RESEARCH TRAINING OF HUMAN SERVICES SPECIALISTS: THE US EXPERIENCE

ABSTRACT

The article shows that the field of human services is developing in the context of science and technologies being the driving forces of sustainable development in US society. Although the field of human services differs from other social sciences since and is more focused on practice, it still requires high-quality scientific research. It is because this field deals with the person and the social environment, including multiple factors and influences. The article defines the most important reasons why prospective human services specialists should engage in it. They are as follows: to be able to systematically build knowledge and test treatment efficiently; to influence health policy and service delivery; to enhance the understanding of daily practice; to become a critical consumer of research literature. The article specifies that the field of human services is rather broad and involves mental health services, family support programmes, child development, addiction prevention and correctional services. Therefore, research is essential to the provision of human services, as well as to those specialists responsible for providing them effectively and efficiently. Human services specialists should be able to organize and analyze the knowledge generated by the conducted research and apply the findings to take the relevant professional decisions. The article proves that the most common areas of research projects on human services are Population Health; Child, Youth and Family; Aging and Disabilities; Behavioural Health; Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities; Housing and Homelessness. This article presents the experience of providing research training by the Ashford University, the Walden University and The Capella University.

Keywords: human services, research training, research activities, dissertation, the USA, human services specialist.

АНОТАЦІЯ

З’ясовано, що сфера послуг для населення розвивається в контексті науки і технологій, які є рушійними силами сталого розвитку в суспільстві США. Незважаючи на те, що ця сфера відрізняється від інших соціальних наук і більше зосереджена на практиці, вона все одно потребує якісних наукових досліджень. Справа у тому, що ця сфера стосується людей та соціального середовища, включаючи численні фактори та впливи. У статті визначено, чому майбутні фахівці із соціальної реабілітації повинні брати участь у наукових дослідженнях. Це дозволяє систематично накопичувати знання та ефективно тестувати лікувальні концепції; впливати на політику охорони здоров’я та надання послуг для населення; покращити розуміння щоденної практики у контексті соціальної реабілітації; критично аналізувати наукову літературу. Зазначено, що сфера послуг для населення досить широка і включає у себе програми підтримки сімей, розвиток
дитини, профілактику наркоманії та коректувальні дії. Цей факт підтверджує надзвичайно важливе значення якості наукових досліджень у контексті надання послуг для населення, а також науково-дослідницької підготовки фахівців, які відповідають за їхнє ефективне надання. Майбутні фахівці із соціальної реабілітації повинні вміти аналізувати знання, здобути в результаті проведенного дослідження, та застосовувати одержані результати для прийняття відповідних професійних рішень. Доведено, що найпоширенішими напрямами дослідницьких проектів у сфері послуг для населення є такі: здоров'я населення; діти, молодь та сім'ї; старіння та інвалідність; здоров'я поведінка; інтелектуальні вади та порушення розвитку; безпритульні. У статті також представлено досвід провідних університетів США у контексті науково-дослідницької підготовки майбутніх фахівців із соціальної реабілітації.

Ключові слова: послуги для населення, науково-дослідницька підготовка, науково-дослідницька діяльність, дипломна робота, США, фахівець із соціальної реабілітації.

INTRODUCTION

Given the modern conditions of global social transformations, the field of human services is one of the professions necessary for the sustainable development of society. In Ukraine, one can observe significant changes in the political and economic spheres and the social services system. Besides, there are attempts to reconsider the role of state-owned social institutions, agencies and non-governmental organizations providing human services to various categories of the population. Today, human services specialists are facing new problems and non-standard tasks which they can solve with the help of appropriate research skills and qualities.

Ukrainian educators realize the value of science in ensuring economic, social and cultural progress. They strive to emphasize the importance of training a new generation of human services specialists who are ready for lifelong learning and continuing professional development. Therefore, the modern system of education in Ukraine pays much attention to the research activities of students, in particular in the context of the human services sector. Indeed, the centres of scientific research can be not only specialized institutions but also educational institutions, in particular higher education institutions (HEIs), where human services students perform the role of actors in the educational process, as well as to conduct social research.

It is important to note that Ukrainian educational authorities continue developing and improving the system of research training for prospective human services specialists. Ideally, it should combine the national traditions and achievements in this sector and the leading world experience, as well as be part of relevant international structures. In this regard, it is essential and extremely relevant to study the innovative experience in this field, especially that of the USA. This country has long engaged in protecting human rights all over the world. The author of the article believes that such experience, in particular its positive aspects, can much enrich the national potential of research training for prospective human services specialists and enhance their employment prospects in the context of the international labour market.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The article aims to analyze the peculiarities of research training for prospective human services specialists in the context of the US experience.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

Relevant scientific sources indicate that professional activities of human services specialists imply the use of innovative mechanisms to solve some thorny social issues. At the same time, innovation means the process of creating, disseminating and using practical tools to meet the relevant needs of society as a whole and its members. Human services require specialists to create the effective social technologies, programmes and projects and introduce them in the interaction with different categories of clients. Thus, innovations act as an important factor in the economic, social and cultural progress of mankind and as a means of meeting social needs. Furthermore, they contribute to improving the human services sector, its effectiveness and quality and enhancing the status of the profession (Alexander, & Solomon, 2006; Burger, 2008; Neukrug, 2013; Reamer, 2012).

Accordingly, innovative functions of human services specialists should manifest themselves in a creative approach to professional activities, the search for new and more qualitative technologies of human services, the summary and introduction of the leading experience, the ability to use both positive and negative sides of activities of social agencies. Therefore, prospective human services specialists should know theoretical, methodological, scientific and methodical interdisciplinary principles of social research, social forecasting and projects. Besides, they should be able to solve typic social situations in a non-standard way and apply the methods, technologies and tools for evaluating the effectiveness of the performed social tasks, as well as the tools of social monitoring for assessing the results of the implemented social projects (Levinson, 2002; Rothman, & Thomas, 2013; Rosenthal, 2012; Woodside, & McClam, 2014).

According to Anastas (1999), the human service profession has always been in a controversial relationship with the research sector (p. 3). It develops at a time when science and technologies are the prevailing driving forces in the Western world. At the same time, the field of history human services is considered to be different from other social sciences since it is focused on practice rather than scientific investigation. Indeed, human services deal with the whole person and the social environment. They cover the fields of practice with multiple factors and influences under which social sciences present hypothetical knowledge. Thus, the attempts to make human services more exact research-wise have not been easily accorded with the recognition of the primary practical goals.

The challenges of conducting such research may occur since human services research is rather complicated and complex and deals with human behaviour. However, there are many important reasons why prospective human services specialists should engage in it:

1. It helps one to systematically build knowledge and test treatment efficiently.
2. It has an impact on health policy and service delivery.
3. It enhances the understanding of the daily practice.
4. It helps one to become a critical consumer of research literature (DePoy, & Gitlin, 2011, p. 4).

It is important to note that human services are a broad field, which covers mental health services, family support programmes, child development, addiction prevention and correctional services. As noted by Monette, Sullivan, Dejong, & Hilton (2014), research in human services is extremely essential to the provision of human services, as well as to those specialists responsible for providing them effectively and efficiently. Besides, human services specialists should be able to organize and analyze the knowledge generated by the conducted research and apply the findings to take the relevant professional decisions.
Moreover, such knowledge can provide insight into human behaviour and the effectiveness of human services in a particular case. The above-mentioned aspects have made it possible to prove the relevance of research activities in the context of professional training for human services specialists within the framework of the relevant views of the leading US experts, practitioners and scholars. Accordingly, the results section should deal with the practical examples of organizing research training for prospective human services specialists in the US experience.

Given the scope of this particular article, research methods should include generalization and systematization, analysis and synthesis.

RESULTS
In the context of the human services sector, one should identify the following types of research: social, descriptive, predictive, explanatory, evaluation.

Social research is a systematic investigation of empirical data on the social or psychological forces operating in a situation. Descriptive research lies in discovering facts and reality. Predictive research implies making predictions about what may happen in the future or other settings. Explanatory research aims to clarify why or how something occurred. Evaluation research suggests using research methods to monitor the realization of new programmes and existing ones (Hilton, Fawson, Sullivan, & Dejong, 2019).

In the USA, Talbert House’s Institute for Training and Development (ITD) aims to provide effective training and programs in the context of behavioral health. It ensures both clinical and professional development of the human services specialists who deal with mental health, substance use and preventive activities. The ITD is a provider of Continuing Education credits by the following professional organizations:
– Ohio Psychological Association;
– Ohio Chemical Dependency Professional Board;

At the same time, the Center for Health and Human Services Research (CHHSR) combines both practice and research to make high-quality human services more accessible to clients, families and communities. The CHHSR operates within Talbert House. Their common goals are the following:
1) to enhance practice-based science and science-based practice;
2) to meet the needs of practitioners and clients in the context of relevant disciplines to improve knowledge production and integration.

It must be noted that the research-related products of the CHHSR can be divided into the following three areas: a) knowledge production and dissemination; b) applied research and c) development and testing. https://www.talberthouse.org/social-enterprises/center-for-health-%2B-human-services-research-3/about-chhsr-1/

The Human Services Research Institute (Cambridge, MA) offers prospective human services specialists to conduct projects on the following areas:
– Population Health; Child,
– Youth and Family;
– Ageing and Disabilities;
– Behavioural Health;
– Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities;
– Housing and Homelessness.

Importantly, the Institute aims to teach prospective specialists to design and coordinate the research process through collaborating and communicating with
stakeholders, as well as to develop a vision of an optimal system. It follows the principle of respecting the rights and the uniqueness of service users and offers a flexible way of choosing relevant human services to improve the quality of life for the population (Human Services Research Institute, 2020).

The Capella University (2020) (Minneapolis, Minnesota) offers two online doctoral programmes in human services: an online doctor in human services; an online PhD in human services. The first programme is based on professional practice, whereas the second one focuses on both research and theory. However, both programmes prepare prospective human services specialists for various careers in the field.

The online doctor in human services involves two specializations: advanced programme evaluation and data analytics; leadership and organizational management (72 quarter-credits for completion). The topics of the course are related to action research methods, data analytics and programme evaluation, ethics and leadership models, grant writing and multidisciplinary practice.

Interestingly, the online PhD in human services offers three specializations, namely, multidisciplinary human services, nonprofit management and leadership, social and community services (92 quarter credits). It involves a dissertation project and comprehensive exams. It must be noted that the courses within it cover such topics as advanced research methods, diversity in the workplace, ethics, multidisciplinary practice and case analysis (The Capella University, 2020).

Ashford University (2020) (San Diego, California) offers online undergraduate and graduate programmes, including an online PhD in human services (62 credit hours). It covers 11 obligatory courses, one optional course and 5 specialization courses. It must be noted that students have the opportunity to choose the offered specializations (mental health administration; nonprofit management; standard human services). All specializations offer fundamental knowledge, abilities and skills in the field of human services. Prospective human services specialists prepare themselves for leadership roles, learn how to evaluate the structures of human services, formulate and implement research concepts, develop relevant research strategies and promote policies and practices in the field of human services (Ashford University, 2020).

Walden University (2020) (Minneapolis, Minnesota) offers an online doctor of philosophy in social services. The programme covers 15 specializations (advanced research; community and social services; criminal justice; family studies and intervention; gerontology; military families and culture). Thus, prospective specialists can choose any of these relevant areas in the field of human services and become competitive in the labour market. Importantly, they learn how to analyze research problems effectively, formulate and develop research strategies and meet the needs of different groups of the population. The online programme consists of the so-called tracks, which are aimed at serving students at different levels of experience. Track 1 is designed for those who already have a master’s degree in human services, social work, psychology (83 quarter-credits). At the same time, track 1 is aimed at those who have a bachelor’s or a master’s degree in a non-related area (108 quarter-credits). However, both of them require students who write a dissertation and a plan for professional development (Walden University, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, one can conclude that the field of human services is developing in the context of science and technologies being the driving forces of sustainable development in US society. Although the field of history human services differs from other social sciences
since and is more focused on practice, it still requires high-quality scientific research. It is because this field deals with the person and the social environment, including multiple factors and influences. There are many important reasons why prospective human services specialists should engage in it. They are as follows:

– to be able to systematically build knowledge and test treatment efficiently;
– to influence health policy and service delivery;
– to enhance the understanding of daily practice;
– to become a critical consumer of research literature.

The field of human services is rather broad and involves mental health services, family support programmes, child development, addiction prevention and correctional services. Therefore, research is extremely essential to the provision of human services, as well as to those specialists responsible for providing them effectively and efficiently. Human services specialists should be able to organize and analyze the knowledge generated by the conducted research and apply the findings to take the relevant professional decisions.

The context of the human services sector covers the following types of research: social, descriptive, predictive, explanatory, evaluation. The most common areas of research projects on human services are Population Health; Child; Youth and Family; Aging and Disabilities; Behavioural Health; Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities; Housing and Homelessness.

This article shows the experience of providing research training by the Ashford University, the Walden University and The Capella University. It must be noted that all these universities offer online doctoral programmes in human services, mostly covering such specializations as multidisciplinary human services, nonprofit management and leadership, social and community services, mental health administration; nonprofit management; standard human services, advanced research; community and social services; criminal justice; family studies and intervention; gerontology; military families and culture. Given today's pandemic outbreak, it is seen as a really good option of helping prospective human services specialists to keep up with the latest trends in the field and continue professional development.

Further research should aim to reveal the methodical support for professional training in human services in the USA.

REFERENCES


