

RESEARCH IN ACTION
Developing Networks For Evidence-Based Socio-Legal Research

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Abstract

This workshop will increase knowledge about possibilities for groundbreaking research related to justice systems and social context issues. Consideration will be given to what is needed to establish local and national networks between the justice community and capable social researchers.

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Developing Networks For Evidence-Based Socio-Legal Research
A workshop from the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice

Historically, issues of civil justice have been subordinated to criminal justice in terms of investment, research and media attention, but recently there has been international recognition of the fundamental importance of civil justice systems and increased awareness of the need for high quality evidence-based socio-legal research. The Canadian Forum on civil justice receives many requests to assist in the development and conduct of a wide variety of new research that has applied, substantive, methodological and theoretical value. There is, however, a lack of socio-legal research capacity, both within Canada and internationally and partnerships between universities, governments, and community groups face practical and philosophical challenges. This workshop aims to provoke constructive discussion of some associated considerations. The purpose of this workshop is three-fold:

- *To increase knowledge about the possibilities of groundbreaking research and theory related to justice systems and social context issues.*
- *To build on input gained in previous series of workshops held across British Columbia in August 2007.*
- *To discuss what is needed to establish local and national networks between the justice community and capable social researchers from all disciplines.*

The workshop will provide:

- A brief presentation about some priorities and opportunities for socio-legal research.
- An overview of themes emerging from the previous series of workshops held in British Columbia.
- An opportunity to speak with guests from the prior workshops, representing government and academic interests in socio-legal research.
- Small and full group discussions aimed at identifying what would be necessary to begin and nourish local and national socio-legal research networks.
- An opportunity to join a database of social researchers with skills and interest in conducting law-related research of all kinds.

Participants are asked to:

- Give prior consideration to how their current research interests might intersect with issues related to law and justice systems, especially regarding areas of civil law, such as family, economic and social costs of accessing justice, public perceptions of justice systems, public understanding of legal process and systems of justice, and access to justice issues for vulnerable people.
- Consider what they might contribute and what they might hope to gain from a socio-legal research network and be prepared to discuss ways of establishing local and national socio-legal research networks.

Discussion Points

Previous workshop participants identified the following challenges to meet if university community alliances and networks are to be facilitated:

- Increase academic understanding of how social and legal issues are related.
- Improve lines of communication between academia and the justice community.
- Improve access to data among academics, government and community organizations.
- Overcome a negative climate of competition.
- Find ways to turn our research into action and get the knowledge out there.

This is what Participants said about these challenges:

We need better communication between justice system providers and academic researchers. The two groups do not know each other or each other's issues. We have a critical mass of people in each community...but no points of good contact.

When we worked for government we would ask people what research they were doing, they wouldn't know. But when we talked to them more, we discovered a lot of informal research was being done that was valuable and was not being used; an amazing wealth of knowledge.

Government had a ton of research, but the academic world had no idea what's going on!

We need research that evaluates what organizations are doing. Not just quantity tracking but quality - what are the long-term impacts.

Unless it's published it's not worth much [for tenure]. Community work is not worth much; invisible work in supervising graduate students - not much! Who are the peers? Academics!

There is a feeling that people don't want to share data because they fear someone else will steal their work. If you want to bid on something, having data to yourself helps.

You get recognition if you bring in money rather than if you bring about change. I would like to have more experience getting research done on applied issues - resolving problems.

A lot of academic research never gets out there, and the community groups are good at getting things out there. Community groups can help get academic research out there!

There was a time when funding didn't dictate what we did and we need to keep that so that it doesn't become competitive and money dictates what is needed rather than us, and our gifts being implemented.

There is an incredible amount of information there, but also questions about how it is possible to access that knowledge and connect it to what's going on in academia. What is needed is some person with the knowledge and the funding to put the pieces together.