

## Advanced Generalist Practice and Research

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### Abstract

Social work practitioners are required to have the competence of advanced generalist practice skills to provide appropriate social services to clients with various problems in a current complex society. For the competence of advanced generalist practice, one of the essential components is gaining research knowledge and skills to provide appropriate interventions. Social work practitioners need to have research skills to utilize many scientific research publications and to directly evaluate unique client needs, effectiveness of the delivery system, and intervention results in a particular environment. Research skills will improve the accountability of social work practitioners and increase the satisfaction of clients. Thus, this author suggests that social work students need to actively participate in research projects to maximize their research knowledge and skills for future evidence-based advanced generalist practice.

**Keywords:** Advanced generalist practice, research, social work

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### ***Needs of Advanced Generalist Practice***

In a society with complex problems and a variety of populations, social work practitioners are required to have competence to provide appropriate interventions to individual clients, families, and communities. To competently engage in all levels of interventions as well as to promote human rights and social justice, social work practitioners need to be able to integrate advanced social work knowledge, theories, skills, values, and ethics (Lewandowski, GlenMaye, & Bolin, 2004). Thus, advanced generalist practice skills are needed for social work practitioners. One of the important components for advanced generalist practice is gaining research and evaluation skills to provide more sophisticated direct and indirect practice. In this paper, this author explains 1) the importance of research for advanced generalist practice, 2) indirect and direct research methods for the best advanced generalist practice, and 3) how to maximize research skills for advanced generalist practice.

### ***Importance of Research for Advanced Generalist Practice***

Research and evaluation skills can enable social work practitioners to provide evidence-based practice. Evidence-based practice is a proven way to assess clients and to provide appropriate interventions based on rigorous scientific methods and results (Howard, McMillen, & Pollio, 2003). Social work practitioners are expected to justify their practice for unique clients, environments, and situations through the best scientific evidence (Kapp & Anderson, 2010). Also, social work practitioners can optimize client outcomes and enhance the credibility of advanced generalist practice by utilizing research for evidence-based practice.

### ***Indirect and Direct Research Methods for Advanced Generalist Practice***

To provide the best interventions based on the evidence, social work practitioners need to know how to utilize scientific research articles or reports and how to directly evaluate the needs of clients or community, delivery system of an agency, and outcomes of their interventions (Dodd & Epstein, 2010). First, social work practitioners need to have indirect research skills to utilize many scientific research articles in academic social work journals or closely related journals to social work areas. The scientific articles are written by social work researchers, faculty, and practitioners who have practice experience. Social work practitioners can utilize their research results and suggestions for practice improvement and policy change. However, since many research articles have some type of study limitations, social work practitioners should carefully review articles with similar topics to utilize them for advanced generalist practice.

Second, social work practitioners need to have direct research skills to evaluate client needs, effectiveness of the delivery system, and intervention results. By doing so, social work practitioners can provide appropriate services for their unique clients with the best scientific evidence. For a particular agency setting, sometimes it is difficult to gain specific information about the needs of clients and communities, effective delivery structure, and the intervention results for the clients from published articles. It is because results from published articles cannot always be generalized to different population

in different areas. Therefore, it is important to have competence for the knowledge of scientific research methods, skills to conduct a research project and analyze data, and capability to interpret the results of data for advanced generalist practice. The research competent will improve the accountability of social work practitioners for providing appropriate services and to increase the satisfaction of clients.

### ***Maximizing Your Research Skills for Advanced Generalist Practice***

For this reason, Council on Social Work Education required accredited social work programs to educate social work students to be familiar with scientific research and using scientific evidence for providing appropriate interventions. Many students are interested in research classes and research. On the other hand, some students have a reluctant perspective, assuming research is not a role of social work practitioners and not helpful for providing interventions to clients. This author strongly argues that research is important, useful, and helpful for advanced generalist practice. In addition, this author strongly challenges social work students for filling the gap between research and practice, developing research plans, and even applying for research grants. Also, they can conduct a project, write a research paper, present at university, local, and national conferences, as well as submit research for a professional journal publication. These experiences will maximize the ability of social work students to expand their research knowledge and skills at both undergraduate and graduate levels for future evidence-based advanced generalist practice.

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### **About the Author(s)**

Dr. Lee received a Ph.D. in political science and MSW from West Virginia University, Morgantown. He received MA and BA degrees in Public Administration from South Korea. His research interests include gerontology, mental health, health disparity, immigrant older adults, assisted living residents, welfare reform, and homelessness. Dr. Lee teaches courses in social work research, policy, and international social work for undergraduate and graduate students. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Kyoung Hag Lee, School of Social Work, Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount, Wichita, KS 67260. Email: kyoung.lee@wichita.edu