Towards deeper understanding in social work: social workers' thoughts on how to apply research and evaluation in the everyday practices

The study explores the role of research and evaluation practices in the everyday work practices of social workers. The aim of the study is to analyse different meanings that social workers give to the research and evaluation practices in their everyday work.

One way to get social workers more involved in development of social work is to help them apply research and evaluation in their own work. Research and evaluation in social work help social workers improve the availability and quality of services in close connection with the clients. Research and evaluation help social workers to improve client-orientation and also provide new ideas and information for the theory of social work. Research in social work focuses on the processes of social works and analysis of the interaction relationship between social worker and the client. Evaluation in social work focuses on analysing the outcome of the processes of the social work and effectiveness of the social work.

The research material consists of five focus-group interviews. These five interviews were made in different social work units. Three of these units worked with child protection services or adult services and two in the special sectors of social work. Altogether 33 social workers were interviewed. The analysis methods were similar to the contents analysis.

According to social workers' opinions research and evaluation in their work consists of: research, evaluation, reflection, communality, influencing and development work.

Social workers also explained why they were motivated to apply research and evaluation in their own work. The research on the interactional relationship between social worker and the client helps to improve client orientation of social work. This orientation is one way to get a deeper understanding of the clients' needs and the phenomena that may only be possible to notice in social work practices. Community oriented way to develop social work is considered very important especially in the work with adult services and the special social work sector.

The use of evaluation is a new practice in social work. Social workers are not interested in evaluating the effectiveness of the social work. They see application of evaluation as a tool of process evaluation or development evaluation. After these processes it is more motivating to think about the effectiveness issues. Influencing in the social work is not very common, although social workers think it should be. It is challenging to try to find the ways how to support social workers in this influencing task.

It is important to report the conclusions that rise from the field of social work and to get the social workers involved in the development work. With the help of the research and evaluation practices it is possible to cross borders of traditional research. It also strengthens the knowledge construction that arises from practice.

Avainsanat: social work, development, social workers, evaluation

Säilytyspaikka: Muita tietoja: This thesis is written in Finnish.