

Patricia Robinson Successfully Defends PhD

Congratulations to Patricia Robinson who successfully defended her dissertation on May 4, 2007 titled, *Mental Health Research: A Path to Personal, Interpersonal and Political Change for Participant Researchers*.



The Examination Committee, was chaired by Dr. Charles Malsbury (Professor, Dept of Psychology, MUN) included Dr. Mark Salzer (Assistant Professor, Center for Mental Health Policy & Services Research, University of Pennsylvania); Dr. Shelly Birnie-Lefcovitch (Associate Professor, School of Social Work, MUN); Dr. Janet Fitzpatrick (Associate Professor, School of Social Work, MUN).

The Supervisory Committee, which was chaired by Dr. Ross Klein (Professor, School of Social Work, MUN) included Dr. Michael Ungar (Associate Professor, School of Social Work, Dalhousie University); Dr. Roger Boothroyd (Associate Professor, Dept of Mental Health, University of South Florida).

Abstract

Mental Health Research: A Path to Personal, Interpersonal and Political Change for Participant Researchers

People who have mental illnesses often find themselves being spoken “about” or spoken “for” by others. In contrast, this study is about obtaining first person accounts from individuals who have or have had mental illnesses and have participated in research in roles other than as research subjects. The purpose of the study is to determine whether or not they believed that their research experiences positively contributed to their personal, interpersonal, and political lives, a proposition often held by professionals in the literature. The study also sought to determine the factors that were associated with their reported outcomes and whether they endorsed more participatory models of research.

Multiple strategies were used to identify and recruit individuals that met the study criteria. Known consumer/survivor researchers were contacted directly, others were recruited through their attendance at conferences or through contact by other researchers. The study sample consisted primarily of white females over the age of 40, most of whom had post secondary degrees and who had had a variety of roles in their research experience.

Scales were created that measured the extent to which respondents believed that their research experiences were participatory; the changes they had experienced in their personal, interpersonal, and political lives; and the degree to which they endorsed participatory methods of research. Bivariate Correlations and one-way ANOVAs were computed to tests the relationships among the degree of “participatoriness” and respondent outcomes as well as they relationships between the participants’ level of research experience, the research environment and their reported outcomes.

Respondents were generally positive about the degree to which their research experiences were participatory and indicated that they had experienced some changes as a result of their research experiences. Their outcomes were significantly, positively related to the extent to which they felt their experiences were participatory.

Social Work research is fertile ground for participatory models of research, given the profession's commitment to the principles of social justice and empowerment. Social work education, particularly doctoral education, should expose students to these more inclusive research approaches and prepare them to engage in authentic participatory research models.