

Meta-analysis of the Evidence-based Practices Research Reports in Social Services in Hong Kong (1998 – 2012)

Ka-shi Kwong

The Salvation Army, Hong Kong KaShi_Kwong@hkt.salvationarmy.org

Abstract

Evidence-based Practices Research is one of the main focuses of social services in Hong Kong. Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) publish research reports to present the service models they adopted and their effectiveness; the findings of their needs assessments on specific communities or service users. Although evidence-based practices research is an important tool for assessment and development of social service, we don't have a comprehensive and systematic database to contain these published reports or even abstracts. Besides, there are no further analysis based on the methodologies have been made among those reports. In this paper, meta-analysis is used to analyze those reports, which are selected by simple random sampling. There were three dimensions of the reports would be examined and analyzed. The first dimension is the basic research methodologies, which include the design of the study, degree of control over the social system, temporal dimension, sample, sample size, data source, data collection method, researchers and so forth. Another dimension is the size of the NGOs, which include the number of units, number of staff (general or professionals), sources of funding and the amount from different sources of funding. And the third dimension of analysis would be emphasized on the development of Social Welfare and NGOs in Hong Kong. This paper was prepared based on the captioned methodology; NGOs published over 1,000 reports from the Handover of Hong Kong to 2012. This paper studied 885 researches from 800 reports. Observations of their practices, researches and reports had been drawn. Studying evidence-based practices research methods and statistics are compulsory courses for the social work students in the tertiary institutions in Hong Kong, this presentation aimed at enhance their basic research abilities. Most importantly, I would like to provide them a holistic picture on the topics and trends on the evidence-based practices research reports in the Social Services sector in Hong Kong.

Key Words: Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Research Methodologies, Research Abilities, Social Welfare Development.

1. Introduction

Since the Handover of Hong Kong from 1997, the concept of the “evidence-based practice”(EBP) in the social service sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is increasingly important. Most of the NGOs draw their strategic and development plans based on the figures they obtained from their services and other stakeholders. Evaluations are also conducted on their own services and on the growth of the service users.

Some of the insiders believed that the rise of the EBP may be related to the introduction of the “Lump Sum Grant Subvention System” (LSGSS) from the Social Welfare Department (SWD) in 2001. Most of the NGOs, especially those of the large and comprehensive one, were mainly depends on the government's subventions in the past. Under the new subvention system, the amount of subventions had been barred at a specific level based on the established manpower in the year 2000. Those services units which had satisfied the communities' needs would not obtain extra resources from the new subvention system easily. Organizations should rearrange their manpower and structure to support new services. On the other hand, other insiders suggested that the lack of long term planning was another reason of inducing the EBP projects. After 1991, the usual practice of publishing 5 years' welfare planning had been ceased. In order to lead the sector development, to gain the public concerns and to obtain extra financial

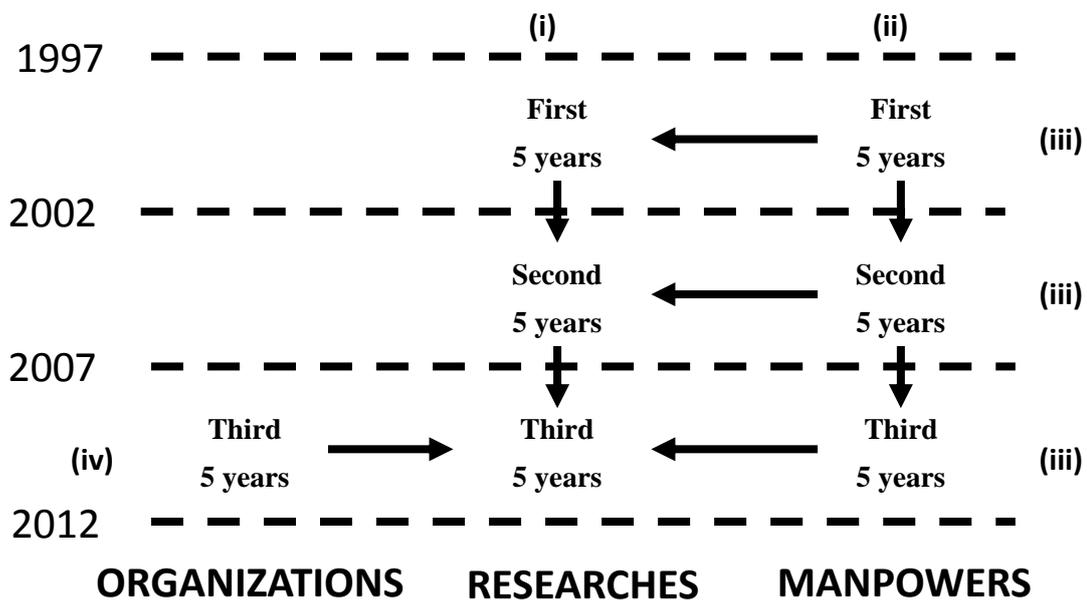
supports, most of the organizations started make use of the findings in their needs assessment and service evaluation reports. These two explanations directed to the same meaning, the LSGSS raised the importance in monitoring the outcome and effectiveness of services provided in the social service sector in Hong Kong.

The LSGSS allowed the NGOs to re-engineer their existing structure in meeting the changing community needs. NGOs began to set up departments and posts to recruit specific and professional staff in conducting EBP projects. For example, the Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service set up the Service Planning and Development Department in 2001, and the Christian Family Service Center employed Research Officer since 2003. In addition, some of the organizations conducted research projects in order to increase the creditability and accountability of their services. The practice researches include doing the social needs assessment, analysing the social problems, service models developments and service evaluations.

The aim of this paper is to evaluate the use of the EBP in the social services sectors. In order to make the test easy to read and compare, I am going to put the focus on analyzing those reports published and released publicly, and then to make the following explanations (Diagram 1):

- i. RESEARCHES changed in past 15 years.
- ii. MANPOWERS changed in past 15 years.
- iii. MANPOWERS affected the RESEARCHES in past 5 years.
- iv. ORGANIZATIONS affected the RESEARCHES in the past 5 years.

Diagram 1: Analytic Plan



2. Methods

Period of Time. After the handover of Hong Kong to nowadays, measured from 1998 to 2012. The time frame is going to be further divided into 3 parts (from 1998 to 2002, from 2003 to 2007, and from 2008 to 2012).

NGOs. ORGANIZATIONS included those on the membership list of the Hong Kong

Council of Social Service (HKCSS). HKCSS was established in 1947 and aimed at coordinating NGOs to promote the development of social welfare in Hong Kong. Moreover, the details of the ORGANIZATIONS are checked from the Directory of Social Service Organizations in Hong Kong (Directory). The 2009 version of this Directory is used to compare with the details of the RESEARCH from 2008 to 2012. In this paper, the number of unit, number of staff (Overall, Social Workers, Nurses, Physiotherapist, Occupational Therapist, Speech Therapist, and Clinical and Educational Psychologist), and the income (Overall, SWD, Other Governmental Departments, Other Funding Resources, Donation, Programme Fee, Business Earned and Investment) and expenditures are drawn from this Directory.

Researches. Based on the definitions of Fink (2003), this paper put the focus on assessing the RESEARCHES on the methodologies and samples, the research design are defined (Basic research, Applied research and Evaluative research). Based on the categories decided by Miller (2002), degree of control over the social system (No control, Partial control, Completed control); temporal dimension (Cross-sectional, Time series or longitudinal, Comparative cross-cultural, comparative longitudinal), sample (Individuals in a role within a group, Pair of interrelated group members, Primary group (30 or less), (Secondary group (31 or more)), Tertiary group (crowd, public, etc.), State, nation or society), sample size, data source (Original data to be collected by the researcher, Archived or secondary data in hand, Archived or secondary data to be collected), data collection method (Analysis of documents, Self-administrated questionnaire, Email or Web questionnaire, In-depth interview, Focus group, Telephone survey, Case study and life history, Non-participant observation, Participant observation, Laboratory, Face-to-face interview) are defined. Based on the Classification from Fung (2004), Sampling is divided to 5 levels (Did not mentioned, Labeling, Elaborated, Elaborated with sample summaries, and Elaborated with sample summaries and quality assurance. At last, MANPOWER, such as the number and types of people involved (Scholars from tertiary institutions, other professionals, and representatives from the organization) are also recorded.

Samples. Published research reports that can be borrowed and read/access from the public, universities or HKCSS libraries are included in the data collection frame. However, researches conducted by HKCSS herself, NGOs are not on the membership list, a research centre from a listed NGO, and respondents who are not lived in Hong Kong, are excluded. Data are collected from the paragraphs printed on the reports, including introduction, background, methods, targeted population, study and questionnaire design, number of cases and data processing, etc. If the reports contain more than one research and the unit of analysis in this paper is the RESEARCHES but not the reports.

Sampling. Simple Random Sampling is manipulated. A list of reports is sorted out from 3 main resources in Hong Kong: Hong Kong Academic Library Link OPAC, Hong Kong Council of Social Service Reference Library, and the Hong Kong Public Libraries. A random digit is assigned to each report and checks their availabilities from the library systems. Each report would have 2 attempts before replacing another one with a smaller random digit. Finally, this paper stopped accessing reports until more than 70% of the reports are read in every single year.

3. Results

RESEARCHES. Altogether 800 reports had been studied and 885 researches had been located in these reports. 37.8% of the target population was “Youth/ Students” and 14.8% was general public. They were Basic Research (84.0%), had no control over the social system (95.0%), Cross-sectional (94.0%) and focus on Secondary group (31 or

more)(92.0%). The mean and median of the samples were 785.6 and 471 respectively, which are usually collected by Self-administrated questionnaire (56.0%) or Telephone survey (9.9%), and the Sampling method just a label (41.2%) tagged in report or even did not mentioned (37.9%).

MANPOWER. Representatives from the organizations took part in 86.4% researches, while the scholars from tertiary institutions were 35.1% and other professionals were 2.7%. 64.9% of the researches were conducted by the representatives from the organizations alone, and another 29.9% were conducted by the cooperation between representatives from the organizations and the scholars from tertiary institutions

ORGANIZATIONS. There are 318 organizations on HKCSS's list. The Directory contains details of 264 (83.0%) of them. The average SWD subventions in 2008 were HK\$29,264,426.00 and the median was HK\$1,182,309.00. In last 15 years, 97 (30.5%) organizations conducted researches. One organization conducted the most 147 researches and 28 organizations conducted only 1 research in the past 15 years.

i. RESEARCHES changed in the past 15 years

In the past 15 years, most of the details did not change significantly, expected:

- i. fewer and fewer basic researches conducted in recent years and more and more applied and evaluative researches completed ($\chi^2=9.590$, $df=4$, $p=0.048$).
- ii. data are collected from the archived or secondary data in hand, and archived or secondary data to be collected more often recently ($\chi^2=11.577$, $df=4$, $p=0.021$).
- iii. more and more researches did not mention their sampling methods in the reports ($\chi^2=36.184$, $df=6$, $p<0.001$).

ii. MANPOWERS changed in the past 15 years

In the past 15 years, the MANPOWERS in conducting the researches were changed significantly:

- i. more and more researches involved scholars from tertiary institutions ($\chi^2=13.731$, $df=2$, $p=0.001$).
- ii. more and more researches involved representatives from the organizations ($\chi^2=8.297$, $df=2$, $p=0.016$).
- iii. hence, more and more researches enhanced the cooperation between scholars from tertiary institutions and the representatives from the organizations ($\chi^2=17.540$, $df=4$, $p=0.002$).

iii. MANPOWERS affected the RESEARCHES in past 5 years

In the past 15 years, the impact from the MANPOWERS towards the details of the RESEARCHES did not change significantly. The representatives from the organizations to conduct the Basic Researches quite often that had no control over the social system and collect cross-sectional data. And the representatives from the organizations rarely mentioned the sampling method in the researches (Table 1).

Table 1: MANPOWERS and the RESEARCHES in past 15 years

	Study design	Degree control	of Temporal dimension	Sampling	Sample Size
1998-2002	$\chi^2=18.133$, $df=2$, $p<0.001$	$\chi^2=41.605$, $df=2$, $p<0.001$	$\chi^2=32.453$, $df=2$, $p<0.001$	$\chi^2=15.323$, $df=2$, $p=0.004$	---
2003-2007	$\chi^2=7.996$, $df=2$, $p=0.018$	$\chi^2=6.602$, $df=2$, $p=0.048$	---	---	---
2008-2012	$\chi^2=12.544$, $df=2$, $p=0.002$	$\chi^2=6.277$, $df=2$, $p=0.043$	$\chi^2=6.990$, $df=2$, $p=0.030$	$\chi^2=12.808$, $df=2$, $p=0.012$	---

iv. ORGANIZATIONS affected the RESEARCH in past 5 years.

Based on the sizes of the ORGANIZATIONS listed on the Directory, the correlations with the output of the researches are calculated. The number of social workers ($r=0.519$, $p<0.001$), total income ($r=0.339$, $p=0.002$), amount subventions from SWD ($r=0.442$, $p<0.001$), amount of subvention from other governmental departments ($r=0.412$, $p<0.001$), amount of subvention from other funding sources (such as Community Chest and HK Jockey Club Charities Trust, etc.)($r=0.313$, $p=0.004$) and total expenditure ($r=0.353$, $p=0.001$) are positively correlated with the number of researches conducted from 2008. A conclusion might be able to draw at this moment, the larger the size of the organizations, tend to conduct more researches in past 5 years, and vice versa.

4. Conclusions and Discussions

From the Handover of Hong Kong to 2012, the content of EBP researches had been changed significantly. More and more Applied Research and Evaluative Research conducted, data are more often collected from the archived or secondary data in hand, or to be collected. However, more and more researches did not mention their sampling methods in the reports. Further analysis showed that more than a half (51.6%) of the research reports from 2008 to 2012 conducted by the representatives from the organizations alone did not mention the sampling methods, which is significantly higher than those figures from 1998 to 2002 (37.8%) and from 2003 to 2007 (31.8%).

Even it is easy to understand that the larger the size of the organizations tend to conduct more researches, but the social workers still played an important role in conducting researches than other professionals in the organizations. More and more researches involved both scholars from tertiary institutions and the representatives from the organizations. It would enhance the communications between these 2 parties and would be a chance for the representatives from the organizations learnt more from the scholars from tertiary institutions, and understand about their services and service users more deeply before and after the researches.

In the near future, there would be numbers of evaluative research reports published. SWD began to support organizations extra resource to conduct evaluative studies by the Social Welfare Development Fund. Studies which are evaluating and improving NGOs' existing practices or modes of intervention in delivering their services could be applied.

References:

i. Books in English:

Fink, A. (2003). *The Survey Handbook*. USA: Sage Publication, Inc.

Miller, D.C. (2002). *Handbook of Research Design & Social Measurement*. USA: Sage Publication, Inc.

ii. Books in Chinese:

Feng, X. (2004). *Sampling in Social Surveys: Analysis of 141 Research Reports*. Bian, Y. & Li, L. (2004). *Social Survey Research in Practice: Chinese Experience and Analysis*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 41-61.

Hong Kong Council of Social Service (2009). *Directory of Social Service Organizations in Hong Kong (2009)*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Council of Social Service.

Mo, B. & Zhou, J. (2001). *The Experience of Social Work Research*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Social Workers Association.

iii. Websites:

Hong Kong Academic Library Link OPAC Main Menu. Retrieved April 15, 2013, from <http://hkall.hku.hk>.

Hong Kong Council of Social Service Reference Library. Retrieved April 15, 2013, from <http://www.library.hkcss.org.hk>.

Social Welfare Information Portal. Retrieved April 15, 2013, from <http://www.swik.org.hk/swikportal/DesktopDefault.aspx>.

Social Welfare Department, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government Retrieved April 15, 2013, from <http://www.swd.gov.hk/index/>.

Hong Kong Public Libraries Catalogue. Retrieved April 15, 2013, from <https://webcat.hkpl.gov.hk/?theme=WEB&locale=en>.