The Potential of Research to Inform Theory, Policy, and Practice

Mary Ann Farkas
Marquette University, mary.farkas@marquette.edu

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Recommended Citation
Farkas, Mary Ann, "The Potential of Research to Inform Theory, Policy, and Practice" (2014). Social and Cultural Sciences Faculty Research and Publications. 68.
https://epublications.marquette.edu/socs_fac/68
The Potential of Research to Inform Theory, Policy, and Practice

Mary Ann Farkas
Criminology and Law Studies, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI

The International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology (IJTOCC) presents ground-breaking research from around the world related to the social sciences. It is of great value to academic scholars, clinicians, practitioners, and professionals from a variety of disciplines, including forensic science, psychiatry, psychology, criminology, sociology, and law. It is my honor to once again have the privilege of writing an editorial piece for the journal.

I have chosen to comment on the topic of integrating research findings into the development and conceptualization of theory, the advancement of classification and categorization schemes and the formation of policy and practice. The articles in the present volume represent a quality blend of studies that examine and test the theories and relationships among variables and studies that evaluate the practices and programs based on theoretical assumptions. Over the past few decades, there has been a movement toward integrating theory and evidence-based practices (EBP). EBP draws on science, research, and empirical evaluation to inform policy,
services, and programs (Perez, 2009). One set of studies in this volume provides scientific evidence of the impact of certain variables and their relationship to an understanding of nonfatal suicide behavior, juvenile delinquency, and the expression of anger. Other articles evaluate the perceptions of counselors regarding faith-based and secular types of drug treatment programs, the use of the “Thinking Skills Programme,” the use of psychometric assessment, and reports on the perceptions of civilly committed sex offenders regarding elements of the treatment process and their therapists.

The article titled “Nonfatal Suicidal Behavior Among Women Prisoners: The Predictive Roles of Childhood Victimization, Childhood Neglect, and Childhood Positive Support” elucidates the influence of childhood physical and sexual victimization, childhood neglect and lack of support in childhood on suicidality. As the authors Tripodi et al. explain, their research allows a greater understanding of the relationship between childhood experiences and suicidality and suggests perhaps a more targeted and specific approach to clinically work with female prisoners who have suffered childhood victimization and neglect.

In another study, “Strain, Negative Emotions, and Juvenile Delinquency: The United States Versus Taiwan,” Lin et al. conducted a comparative study of juveniles from the United States and Taiwan to ascertain whether strain theory increases delinquency and whether the strain–delinquency relationship is similar in both countries. Several variables of strain were measured, including strain from negative life events, and strain related to anger and depression. Interestingly, the general strain theory was similar across both cultures. The results are important in understanding strain theory and how it applies to juvenile delinquency cross-culturally. Further research is needed to examine the policy implications of these findings for responding to juvenile delinquents.

An Australian study, “Experience and Expression of Anger among Australian Prisoners and the Relationship Between Anger and Reintegration Variables,” investigated the experience and expression of anger among prisoners prior to and following prison release, as well as the relationship between anger and several reintegration variables. The results indicate that emotional state may play an important role in the psychological adjustment of ex-prisoners and that understanding the emotional needs of prisoners and ex-prisoners must be addressed for a more effective reintegration and community adjustment.

Other readings in this volume, “The Causation of Drug Abuse and Treatment . . .,” “An Evaluation of the HM Prison Service ‘Thinking Skills Programme’ Using Psychometric Assessments,” and “A Consumer Satisfaction Survey of Civilly Committed Sex Offenders in Illinois,” utilized research and evaluation to confirm or refute the value of strategies and services in the correctional system. This ongoing monitoring and evaluation assures that programs will be implemented and carried out in line with program goals and the obstacles in implementation or unintended consequences will be identified. Studies of practice tell us “what works?” and allow us to employ empirically tested strategies to areas such as rehabilitation, clinical services, and correctional programs. By the same token, these studies of practice afford the opportunity to identify ineffective methods and difficulties in the application of theory and conceptualization.

Such evaluations that survey patients/clients, as in Levenson et al.’s article, and treatment providers, as in Chu and Sung’s research, illustrate how research can inform practice. For example, the survey of counselors’ perceptions regarding faith-based and secular drug treatment, revealed that the counselor’s group and individual religious/spiritual identities exert an important understanding of addiction and approaches to treatment. So it is important to understand counselor treatment philosophy and its influence on the strategies counselors utilize and its effect on treatment outcomes. Interventions will thus be more understandable, and perhaps more effective, if grounded in the findings of evidence-based research. A wealth of research studies have been accumulated over the ages. The explication, testing, and corroboration of research findings have the potential to advance our knowledge and enhance our understanding of “what works?”
Mary Ann Farkas, PhD
Professor of Criminology and Law
Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI, USA

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