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Research Activity amongst Social; Work Academics

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Abstract

Summary: The research activity of social work academics in the UK has been of interest and concern amongst academics and research funders. Multiple initiatives have been implemented to develop social work research activity, yet research by social work academics remains limited, hindered by lack of time, support infrastructures, funding, and training. Through the use of a mixed-methods cross-sectional survey (*N*=200) and follow-up individual interviews (*N*=11), this study reports on the factors that were found to contribute to or impede the amount of time that social work academics reported spending on research.

Findings: The results from the survey indicated that 73% of respondents were research active. Bivariate analysis revealed that academics spent less time on research and teaching, and more time on administration than expected by their employing universities. Multivariate analysis found that less time spent on administration and teaching, more university supports, and being from a pre-1992 university predicted more time spent on research.

Applications: The findings indicate that the administrative burdens associated with teaching and assessment in social work education result in academics struggling to fit research into their busy lives, despite initiatives to raise the profile and productivity of social work research. Research support infrastructures and strategies should be reviewed in light of such findings.

Keywords: social work; research; social work research; social work education; continuing professional development (CPD); research activity; research workforce

An Exploration of the Factors that Contribute to or Impede Research Activity

amongst Social Work Academics in the UK

The research activity of United Kingdom (UK) social work academics has been of interest and concern for some time amongst social work academics, research funders such as the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and organisations that support and disseminate social work research, such as the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and the Institute for Research and Innovation in the Social Services (IRISS). The debates have particularly focussed on: the place of social work as a "professional" discipline among "academic" or "scientific" disciplines, such as sociology or psychology (Shaw, Arksey, & Mullender, 2006); the extent to which university infrastructures equip and enable social work academics to conduct research alongside their educational and professional training responsibilities (MacIntyre & Paul, 2013; Moriarty, Manthorpe, Stevens, & Hussein, 2015; Moriarty, Stevens, Manthorpe, & Hussein, 2008; Orme & Powell, 2008; Wilson & Campbell, 2013); the relative lack of methodological expertise (Sharland, 2009); and the ways in which social work education is seen as inadequate in its development of the next generation of both social work practitioners and researchers (MacIntrye & Paul, 2013).

A demographic review in 2005 of the UK Social Sciences highlighted that the quality and quantity of social work research could be strengthened through strategies which build and sustain the social work research workforce, such as enhanced funding for applied research and university support for ring-fenced academic time for research (Mills et al., 2006). Underpinned by the Social Work Research Strategy in Higher Education, set out by the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee (JUC SWEC) (Bywaters, 2008; JUC SWEC, 2006), multiple initiatives have been implemented to develop social work research, such as the ESRC-funded Research Development Initiative (RDI) and opportunities for training in advanced research methods through the National Centre for Research Methods

(NCRM). Despite this, UK social work has been deemed to "lack the necessary breadth and depth to respond to the demands of being a research-based discipline" (Orme & Powell, 2008, p. 991), with research among social work academics limited and hindered by lack of time, infrastructure, funding, and training (Moriarty et al., 2008; Wilson & Campbell, 2013).

In light of the reviews of social work research over the past 10 years, the initiatives implemented to enhance the research of social work academics, and the recent results from the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) – a UK government peer reviewed audit of the quality and impact of research activity within universities that is used to distribute government research funding – it is timely to explore the current state of research activity amongst social work academics in the UK and the factors that impede or facilitate it from the perspective of social work academics. To do so, we draw on a survey and individual interviews with social work academics in the UK undertaken in 2014.

Research Context

Research Activity of Social Work Academics: Barriers and Facilitators

Social work is an applied professional discipline, with most academics also educators who need to be cognisant of contemporary social work practice guidance, issues, and methods if they are to adequately prepare the next generation of practitioners and managers for the challenges of the workplace. Additionally, many social work academics are employed to conduct research and contribute to the knowledge base of social work policy and practice. The JUC SWEC (2008) research strategy proposes that social work academics should be both researchers and teachers. Like other applied disciplines, such as education, nursing, and management, there is a sense that social work academics must align competing demands not necessarily seen within "pure" academic disciplines such as sociology or psychology. The requirements of research excellence within applied disciplines have to be balanced against the time, expertise, and focus needed to ensure students are ready to practice safely and

constructively with service users and carers in challenging contexts. A key challenge is how to create a social work academic workforce which can balance expertise in both research methodology and practice concerns, and provide a facilitative academic environment which ensures its staff have time to conduct high quality research alongside preparing students for practice.

The demands for teaching and tutoring appear to be more onerous than with purely academic disciplines. Social work academics in Northern Ireland reported that there was an additional time burden from enhanced admissions processes to gatekeep the profession, tutoring students personally to ensure they were ready emotionally and practically for practice, dealing with professional suitability issues, and visiting and assessing student placements in social work agencies; this burden reduced the amount of time available for research (Wilson & Campbell, 2013). Indeed, the social work academics reported spending the greatest number of hours per week on administration (M=10.32), followed by research (M=8.00), tutoring (M=7.00), assessment (M=6.19), and lecturing (M=4.32). Younger academics reported being more able to redress the balance in favour of research, as did those who spent more limited time as educators. Although 19% of academics in this study felt that the balance between research and administration was "very satisfactory" for them, almost half (48%) felt that the balance was either "impossible" in terms of managing teaching, administration, and research, or that there was an unhelpful overemphasis on administration. A similar picture was found in Moriarty et al.'s (2008) study which examined the profile of UK social work academics in terms of their research skills and qualifications, support available, the balance between teaching and research, and the employers' expectations of research compared to the actual time spent on research. Academics reported spending 25% of their time on research, 34% on teaching, 31% on administration, and 10% on "other" tasks.

Moriarty et al. (2015) re-examined the data from their previous study to explore the factors that contributed to social work academics receiving research funding from central government, a Research Council, or a national charity. They found that spending more time on research and working in a pre-1992 university were the only two factors that predicted whether social work academics received research funding (NB in England and Wales, higher education institutions [HEIs] are classed according to whether they were granted university status before or after the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. "Pre-1992" HEIs tend to receive a higher percentage of research funding compared to "post-1992" HEIs). Participating in research networks (i.e. a consortium of research experts across several universities), holding a PhD, and being experienced academics made no difference in attracting funding. Moriarty et al. (2015) concluded that "ultimately it is the research culture of the institution that is more important in attracting funding than an individual's own personal resources" (p. 13). Although useful in terms of depicting the factors that contributed to receiving research funding from national funding bodies, the study did not explore research activity more widely in that social work research may be undertaken without funding or may have funding from smaller bodies, such as local authorities, charities, and/or community-based organizations. Therefore, the picture of what factors contribute to or impede research activity of social work academics is incomplete.

The research activity of social work academics is not only of concern to those in the UK. The workload of social work academics in the United States (US), in terms of their time spent on research, teaching, and administration/service, has been a concern for the academic workforce particularly given the demands and requirements for publications in order to achieve tenure. Tenure is typically granted five to seven years after initial appointment where an academic is given a permanent position that cannot be terminated without just cause. The requirements for yearly reappointments of US social work academics (until tenured) is based

on their ability to participate in research, teaching, and administration/service, yet the three aspects are generally not given equal consideration. Green and Baskind's (2007) survey of 51 deans of social work schools found that research (referred to in the study as scholarship) was more important than teaching, and research and teaching were both more important than service. For 21 of the 51 schools, research was ranked as the most important requirement for tenure and promotion.

Research of social work academics in the US is often measured through the quantity of peer-reviewed publications, which is used to rank universities, thus, creating an increasing pressure for US social work academics to conduct research and to publish (Jones, Loya, & Furman, 2009). In fact, Green and Baskind (2007) found US social work academics to have published about one and one-half more articles between 2000-2004 when compared to 1990-1999. Despite the growing demands for research and publication, US social work academics do not report the largest percentage of their time to be spent on research, although the trend is increasing. For example, Jordan (1994) found social work academics to spend 56% of their time on teaching, 28% on administration or service, and 16% on research, Seaberg (1998) found social work academics to spend 42% of their time on teaching, 29% on administration or service, and 29% on research, and Holley and Young (2005) found social work academics to spend 39.3% of their time on teaching, 30.3% on administration or service, and 30.2% on research. Despite the increasing demands to conduct research and to publish, US social work academics are reportedly only able to do so after they have completed their other teaching and administrative responsibilities (Green, 2008) and they identify the largest barrier to conducting research as a lack of time and report feeling "overwhelmed with administrative duties, accreditation-related activities, and teaching loads" (Jones et al., 2009, p. 22).

The extra demands on social work academics in the UK (and in the US) in terms of administrative and other duties appear to inhibit their ability to be research active. Support

from universities could serve as a facilitator to managing these demands, yet Wilson and Campbell (2013) found many academics (41%) are dissatisfied with university support. Participants, in their research, described management as unable to understand the "complexity of social work academics' role and concomitant recognition of the time required to undertake the many and multi-layered tasks and responsibilities" (p. 1015). Initiatives, such as the ESRC-funded RDI, can enhance participants' research confidence and competence, but support from home institutions is critical in enhancing and building individuals' research activity (Powell & Orme, 2011). As this is clearly not always present, support from outside sources could potentially redress the balance. Orme and Powell (2008) argue that decisions and support about research for social work should, in fact, be made at subject level rather than by individual universities to boost activity for the discipline. However, there is no evidence this is happening; social work and social care research continue to receive limited funding from central government compared with similar disciplines (Marsh & Fisher, 2005).

This inability, then, to gain support from either universities or external sources appears to be fuelling rather than reducing a lack of research activity, limiting the quantity and quality of social work research, publications, doctoral students, and research funding. This perpetuates an external view of the social work discipline as being somehow "inferior", concerned with practice issues rather than the creation of new knowledge. This appears to inculcate reluctance in large funding bodies such as the ESRC to invest in social work research (Orme & Powell, 2008) and under-engagement in social care research by more established cognate disciplines, thus compromising interdisciplinarity, breadth, and rigour (Sharland, 2009).

Building Research Capacity

The project of building capacity in UK social work research has encompassed a number of factors or initiatives, particularly since the implementation of a new social work degree in England in 2003 and in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in 2004. At the most basic level was the inclusion of research-mindedness in social work education to ensure future social work practitioners and managers understand and can apply research for service user benefit. To this end, the application and analysis of research was embedded within qualifying social work education through Quality Assurance Benchmark Statements for higher education (such as QAA, 2000 and subsequently 2008), and curriculum guidance promulgated by professional bodies (such as the Health and Care Professions Council's standards of proficiency requiring students to be aware of research methodologies and be able to evaluate research to inform their own practice [HCPC, 2012]). Author's own (in press) provide a useful overview of research methods teaching in social work education conducted in 2015. The importance of social workers being "social scientists" as well as practitioners and professionals has more recently been championed by Professor Croisdale-Appleby (2014, p. 15) in his Department of Health review of social work training.

Acknowledging social work as a priority area for research development, in 2008 the ESRC appointed a strategic adviser to research how best a "step-change" could be achieved in the range and quality of social work's research base, and its capacity for impact on key fields of policy and practice. Sharland's (2009) report identified key themes where new research was needed, and methodologies, which required specific development. This led to the current ESRC-funded initiative, "Making Social Work Count" (ESRC, 2012), which involves the support for delivery of a 10-input curriculum to students in undergraduate social work education aimed at enhancing their quantitative skills (www.beds.ac.uk/mswc). Other resources to social work academics have included a researcher development grant that offers

research methods training (www.rdi.ac.uk), as well as access to the ESRC-funded National Centre for Research Methods (www.ncrm.ac.uk).

The aim of such initiatives has been to enhance the quality and quantity of social work research and "to produce a culture change across the social work community" (Orme & Powell, 2008, p. 1004). Orme and Powell (2011) found nascent evidence of this through enhanced research confidence and competence of social work academics who participated in an ESRC-funded RDI. To date, however, the picture remains problematic, with insufficient understanding of the current factors supporting or hindering social work research activity. For the purposes of this study, research activity is defined as actively pursuing or participating in research scholarship, which can include seeking internal or external funding, carrying out funded and non-funded research projects, and disseminating research and/or advances in knowledge through publications and/or professional conferences. To address this issue, our study sought to explore the research activity of social work academics in the UK (from their perspective) by considering the following research questions:

- To what extent are UK social work academics research active?

- What percentage of social work academics' time do their employing universities expect to be spent on research, teaching and administration? How does this compare to the actual percentage of time social work academics report spending on research, teaching and administration?

- What are the factors that contribute to or impede research activity among UK social work academics?

Methods

Sample and Setting

This cross-sectional, exploratory study used mixed-methods to answer the above research questions. A questionnaire consisting mainly of closed questions was constructed

using the online tool, Survey Monkey. The link to the questionnaire was distributed

electronically to social work academics across the UK through the Joint University Council

Social Work Education Committee (JUC SWEC) email list. The JUC SWEC email list has a

representative from every HEI in the UK, which has a social work programme, who then

circulates information to their staff/colleagues. The link to the questionnaire was also

distributed through "Ning" (a listserv for social work educators) as well as through the use of

social media, such as Twitter. A total of 200 social work academics completed the online

questionnaire between May and September of 2014. The number of social work academics in

the UK is unknown; therefore an exact response rate could not be calculated. According to

prior research with social work academics conducted in 2008, a response from 249 social

work academics was estimated to be a 33% response rate (Moriarty et al., 2015).

At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate if they would be

willing to participate in a follow-up telephone interview. Sixty-four respondents volunteered

to participate in the interview. The first nine respondents were selected for interviews and,

due to the high number of males amongst these respondents, a further two females were

selected purposively to make a total of eleven telephone interviews.

Ethical approval was granted by [ANONYMISED FOR REVIEW]. The purpose of

the study was explained to potential participants in the group email sent via JUC SWEC and

"Ning" as well as at the beginning of the online questionnaire, for those who accessed the

survey through social media. Potential participants were informed that completion of the

questionnaire was voluntary and confidential; completion of the online questionnaire served

as consent for participation in the study. Prospective interviewees who expressed interest

were sent information sheets which included the voluntary and confidential nature of the

research, and procedures for anonymity, and were sent a consent form which they signed and

submitted to the researcher before the interview took place. All eleven interviewees agreed to

the interviews being audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. They were sent their transcripts with an opportunity to revise or add further detail.

Data Collection

The online questionnaire consisted of 55 questions that covered the characteristics of the social work academics, their academic roles and aspirations, their perceptions of social work and social work education, their past and present experience of practising social work, and their current research activity.

The individual interviews had two areas of focus. The first engaged participants in a narrative reflection on their personal career journey and future career aspirations. The second part of the interview engaged the participants in a dialogue about current issues and themes relating to challenges, opportunities and rewards in regard to the social work academic role and its interface with the social work educator role. The research results reported in this article relate specifically to research support, expectations, and activity of the social work academics.

Data Analysis

Data from the online questionnaire were analysed in SPSS using descriptive statistics where percentages, basic frequencies, and/or measures of central tendency were calculated for all variables. Bivariate analysis was used to determine the extent to which variables were correlated. T-test, ANOVA, crosstabs and chi-square were used to determine descriptive statistics across variables and, where appropriate, any statistically significant differences between variables. Ordinary least squares regression analysis was used to determine the variables that contributed to or impeded research activity. Missing data were addressed through listwise deletion of missing cases. Alpha was set at .05.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008) of the interview data was conducted using NVivo version 10. Data were analysed both deductively, using codes drawn from the interview questions, and inductively, from codes arising from the data.

Results

Sample Characteristics

The survey participants ranged in age from 32 years to over 70 years (M=51.27; SD=7.87). The majority of participants were female (62.8%) and identified their ethnicity as White (91.2%). The mean years employed in academia was 10.99 years, yet the median was 10 years and mode was 4 years. Nearly 64% of the participants were employed in a post-1992 HEI and the largest career grouping of respondents was Senior Lecturer in a post-1992 HEI (35%). The majority of participants were qualified social workers (95.4%) with 84.3% registered with a regulatory body. Over 50% of the participants held a Masters' degree as their highest level of education with 34.4% holding a doctorate (either PhD or professional doctorate) and over 33% currently working towards one.

-----Table 1-----

Six of the eleven interviewees were female (55%) and five male (45%). The mean age was 52.91 (SD=7.99) with a range from 42-64 years. Most were White British/English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish with one Black African. All were qualified social workers, with 64% registered with a regulatory body. Just over half (55.5%) worked in post-1992 HEIs, with four of these as Senior Lecturers and one as Lecturer. All four professors (36.4%) worked in pre-1992 HEIs. Only two (18.2%) of the interviewees already had a doctorate, with a further three (27.3%) currently working towards one. Table 2 provides additional characteristics of the interview sample.

-----Table 2-----

Research Activity

Table 3 reports the descriptive statistics on the research activity of the survey participants. Nearly 73% of the participants reported being research active with the primary research methodology as qualitative (57.9%). Nearly 8% of participants reported "other" research methodologies, some of which were specific approaches, such as action/development research or discourse analysis.

Twenty-five per cent of participants reported inclusion in the 2008 government-funded Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) (www.rae.ac.uk) and 34.6% reported inclusion in the 2014 REF. Nineteen per cent (*n*=29) of participants were included in both the 2008 RAE and 2014 REF, and 13.8% (*n*=21) were not included in the 2008 RAE, but were included in the 2014 REF. As with previous research selectivity exercises (Author's own, 2007), the majority of the REF submissions (49.2%) were to the Social Work and Social Policy Panel (Unit of Assessment 22) with (41.5%; *n*=22) to other panels, including Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy (1.5%); European Area Studies (0.5%); Health and Social Care (0.5%); Health Studies (0.5%); Language and Area Studies (0.5%); Social Policy (1%); Social Policy/Sociology (0.5%); Sociology (2%); and Sociology and Education (1%). One survey participant reported:

> *Despite having a very good social work group of about 8 all with high quality publications, our Senior Management team binned the Social Work REF group, and moved about half of the group into Politics and International Studies where our publications, after being highly rated by our External Assessor, were rejected.*

The survey participants were asked to indicate the percentage of time (out of 100%) that their employing university expected them to spend on research, teaching, and administration and the actual percentage of time (out of 100%) they spent on each of the three. As table 3 indicates, the participants reported that on average (mean) their university placed the importance of their time as 33% on research, 44% on teaching, and 22% on administration. The mode for these variables indicated slightly different percentages: 40% on research, 40% on teaching, and 20% on administration. The average (mean) amount of time

that the participants reported actually spending on the three was 20% on research, 41% on

teaching, and 39% on administration; the mode for the three were 10% on research, 40% on

teaching, and 40% on administration.

-----Table 3-----

A series of paired-sample *t*-tests were utilised in order to determine whether there is a

statistically significant difference in participants' perceived expectations of the university in

terms of percentage of time spent on research, teaching, and administration (for example,

what is specified in their contract or workload calculator) and their reported actual percentage

of time spent on each of the three. The results indicated that participants spent less time on

research activities (*M*=20.91, *SD*=18.91) than is expected of their universities (*M*=32.28,

SD=17.22), $t(157)=6.15$, *p*< .001, less time on teaching (*M*=40.57; *SD*=18.63) than is

expected of their universities (*M*=44.60; *SD*=16.32), $t(163)=2.50$, *p*=.01, and more time on

administration (*M*=39.10; *SD*=18.64) than is expected of their universities (*M*=22.42;

SD=11.90), $t(162)=-11.00$, *p*< .001.

Comments of interviewees are revealing about the particular demands of social work

education alongside research. For example, one interviewee remarked on how the demands of

teaching takes away from time needed to fully develop research analysis and theoretical

ideas:

> *I think the academic environment of social work education in particular and the*
> *kind of demands that we place upon our staff in terms of the… just the volume of*
> *teaching and the spread of teaching and all of that, I think it's very difficult for*
> *people to kind of carve out the kind of thinking time that is necessary to do that*
> *kind of work […] a social work education context makes it difficult to really take*
> *the time to do the intellectual capitalising on our research.*

Another interviewee commented on how research activity is impeded by the demands

of a professional programme:

> *I know that in other subjects people have said the core activity is research but I*
> *think that in nursing and social work it probably does start with admissions and*
> *tutoring and teaching or whatever, so it's, you know, in terms of what you can*

do beyond that, and I think that's a real dilemma because you know, the people
that are probably forging ahead best at the research are the ones who are more
detached from practice because again how do you actually find your time.

Finally, survey participants were asked to indicate whether their university provided a range of fourteen different kinds of support to employees. As table 4 reports, the most common type of support is teaching development courses (82.7%), followed by funding for conferences (74.3%). In regard to research support, 60.4% of participants indicated their universities provided research mentoring, 53.5% provided funding for small projects or pilots, and 45% provided methodology workshops.

-----Table 4-----

Factors that Contribute to or Impede Research Activity

In order to explore the factors that contributed to or impeded research activity among social work academics in the UK, bivariate analyses were employed to determine the extent to which variables were correlated, and, thus, whether it was reasonable to include them in a multivariate analysis. If variables are not statistically significant at the bivariate level then it is assumed that there is no relationship between the two variables and, thus, the non-significant variables will not explain any of the variance in the dependent variable (e.g. time spent on research activities) in a multivariate analysis.

The bivariate analyses revealed that survey participants in pre-1992 universities reported spending more time on research activities (M=24.05; SD=17.35) than participants in post-1992 universities (M=18.39; SD=19.22), t(171)=1.94, p=0.05. Age was found to be positively correlated with the amount of time spent on research activities (r(162)=.15, p=.06), although not statistically significant, and males were found to spend more time on research activities (M=25.16; SD=22.05) than females (M=18.26; SD=16.31), t(165)=2.15, p=.003. The number of years in academia was positively correlated with the amount of time spent on research activities (r(166)=.35, p< .001). Those participants who held a doctorate spent more

time on research activities (*M*=31.81; *SD*=22.06) compared to those academics who did not

hold a doctorate (*M*=13.50; *SD*=12.13), *t*(171)=-6.08, *p*< .001. There was a positive

correlation between the number of supports that universities provide and the amount of time

spent on research activities (*r*(175)=.44, *p*< .001). In this study, number of supports was

defined by the total number of supports, out of a possible 14, that their university provided

(see Table 4). There was a negative correlation between the amount of time spent on teaching

and the amount of time spent on research activities (*r*(174)=-.51, *p*< .001), and a negative

correlation between the amount of time spent on administration and the amount of time spent

on research activities (*r*(174)=-.52, *p*<.001), findings which are illustrated by the quotes from

interviewees above. There was a negative correlation between the number of administrative

positions held and the amount of time spent on research activities (*r*(202)=-.15, *p*=.05), a

positive correlation between the expectation of universities in terms of research and the actual

amount of time spent on research (*r*(158)=.18, *p*=.03), a negative correlation between the

expectation of universities in terms of teaching and the amount of time spent on research

activities (*r*(159)=-.10, *p*=.23), although not statistically significant, and a negative

correlation between the expectation of universities in terms of administration and the amount

of time spent on research activities (*r*(158)=-.15, *p*=.06), although not statistically significant.

The interviewees fleshed out the struggles to be research active where large administrative

roles were being undertaken as one interviewee reported:

> *[M]ost people have found the prospects of doing research within the demands made on us really quite limited really [...] I've worked a six day week across this year just on the tasks of doing, of keeping the programme running.*

Another interviewee commented:

> *I actually remember at the time of my interview they said, 'do you have any questions about the job and that kind of stuff?', and I said, 'well, I want you to make it clear that what you've painted in the job description is high expectations in terms of being a productive researcher and so on at the same time it says a little further down the list, to be director of the MSc programme for the next three years'. I said frankly, 'I can't do both'.*

Ordinary least squares regression was used to test if the variables found to be significant or near significance ($p \leq .06$) in the bivariate analyses predicted the actual time spent on research. The independent variables consisted of the following: employment (1=pre-1992; 0=post-1992); age; gender (1=male; 0=female); years in academia; holding a doctorate (1=yes; 0=no); number of supports; time spent on teaching; time spent on administration; number of administrative roles; university expectation of research; and university expectation of administration. The dependent variable was self-reported actual percentage of time spent on research activities (out of 100%).

The independent variables were entered simultaneously. The results of the regression analysis indicated that four variables explained 99% of the variance ($R^2=.99$, $F(11, 127)=2096.11$, $p<.001$). As Table 5 reports, less time spent on administration, less time spent on teaching, more support, and being from a pre-1992 university was associated with more time spent on research. Gender, age, number of years employed in academia, holding a doctorate, number of administrative positions, universities' expectation of research, and universities' expectation of teaching did not explain the variance in time spent on research. Collinearity diagnostic tests indicated no problems with multicollinearity in this model (Durban-Watson = 1.95; Tolerance >.2; VIF <10) (Field, 2009).

-----Table 5-----

Discussion

The findings from this study provide a description of the research activity of a sample of social work academics in the UK and the factors that contributed to or impeded their research activity. Seventy-three per cent of survey participants reported being research active. While universities were reported to expect the smallest percentage of academics' time to be spent on administration (22%), in fact the least amount of their reported actual time was spent on research (20%) with nearly an equal split of the remaining time on teaching and

administration. This echoes Moriarty et al.'s (2008) study which found academics' time to be split by 25% on research, 34% on teaching, 31% on administration, and 10% on "other" activities, as well as the US studies which found social work academics to spend the least amount of time on research despite research being an integral part of their workload (Holley & Young, 2005; Jordan, 1994; Seaberg, 1998).

In analysing the 2008 data, Moriarty et al. (2015) found the following three main responses when asking social work academics to list three things that would help them become more actively involved in research: (1) more time; (2) improved support and better infrastructure for social work research; and (3) funding availability and sustainability. The findings from this study indicate that despite initiatives to increase and strengthen the research activity of social work academics, as discussed in the literature review, academics six years on are still struggling to participate in research and calling for more time and support from universities in order to do so. The call for more time and institutional support to conduct research is echoed by US social work academics who have specified the need for additional time to conduct research, which would mean fewer administrative duties and lower teaching responsibilities, as well as research support in the form of mentoring and opportunities for collaboration (Jones et al., 2009).

The interviewees highlighted the extra time and administrative duties required of social work academics due to the professional and practice responsibilities that go along with social work education, such as tutoring, liaising with practice placements, and the group and individual interviews entailed by enhanced admissions processes. Such additional roles appear to reduce the percentage of time spent on research and increase the time spent on administration, yet it appears that universities do not acknowledge this discrepancy in "expected" time and "actual" time. As one interviewee indicated, s/he is spending six days a week working to make the programme run, which leaves little to no time to participate in

research activities. Social work, as an academic discipline, needs to educate HEIs regarding how social work academics can realistically contribute to research whilst working on a professional programme requiring higher administrative duties, and, as the US studies have indicated, this appears to be needed in social work programs beyond the UK. Additionally, as social work research seeks to inform social work practice, HEIs need a better understanding of the time required of academics to consult practitioners and social work organisations of their research needs, time to gather data from the field, and time to disseminate findings back to practitioners and organisations.

This study found that more time spent on research activities was supported by: more support from the university, less time spent on teaching and administration, and affiliation with a pre-1992 university. In regard to the first three factors, the findings have been echoed by US social work academics who are calling for more time for research by reducing administrative and teaching loads, and more institutional support (Green, 2008; Jones et al., 2009). Green (2008) argues that the disconnect between expectations of a university in terms of research and the reality of the environment in supporting the production and dissemination of research naturally leads to "impeding morale, well-being, productivity, and recruitment" (p. 126). Green (2008) goes on to argue that universities that do not support academics in conducting and disseminating research may be to blame for "findings that most social work faculty members conduct very little research and contribute to the professional literature infrequently" (p. 126). This is in line with Powell and Orme (2011) who found that support from home institutions was the critical factor to enhancing individuals' research activity. Such findings point to the need for all universities, both within the UK and beyond, to provide the time and support for social work academics who are appointed to be research active to participate in research activities. Based on the findings from this study, the support

can be in the form of reduced administrative and teaching loads, as well as supportive opportunities to build and enhance research, such as those supports listed in Table 4.

This study also found that being from a pre-1992 university predicted an increase in research activity. The findings are similar to those of Moriarty et al. (2008; 2015) in that attracting research funding was associated with being from a pre-1992 university, and that it is the culture of the university that is more important in receiving research funding and being research active, than the academic's personal resources. Such findings indicate that the culture of pre-1992 universities may be more supportive of research activities of social work academics. In particular, they may have less administrative and teaching responsibilities and more supports to conduct and disseminate research. It could be argued that such findings point to the need for a dual workforce of: "non-research-active" social work educators who provide most teaching, tutoring and placement-liaison; and "research active" academics who primarily conduct high quality research and doctoral supervision with some specialist, research-focused teaching and dissertation supervision. A presentation by Taylor (2015) at the Association of Professors of Social Work (APSW) annual conference on the outcomes of the 2014 REF highlighted evidence of increasing research capacity, such as new national and international collaborative research and enhanced rigour of qualitative and use of quantitative methods, but the "researchers" tended to not be spending time on teaching. The universities with more "successful" REF research gradings were found to employ teaching fellows as opposed to researchers to teach.

However, despite this possible growing trend, some of the interviewees suggest that such a split is not the best way forward: teaching is best done by research-active staff:

> [I]n an ideal scenario you would, all that stuff would be taught by people who had done the job because again in teaching about research methods I think it's so important that you make it real to the students in terms of what makes sense to them as practitioners. You would just engage the students far more if your teaching about research methods is replete with practice examples, with credible social work examples.

and research by those who understand social work practice:

> *it matters when [research] findings are being turned into, you know, policy and practice guidelines [...] there's an understanding of the complex nature of social work [by social work academics]. That it's not straight forward, it's not like you're doing sociology or psychology, it's a very complex area and to actually be then able to understand that the complexities will enrich their research, I think.*

Limitations

The results should be considered against several limitations. First, the extent to which the sample is truly reflective of the population is unknown as the response rate is estimated based on prior research at around 33% (Moriarty et al., 2015), thus, the extent to which the results would vary based on more responses is unknown. Despite the unknown response rate, the sample size was large enough for statistical analyses, thus, enhancing the generalizability of this study to the population (i.e. all social work academics in the UK). Likewise, the characteristics and demographics of the sample in this study (see Table 1 and 2) describe a sample of academics from both pre-1992 and post-1992 universities, as well as across various academic levels (Teaching Fellow to Professor). Finally, the authors constructed the questions on the questionnaire, which has not been subject to psychometric testing. Future research should replicate the questions and should continue to explore other possible factors that could contribute to or impede research activity amongst UK social work academics.

Conclusion

This study has provided a picture of the research activity of UK social work academics. Although the majority of social work academics report being research active, the extent to which academics can participate in research activities is influenced by their administrative and teaching responsibilities, the support from their universities and the classification of their universities (pre or post-1992). The findings echo research conducted in the US that calls for more time for research by reducing administrative and teaching loads as well as other opportunities to participate in research, such as through mentoring and research

and writing collaborations (Green, 2008; Jones et al., 2009). With the demands of social work education as a professional discipline responsible for training and educating the next generation of social work practitioners, the findings of this study suggest that social work academics must be hybrid individuals, highly competent in both social work education and research methods and methodology, with links to current social work practice issues which need exploration or evaluation. But this comes at a cost. For their research to be high quality and their teaching/tutoring practice-relevant, at the individual level social work academics will need ring-fenced time for both research activity and administration, and to receive research training and mentorship. It is unclear that universities are ready to commit to this, so macro intervention will be needed by organisations such as APSW and JUC SWEC the last of which are currently reviewing the discipline's research strategy and will advocate for the time and resources needed to build the research activity required for evidence-informed social work.

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Table 1: Characteristics of Survey Participants (*N*=200)

Variable (*n*)	*M*	*SD*	% (*f*)
Age (183)	51.27	7.87	
Gender			
Female			62.8% (121)
Male			37.2% (71)
Ethnicity			
White British/English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish			77.2% (149)
White other			6.2% (12)
White Irish			5.2% (10)
White European			2.6% (5)
Black – African			1.5% (3)
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups - White and Asian			1.5% (3)
Other ethnic group			1.5% (3)
Black – British			1.0% (2)
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups - White and Black African			1.0% (2)
Prefer not to say			1.0% (2)
Asian/Asian British - Indian			0.5% (1)
Black – Caribbean			0.5% (1)
Years employed in academia (190)	10.99	7.51	
Employment			
Post 1992 University			63.8% (127)
Pre 1992 University			36.2% (72)
Title of Academic Role			
Senior Lecturer – post 1992 HEI			35.0% (70)
Lecturer – post 1992 University			12.5% (25)
Professor			11.0% (22)
Senior Lecturer – pre 1992 HEI			9.5% (19)
Principal Lecturer – post 1992 HEI			7.5% (15)
Other			7.5% (15)
Lecturer B – pre 1992 HEI			6.5% (13)
Lecturer A – pre 1992 HEI			4.5% (9)
Teaching Fellow			2.0% (4)
Associate Professor			1.5% (3)
Senior Teaching Fellow			1.5% (3)
Reader			1.0% (2)
Highest level of education			
Masters degree			50.5% (100)
PhD (traditional research route)			25.3% (50)
Postgrad certificate			7.6% (15)
DSW/Professional Doctorate/EdD			5.6% (11)
PhD (by publication)			3.5% (7)
Other			2.5% (5)
MPhil			2.5% (5)
Undergraduate degree			2.5% (5)
Plans for a doctorate			
Yes, but not right now			36.8% (49)
Yes, currently working towards			33.8% (45)

No	29.3% (39)
Qualified social worker	
Yes	95.4% (185)
No	4.6% (9)
Registered with a regulatory body	
Yes	84.3% (156)
No	15.6% (29)

Table 2: Characteristics of the Interviewees (*N*=11)

Variable (*n*)	*M*	*SD*	% (*f*)
Age	52.91	7.99	
Gender			
Female			54.6% (6)
Male			55.5% (5)
Ethnicity			
White British/English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish			90.9% (10)
Black – African			9.1% (1)
Years employed in academia	15.45	9.37	
Employment			
Post-1992 University			54.6% (6)
Pre-1992 University			55.5% (5)
Title of Academic Role			
Senior Lecturer – post 1992 HEI			36.4% (4)
Professor			36.4% (4)
Other			18.2% (2)
Lecturer – post 1992 University			9.1% (1)
Highest level of education			
Masters degree			54.6% (6)
PhD (traditional research route)			9.1% (1)
PhD (by publication)			9.1% (1)
Postgrad certificate			9.1% (1)
MPhil			9.1% (1)
No response			9.1% (1)
Plans for a Doctorate			
Yes, but not right now			27.3% (3)
Yes, currently working towards			27.3% (3)
No			27.3% (3)
Already have a doctorate			18.2% (2)
Qualified social worker			
Yes			100% (11)
Registered with a regulatory body			
Yes			63.6% (7)
No			27.3% (3)
Did not respond			9.1% (1)

Table 3: Research Activity of Survey Participants (*N*=200)

Variable (*n*)	*M*	*SD*	Range	% (*f*)
Research Active				
Yes				72.9% (145)
No				27.1% (54)
Primary Research				
Qualitative				57.9% (84)
Mixed Methods				31.7% (46)
Other				7.6% (11)
Quantitative				2.8% (4)
Submission to 2008 RAE				
Yes				25.0% (39)
No				75.0% (117)
Submission to 2014 REF				
Yes				34.6% (54)
No				65.4% (102)
Department REF Submission to Social Work and Social Policy Panel				
Yes				49.2% (97)
No				26.9% (53)
Don't know				23.9% (47)
If no, Submission to other Panels				
Yes				41.5% (22)
No				39.6% (21)
Don't know				18.9% (10)
University Importance of:				
Research (169)	32.75	17.51	0-90	
Teaching (171)	44.41	16.36	0-100	
Administration (170)	22.12	11.81	0-70	
Actual time spent on:				
Research (175)	20.34	18.65	0-90	
Teaching (179)	41.27	18.52	5-90	
Administration (179)	38.76	18.24	0-90	

Table 4: Survey Participants Reported Support from University (*N*=200)

Type of Support	% (*f*)
Teaching development courses	82.7% (167)
Funding for conferences	74.3% (150)
To obtain doctorates	67.8% (137)
Research mentoring	60.4% (122)
Seminar programs	58.9% (119)
Sabbatical/Study leave	58.9% (119)
Funding for small project or pilots	53.5% (108)
Mentoring for writing for publication	48.5% (98)
Encourage to work with experienced colleagues	45.5% (92)
Teaching mentoring	45.0% (91)
Methodology workshops	45.0% (91)
Other CPD	37.6% (76)
Equipment	29.7% (60)
Pathways from having limited involvement to being PI on research projects	14.9% (30)

Table 5: Factors Predicting Research Activity of Survey Participants (*N*=138)

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*β*
Employment (Pre/Post 1992)	-.623	.314	-.015*
Age	.002	.022	.001
Gender	.274	.275	.007
Years in academia	.014	.023	.006
Doctorate	-.189	.323	-.005
Number of supports	.084	.040	.016*
Time spent on teaching	-.991	.010	-.912**
Time spent on administration	-.980	.009	-.949**
Number of administrative roles	-.131	.152	-.006
University expectation of research	-.003	.010	-.003
University expectation of administration	-.006	.013	-.004

Adjusted R^2 .994
F 2096.11**

**$p<.001$; *$p<.05$