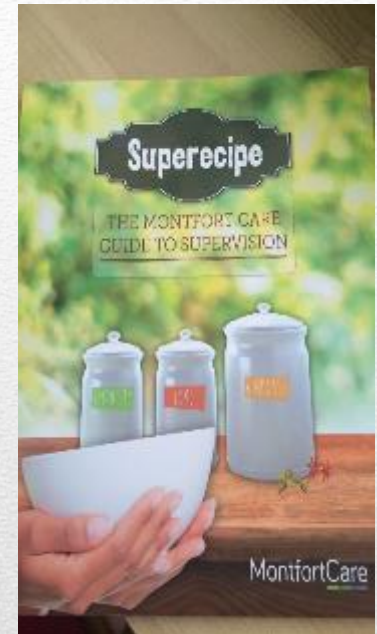
- Paper: “*Community Child Protection In Singapore: Big Love Service Model & Evaluation Framework*”
- **Collaboration** : Study commissioned by Montfort Care – research done by academic from Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy & PSW from Ministry of Social & Family Development – interviewees were staff/workers from Montfort Care, MSF Child Protection Department & clients.
- To be presented at the 2016 ISPCAN (International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse & Neglect) Conference in Canada

## **Montfort Care examples of research by practitioner-researchers**

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# Montfort Care examples of research by practitioner-researchers

- **2014-2016:** focus on reviewing Montfort Care supervision ; researching on supervision approaches & building better practice in supervision
- Launching of “*Superecipe-The Montfort Care Guide to Supervision*” in March 2016.
- Purpose:
  - to review and evaluate supervision practices & structure
  - To consolidate good practices & document & disseminate
  - To enhance better supervision practices & standards to ultimately benefit client outcomes
  - To enhance competence of supervisors



- April 2015: sharing platform on supervision with Montfort Care staff
- Purpose:
  - To share work done in review of supervision & key findings
  - To share Montfort Care supervision model
  - To share the importance of supervision
  - To create awareness of staff roles in supervision
  - To share knowledge on best practice & approaches of supervision from research



## Montfort Care examples of research by practitioner-researchers

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