

The book is one of many on the systems approach but has made a definite contribution, which is to be welcomed.

Reviewed by Dr Lengwe-Katembula Mwansa, Senior Lecturer, University of Botswana.

Gillespie, D F and Glisson, D (eds) (1993) **Quantitative Methods in Social Work: State of the art**, Haworth Press, New York, ISBN: 1-56024-275-2, 228 pp inc index.

One of the outcomes of the National Institute of Mental Health Task Force on Social Work Research is this edited collection of examples of the use of quantitative methods. Initiated by the realisation that only a scattering of social workers carry out research in the field of mental health, the Task Force analysed social work research articles published between 1977 and 1988.

The report found that although the use of advanced analytic techniques was increasing, the research tended to use "...*quick, inexpensive and relatively simple research methods*", for example, cross-sectional and quasi-experimental designs and samples of convenience. The editors argue that the increase in the more advanced methods needs to be encouraged because they improve the researcher's ability to study complex social problems and interventions while reducing the risk of oversimplification and inferential error. Hence the idea of stimulating further research development through this collection of examples applying advanced methods.

The authors of the papers in this volume assume the reader is familiar with basic research methodology, including descriptive statistics and elementary inferential techniques. The volume focuses on three types of methodological issues: measurement; issues related to the incorporation of non-quantitative variables in quantitative analysis; and issues surrounding the use of quantitative techniques to analyse complex social phenomena. Three papers are devoted to each of these issues.

The measurement of complex and abstract concepts used in social work is addressed by Nugent and Hankins who evaluate Hudson's Generalised Contentment Scale; Kronick and Silver examine different software packages that can be used for content analysis; and Orme and Fickling describe the use of latent variable structural equation modelling. The papers on the analysis of non-qualitative variables using quantitative methods includes a paper on logistic regression by Morrow-Howell and Proctor; the application of log-linear analysis by Combs-Orme; and a presentation of event history analysis by Fraser, Pecora, Popuang and Haapala. Addressing the question of how to model complex social phenomena, Koeske describes moderation effects; while Coulton and Chow analyse interactions using regression techniques; and finally Streeter and Gillespie present an application of network analysis.

All the articles in this collection provide excellent examples of a variety of techniques and methods, and include illustrations from different areas, including family preservation and prevention of risks to infants. However there is a potential problem with the discussion about the relative merits of certain research methods and approaches over others. The editors tend to equate "good quality" research with sophisticated quantitative data analysis; this provides a relatively narrow perspective on the future development of social work research.

As the editors themselves point out, one of the problems with social work research is the lack of linkage between substantive theory and methods of inquiry, a consequence or cause of the much discussed rift between social work practitioners and social work researchers. Nevertheless, the solution to this problem goes beyond the adoption of more sophisticated quantitative methods, and calls on social workers to be exposed to a wide variety of methods, and gain expertise and sophistication in the methods that match most appropriately the problem at hand. This would significantly contribute to closing the gap between research and practice.

The recent contributions to the social work literature on qualitative research methods make a valuable contribution in this regard, as does the discussion about the relevance to social work of analytic approaches used in the humanities and social sciences (eg, the use of oral histories). Add to this the debates surrounding the "alternative research paradigms" in social work, for example, constructivism, feminist research methods, etc, and what emerges is a methodological forum that matches the type of substantive theoretical considerations one would encourage social work practitioners to consider.

Social work research should be responsive to the different settings and problems it confronts without being ranked as more or less advanced or more or less sophisticated. A fairly obvious example of this is presented in many African countries where the types of survey methods advocated in developed countries are not only completely impractical, but more importantly inappropriate. A different approach to research needs should be adopted, not one less "sophisticated", but one more responsive to the entire context of the phenomenon under study. Quantitative analysis should not, and cannot, be the standard to which social work research is held.

Despite this tendency towards methodological elitism, this volume will be of considerable use to social workers who wish to increase their knowledge of advanced quantitative methods, and bringing such a collection together undoubtedly provides a contribution to the advancement of social work research.

Reviewed by Prof Christine Marlow, Fulbright Scholar, University of New Mexico, USA (on attachment at School of Social Work, Zimbabwe).