

Guest Editorial

Welcome to the bumper second/third edition of Volume 25 of the Journal. This combines selected Annual Workshop papers in 2007 with additional articles, and completes the three editions for Volume 25. Publishing the plenary and workshop presentations helps disseminate the messages delivered at the Annual Workshop and is also an opportunity to explore some of the themes in more depth. This is a great way for SSRG to maximise the impact of the event and is a model we intend to repeat for papers from future workshops. The overall collection of papers makes for a varied and valuable double edition and brings us back up to publication schedule for 2008.

Partnerships and the use and production of evidence are key themes in several of the workshop papers. The first two articles by Sue Balloch and Helen Dickinson focus explicitly on theoretical and methodological issues around partnership working. Both papers stress that 'partnership' has been one of the defining characteristics of New Labour's approach to public services and both papers also note that there has been little research evidence to support this intuitive, common sense idea about the value of collaborative working. Sue Balloch explicitly links various theoretical approaches to researching partnership working whilst Helen Dickinson's paper describes key concepts and mechanisms to identify and tackle the challenges of evaluating partnerships, such as the huge range of partnership arrangements, the difficulty of identifying outcomes and measuring whether a partnership has helped generate improvements in outcomes.

Clive Downs' paper outlines a specific application of complexity theory as a way of understanding some of the difficulties in researching partnerships and other complex organisations involved in delivering social care. The paper offers a fascinating and innovative approach to thinking about and researching partnerships and large organisations in social care, which can appear to contain virtually autonomous entities operating within them.

Andrew Kerslake's timely and detailed paper on commissioning also has relevance for partnership working, in focusing on the ways in which Local Authorities and Primary Care Trusts can develop an holistic understanding of needs in local areas. This paper also very usefully points out the value of research and other knowledge as the 'jam in the commissioning sandwich' essential to informing commissioning behaviour at a macro and micro scale. He then goes on to describe a range of issues and themes relating to the kinds of research and population data that can generate essential knowledge for commissioners.

The final article from the workshop, by Jess McEwen, describes a partnership between the University of York and Wakefield MDC. This was set up to support the implementation of Research Governance and to develop research culture in the local authority. Central Government has supported this Knowledge Transfer Partnership, in the form of funding and training from the Department for Transport. It sounds like a model that could well be followed by other authorities: it brings together the two key themes of the workshop papers (partnership and evidence-informed policy and practice).

Our additional papers in this edition offer a range of valuable practice, policy and conceptual insights into aspects of child protection, child and adult disability and domestic violence that have been under-researched and insufficiently discussed. Phil Prescott and Mike Hartill describe the development of child protection policies by sporting bodies, focusing on UK Rugby League, and argue for a clear policy initiative developing this aspect of safeguarding

children. This is a topical issue and provides a valuable example of the fast-dispersing boundaries and responsibilities around the safeguarding of children and young people.

Children's needs and related research practices also underlie the article by Debbie Kramer-Roy. She outlines how Pakistani families are often disadvantaged in multiple ways and how a climate of fear and discrimination against Islamic people exacerbates entrenched deprivations and poverty. All of which has increased the problems faced by Pakistani families of disabled children. The article calls for an emphasis on emancipatory approaches to research which can help families understand and advocate for their own needs.

The volume is brought to a close by an important and compelling paper on disability and domestic violence. The article by Joy Trotter, Jill Radford and Lynne Horne, both argues for and reveals the value of research in helping disabled women who experience domestic violence overcome barriers to accessing services. The paper offers a number of conceptual insights into the social, legal, organisational and research challenges that collect around this relatively neglected area of need.

It is very gratifying to see, in this edition of the Journal, the interface between academic theoretical thinking and applied research into pressing issues of practice and policy. There are few opportunities for such work to be published in a Journal that reaches such a broad practice and academic readership. Being able to present such links is one of the key strengths of a Journal such as RPP, which sits very squarely on the boundary between these two worlds.

Martin Stevens, Chair SSRG
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