

## Research Policy

### Introduction

Increasingly BASW is being asked to partner individuals and organisations in research or in research bids. This policy sets out the research that BASW will support and prioritise.

### Definitions

This policy adopts the definition of social work research by Shaw and Norton (2007).

*Social work research is research that has one or more of the following purposes:*

- *provide objective, impartial evidence for decision making; provide public accountability;*
- *generate or enhance theory and knowledge about social problems, social policy and social work and how best to develop them;*
- *develop or improve social work intervention and practice;*
- *highlight and advance the quality of lived experience, practical wisdom, and personal and organisational learning;*
- *promote social inclusion, justice or social change.*

(Shaw and Norton, 2007).

This definition of research is consistent with the BASW Code of Ethics.

BASW can be involved in research as a direct researcher, as a commissioner of research (commissioning should not be equated with funding), as a facilitator of research, as a partner in research, as a consumer of research (e.g. to improve services, to advocate and campaign), and as a communicator of research (e.g. through campaigning, continuous professional development and publication).

As a membership organisation BASW will prioritise research by the members of BASW.

As a membership organisation of social workers BASW will also promote understanding of the membership, their impact, the work setting and an understanding of membership organisations generally.

Social work draws on a range of disciplines. BASW must therefore promote a wider body of research and beyond those simply with the title 'social work'. Such research can have applications and implications for social work even if this was not the primary intention of the researchers.

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## Principles & Priorities<sup>1</sup>

**Ethics:** BASW supports research, which accords with the highest standards of ethics. The research must be consistent with the BASW Code of Ethics and relevant Research Governance Frameworks. In the case of research by university-based researchers, the proposed study must be approved by the university's research ethics committees. BASW will also expect researchers to conduct themselves ethically in the field (Clarke 2006).

**Consent:** BASW will only fund or partner on bids with clear ethical processes for seeking consent of all participants. Where the research includes people over 18 years old, to elicit consent, it is expected that the language of the Consent Forms, Participants' Information Sheets and other documents are written in 'Plain English'. For research participants, who are adults with learning disability, accessible language should be used, and the research should adhere to the research provisions of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 (Boahen 2015; Department of Health 2009).

**Involvement of children:** Where the research includes people under the age of 18, researchers will need to secure the consent of parents (or legal guardians) and the *assent* of the child. This means that researchers should explain the research to the children using accessible language. Where there is parental consent to their children's participation but the child(ren) refuse assent, then the latter will not be included in the research. This principle therefore requires *both parental consent and the assent of child(ren)* and applies to both qualitative research – for instance interviews, observations, diary keeping, videoing – and quantitative studies, e.g. surveys.

**Experts by Experience:** For BASW to support research and/or be a partner on funding bids, the study must involve users of services in as many phases of design as possible. This is because BASW believes that those with lived experience have a unique knowledge of their situation and that their involvement has intrinsic ethical value. In practical terms, to adhere to this principle, researchers must include experts by experience in either: setting questions and research priorities, collecting data, analysing results, and disseminating findings. Alternatively, service users may be involved as members of the steering committee or in advisory capacity. The research should also seek to benefit participating experts by experience – for example through improvement in their quality of life, acquisition of skills for self-advocacy to seek their emancipation from oppression, their empowerment, and increased uptake of services.

**Non-discrimination:** BASW will only support research with a clear strategy for the involvement of marginalised groups in social work such as Black and Minority Ethnic people, LGBTQI people, people stigmatised because of their religion and gender, and those socially excluded because of illness or socio-economic circumstances (Louisa *et al.* 2010). This is not an exhaustive list – it will be the researcher's duty to show their efforts to include those who may otherwise be excluded.

**Social justice:** BASW will prioritise research with a wide social justice agenda such as studies that seek to improve lives; reduce economic, social, and political inequality;

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<sup>1</sup> This section has been developed from Butler, I (2002) A Code of ethics for Social Work and Social Care Research.

promote the interests of marginalised groups; enhance diversity and inclusion; and those that address environmental concerns.

**Social workers' involvement:** BASW will prioritise research that is directly applicable to *practice*. To achieve this, research that BASW supports would need to include social workers in design, data collection, analysis, and dissemination. Examples of such research might include:

- Research that addresses the practice concerns of social workers;
- Research that seeks to improve social work by addressing professional and organisational issues that impact on practice;
- Research that explores new interventions aimed at increasing practice standards and improving service users' lives;

Where external researchers request BASW's assistance to gain access to social workers for research, this will be granted if BASW is assured that the members involved will receive benefit for their practice and personal development.

**Methodology:** Although BASW does not prefer one methodology, it will support good and rigorous research, which conforms to agreed epistemological and methodological standards. Where BASW is a joint-bidder or where the organisation funds research, it will prioritise those drawn from methodologies that foster the participation of users, carers, and practitioners in research, and is able to capture the full spectrum of their lived experiences.

There is a hierarchy of research 'levels' (e.g. Master's research, doctoral, post-doctoral, single site research, multi-site research etc). In applying these principles and priorities there is clearly an issue of *proportionality* around the level of evidence required to make a decision to support or to prioritise a particular piece of research. Thus, a major research study would need considerably more evidence to elicit support than (say) a Master's level thesis. If you need further information talk to a member of the Policy and Research team in the first instance.

BASW is establishing an Expert Reference Group which will facilitate, encourage and support key research and partnership applications to major independent research funders. If you this is an option you wish to explore, again talk to a member of the Policy and Research team in the first instance.

## Internal Processes

This policy recognises that National Standing Committees, PPEGs and SIGs may want to pursue research agendas based on their own workplan. To avoid duplication and encourage synergy it is envisaged that the Policy and Research team will act as a gatekeeper, resource and coordinate the work on research within BASW. This means providing policy, research and operational advice to all internal and external stakeholders and partners, maintaining records of ongoing research, and providing support and advice to PEHR and Council on research matters.

## References

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