

Research Brief from Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Anthropologists Study on Knowledge and Skill Gaps in Research and Child Development Practices

1. Introduction

The study was sponsored by Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Social Anthropologists (ESSWA) and conducted by Dr. Wassie Kebede Social Services and Training Consultancy in 2015 .The rationale to conduct the study is to contribute towards “enhancing institutional and research capacities to prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation” by working closely with 10 public and three private universities and regional chapters of ESSWA.

2. Background

ESSWA is currently implementing two projects financed by USAID and Oak Foundation. The projects are linked to the overall strategy of *strengthening public sector social service systems in Ethiopia*, with the primary focus to contribute to workforce development in the country. The geographic scope of the study covers parts of the country where higher learning institutions are located that provide training on any of the three fields of study (sociology, social work and/or social anthropology). Three groups participated in the study were students, instructors and practitioners in the area of child focused services. The study paid attention to generate data on major issues related to research knowledge and skill gaps on child development, exploitation and abuse. Three independent survey questionnaires were designed and self-administered by students, instructors and practitioners.

3. Method

The study follows predominantly a cross-sectional survey design substantiated by qualitative information generated from qualitative interviews as well as open ended questions embedded within the survey questionnaires. Primary sources of data were students and instructors drawn from universities and practitioners in both governmental and Non-governmental

Organizations. The following table illustrates planned versus actual survey respondents drawn from the three specific groups.

Table 1: Planned vis-à-vis actual targets of the survey

Target category	Planned	Actual	% of actual/planned
Students	278	211	76
Instructors	32	28	88
Practitioners	28	77	275
Total	338	316	93

The overall success rate of reaching planned respondents during the data collection phase is commendable (93%). However, there were variations among specific groups where filled questionnaires collected from the practitioners was by far high from the plan where as among students the actual was relatively lesser.

On the basis of data output from the three surveys, appropriate descriptive statistics were applied to compute frequency tables, percentages and other visual representations of data. Qualitative information from the key informant interviews as well as open ended questions embedded in the survey questionnaires were thematically organized by extracting the major themes and interpreted using content analysis. The study required no critical ethical procedures to consider since it did not involve human subject issues in emotionally or psychologically damaging manner. However, for the sake of maintaining the integrity for research ethics, the purpose of the study was clearly described in a written consent form.

4. Findings

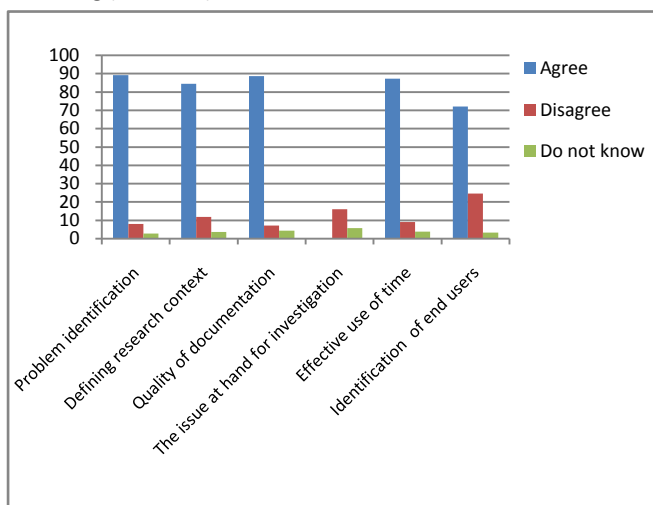
4.1: Research Knowledge and practice

Some questions related to research knowledge and practices were presented to the three groups of survey participants. For purpose of clarity and simplicity, we present summary of findings in relation to research knowledge and practice obtained from each group separately.

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Students: A number of research knowledge achievement related questions were asked for students about which they were asked to show their degree of agreement or disagreement to each question. Majority of the respondents attributed success of research to multiple factors as indicated in the following chart. The responses are dichotomized into “agree” or “disagree” continuum, otherwise do not know.

Chart 1: Factors contributing to research knowledge building (% ,n=211)



Other more questions were raised to attest the level of research knowledge that students have acquired from their undergraduate training. Special emphasis was given to the knowledge students are expected to develop regarding action research. Responses from students in relation to action research are summarized in the following table.

Table 3: Students’ Knowledge on the concepts, use and practice of action research (%), n=211)

Statements in relation to action research	Agreement variability (%), n=211			
	Agree	Disagree	Do not Know	Total
Action research tend to be cyclic	74.0	13.2	12.8	100
Action research tend to be participatory	88.1	7.6	4.3	100
Action research tend to be	70.1	20.4	9.5	100

qualitative				
In action research planning is not an important step, so it should not come first	28.9	59.7	11.4	100

The above table demonstrates many students (though in the graduating class) are yet unaware of or with little knowledge regarding the concept, use and practice of action research.

Practitioners: Research related questions presented in the practitioners’ questionnaire were aiming to examine how practitioners retain and apply their theoretical knowledge of research into practice. Major question posed to practitioners and their responses are summarized in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Measuring research knowledge, use and evidence based practice among practitioners

Practitioners specifically working with children are responsible to critically review theories and interpret research findings in order to demonstrate informed use:	Agreement variability (%), n=77			
	Agree	Disagree	Do not know	Total
In the practice of age related factors	93.5	2.6	3.9	100
In the practice of cognitive related factors	96.2	1.3	2.5	100
In the practice of social related factors	94.8	1.3	3.9	100
In the practice of emotional and behavioral related factors	96.1	1.3	2.6	100
In the impact of cultural diversity on child development	93.5	2.6	3.9	100
On the impact of different parenting styles on child development	89.6	2.6	7.8	100
On the interaction between environment and temperament	74.1	7.8	18.1	100
On the interaction between environment and IQ	74.0	11.7	14.3	100
On the interaction between environment and attention difficulties	80.5	2.6	16.9	

Relatively speaking, practitioners have better knowledge of diverse use of research knowledge and the application therein for practice than students.

Instructors/teachers: Instructors survey solely focused on gathering facts regarding the quality of research course offering from the perspectives of

curriculum design/content, classroom environment, availability of supportive/reference materials, students’ preparedness, administrative effectiveness, resource availability, in-take of competent students, and level of research competency that students have at the phase of graduation. Majority of the instructors (78.6%, n=28) believed that research courses encompass both classroom theoretical teaching as well as practical exercise contents. Similarly 64.3% of instructors asserted that research courses are adequate to equip students with basic knowledge on quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research paradigms. However, a significant number of respondents (64.3%) believe that student-teacher ratio (number of students in a single classroom) is very high. This high student-teacher ratio is accompanied by availability of limited reference materials, as demonstrated by 64.3% of the respondents. Poor library services, limited access to statistical data, shortage of models to demonstrate practical cases/examples, and absence of audio-visual demonstrations are other set of challenges making it difficult to teach research courses. This was asserted by 71.4% of the respondents.

4.3: Training and skills in relation to working with children, families and communities: questions in relation to training course available in the universities related to child development and related matters were included in the questionnaires designed for students and practitioners. Findings from both surveys are summarized as follows.

Findings from students’ Survey: A number of specific issues have included in the students survey to learn more about the extent to which curriculum in the three fields of trainings give emphasis to incorporate child related courses. The introductory question in this regard was asked: “did you take or will you take a course/s related to child development?” While 46.9% respond “no” the other 46.0% respond “yes”. Other 7.1% did not respond to the question. Researchers posed other many questions in relation to children’s issues. The responses shall be presented in the main report that follows this summary report.

Findings from the Practitioners’ Survey:

Researchers did not directly ask practitioners whether they took courses on children’s issues while they were in universities. The reason was that practitioners may not necessary come from the three fields of studies that students’ survey paid attention. Moreover, practitioners can better reflect on existing experience rather than bothering them which course/s they did take when they were in universities/colleges. The outcomes of experiential related questions posed to practitioners are summarized in table 5 below.

Table 5: Skills/knowledge required by a social care provider working with children, families and communities

Required skills and knowledge by a social care provider	Degree of variability (%)			
	Agree	Disagree	Do not know	Total
Helping families to build relationship	89.7	2.5	7.8	100
Helping families to build family resources and resilience	83.2	13.0	3.9	
Identifying the full range of risks to children and help to manage those risks	79.3	15.6	5.2	
Talking and listening as basic interpretation skills	83.2	10.4	6.5	
The seven ladders of social care skills include preparing, beginning, exploring, assessing, contracting, evaluating and ending	78.0	6.5	15.6	

Practitioners are well aware of the basic skills that a social care practitioner has to demonstrate as it is described in the above table. However those practitioners who know the ladders of a social care practice are less compared to other skill areas.

4.3: Knowledge and practice on child abuse and exploitation: On child abuse and exploitation we gathered data from students and practitioners.

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Therefore, summarized responses from both groups are presented as follows.

Students: Majority of the students (90%) believe existence of different forms of child abuse. Regarding rural-urban disparity of child abuse (for example, domestic child abuse) 23.3% did not believe that there is such disparity. Some 19% of students in anthropology, social work and sociology do not know the existence of an international law (CRC) that concerns about children and 21.8% do not believe that parents/care providers can be potential abusers of children. Regarding child protection, 23.3% believe that police is the sole protector of children's safety and wellbeing. There is a new face of child sexual abuse in relation to expansion of tourism industry worldwide. We posed a question to students if such expansion of tourism industry becomes one of the contributing factors for child sexual abuse, about which, 26.9% disagree with the idea that tourism expansion can be a contributing factor for child sexual abuse.

Practitioners: We expected, practitioners have better knowledge about the forms and extent of child sexual abuse compared to students participated in this study. We posed extensive questions to practitioners in relation to different forms/types of child abuse and contributing factors towards abuse. Regarding child trafficking as one form of abuse, 94.8%, 98.7%, 98.7%, 93.5%, and 88.4%, respectively reported that trafficked children can be subject to sexual abuse, forced labor, drug dealing and forced to commit crime. Other more enormous data were generated from practitioners regarding child abuse and exploitation. For instance, 88.4% of practitioners participated in the survey believed that existing law enforcement mechanisms in Ethiopia are weak to address the problems of trafficked children. On another dimension of child abuse, poverty is described as one of the stressor factors that contribute to child abuse as testified by 80.6% of the respondents. Another important finding to report here is that 46.8% of the practitioners participated in this study believe that child maltreatment could also happen in affluent family, which may be the antithesis of poverty as a stressor factor for child abuse.

5. Conclusion

Admittedly, at this early stage of preliminary analysis, researchers cannot provide a comprehensive conclusion of the report. Although there will be detail presentation of concluding remarks in the major report, from our preliminary observation of data, it is quite safe to say the following statements. Students' level of understanding regarding the applicability of research to the world of work is inadequate, which may require an immediate on-job-training/induction orientation in how to use evidences based practice as important tool to work with children and families. Another important observation from students' survey data is that the contents of the curricula among the three fields of study varies and in some situations, there is only little coverage on issues of children specially in anthropology, followed by sociology and the better field that gives attention on children is social work among the three disciplines. Instructors witnessed that although the contents on paper is fair enough to cover both theoretical and practical trainings in research, in actual facts, the large class size, poor reference materials, low student preparedness and less commitment from the university administration deters the quality of research training. Practitioners, although they have better knowledge of the skills needed to work with children, they still claim that refresher training is needed to update their theoretical and application skills to use evidences/scientific knowledge for their day to day activities with children families and communities. Finally, it became eminent that researcher-practitioner synergy should be created to solve emerging and existing social issues.

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