

Research Skills for Social Services Mentoring Programme Aug – Nov 2020

Programme Information

Programme Description

This 13-week course is a research mentoring programme that offers social service professionals an opportunity to complete a small-scale research project with guidance from experienced researcher-mentors. Participants in this programme will be supported by workshops, peer group discussions, and regular feedback from mentors. Throughout the programme, social service professionals will be guided from the conceptualisation of the research problem to data collection, data analysis, and presentation of their research findings. This programme is useful for social service professionals who are observing new issues, complexities, and situations faced by clients due to COVID-19 and aim to garner rigorous insights to understand its impacts on their clients.

While the workshops and mentors may provide support on specific research methods or skills, these would tailor towards the needs and requirements of the research projects proposed. The programme strives to provide a holistic guidance and support on the different stages of research for each proposed research project.

Programme Objectives

At the end of the programme, participants are expected to achieve the following objectives:

- Conceptualise and construct sound research questions relevant to their social service practice that would develop into feasible research projects completed within the programme time-frame;
- Apply appropriate research methods to their research projects;
- Understand and appreciate ethical concerns on social service research;
- Conduct data collection or fieldwork necessary for their research projects;
- Conduct appropriate data analyses and provide accurate data interpretations for their research projects; and
- Prepare and present research findings for a mini-conference.

Programme Requirements

All participants are required to:

- Conceptualise and complete a research project, either individually or in small groups
- Submit two assignments to the mentors for comments
- Attend and contribute actively during the workshops and mentoring sessions
- Present research findings on programme graduation day (the presentation will be attended by participants and invited guests only)

All participants of the programme are expected to attend and contribute actively during the workshops and the discussion groups organised by the mentors.

There will be 6 workshops (2-hour sessions) conducted over 3 days (11, 14, 18 Aug), 7 mentoring sessions, and 1 final end-of-course presentation, all to be conducted online via Zoom. (In the event that meetings are allowed to be held face-to-face, mentors will provide participants with adequate advance notice.)

For each mentoring session, participants will be organized in small groups of 3-4 members each and they will arrange with their mentors on suitable times to meet. Each mentoring session will last about 2 hours at timings agreed by the group.

Aligned with the objectives of SkillsFuture and the National Social Work Competency Framework, certificates of participation will be awarded to participants who attend at least 75% of the required workshops, mentoring sessions, and final presentation as well as submit the two required assignments (see below for details) on time.

Programme Expectations

The programme requires participants to be committed to completing a research project. Other than attending the 6 workshops and the 7 required meetings with mentors, participants will need to have sufficient time to prepare for their research proposals, conduct library research, collect data, perform data-analyses, write reports and prepare for their final presentations. Please consider the time needed for completing this programme and other commitments for work, family, rest, and leisure.

A substantial part of the learning from this programme will come from mutual sharing of their research progress among the participants. Participants must be prepared to share the different stages of their research projects with their mentors and with other participants. If participants are handling confidential data or information from their agencies, they must be prepared to obtain prior consent from the sources of their data or be able to remove personal identifiers from their data before sharing.

Programme Materials

All participants will be given access to NUS e-library resources during the period of the programme. Hence, they are expected to make good use of the available library resources for their research projects. However, software such as SPSS, STATA or NVivo will not be available and participants will need to purchase their own software if they need to use them.

Programme Schedule

Programme Components	Programme Details	Description
Administrative briefing	<p>7 August 2020 (Friday) 10am-11am</p> <p>A link to the online meeting will be sent to participants before the session</p>	<p><u>Pre-training Preparation</u></p> <p>Participants must attend this compulsory session to prepare and clarify any queries for the 13-week programme that will be conducted online.</p>
Workshop I & II	<p>11 August 2020 (Tuesday) 10am – 12pm</p> <p><u>Trainer:</u> Dr Neo Yu Wei</p> <p>A link to the online meeting will be sent to participants before the session</p>	<p><u>Introduction to Research Skills for Social Services</u></p> <p>This introductory workshop is a refresher course on the basic principles and concepts underlying social and practice research. It gives an overview of the types of research designs and methodologies commonly used by social services, highlighting issues on feasibility, limitations and commonly-raised concerns in practice research projects. The workshop will also bring attention to issues on research ethics that participants need to address in their mentoring projects. During this period of the Covid-19 pandemic, participants will learn to consider new ways of conducting research using online and digital platforms, while mitigating some of the challenges that accompany such methods.</p>
	<p>11 August 2020 (Tuesday) 2pm-4pm</p> <p><u>Trainer:</u> Dr Robyn Tan</p> <p>A link to the online meeting will be sent to participants before the session</p>	<p><u>Introduction to Theory of Change for Programme Evaluation</u></p> <p>This workshop is focused on the use of the theory of change approach for programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Participants will learn how to use the theory of change approach, how to assess if their theory of change is sound, and how to derive analytical insights from their theory of change to make decisions about their programmes.</p>

Workshop III (Part I and II)	<p>14 August 2020 (Friday) Part I: 10am – 12pm Part II: 2pm-4pm</p> <p><u>Trainer:</u> Dr Jeanette Renema</p> <p>A link to the online meeting will be sent to participants before the session</p>	<p><u>Quantitative Research and Analysis</u></p> <p>This workshop gives an overview of quantitative research in social research, with a focus on using survey designs commonly used for outcome evaluations. Participants will learn basic MS Excel skills to generate simple statistical analyses.</p>
Workshop IV (Part I and II)	<p>18 August 2020 (Tuesday) Part I: 10am – 12pm Part II: 2pm-4pm</p> <p><u>Trainer</u> Dr Neo Yu Wei</p> <p>A link to the online meeting will be sent to participants before the session</p>	<p><u>Qualitative Research and Analysis</u></p> <p>This workshop focuses on the strengths and limitations of commonly used qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The efficacy of using these methods on digital platforms will be discussed. The workshop will also provide training on basic thematic coding in qualitative analysis.</p>
Small group mentoring discussions	<p>Dates and timing as agreed by mentor and participants</p> <p>7 sessions, 2hrs each, schedules to be arranged with mentors.</p>	<p><u>Discussions on Research Proposals</u></p> <p>Participants will share their initial research proposals in small groups. The session aims to sharpen participants' research conceptualisation and to refine their research questions in their proposals.</p> <p><u>Subsequent sessions</u></p> <p>Participants to meet mentors for discussions on their research progress.</p>
Graduation Day	<p>3 November 2020 (Tuesday) 9.30am-5pm (tentative)</p>	<p>Final programme to be announced later</p>

Assignments

There will be **two** assignments that participants are expected to submit during the duration of the programme. Mentors will give feedback and comments on the assignments, but the assignments are not graded. The first assignment is a research proposal (800 - 1,000 words) outlining the following:

- 1) The research question(s)
- 2) Literature review
- 3) Methodology

The first assignment is due on **7 September 2020**.

The second assignment consists of two parts. The first part is an **abstract** of the research findings, between 200 - 300 words and the second part must be submitted as **either** - a) a set of presentation slides **or** b) a written report (max. 3,000 words) highlighting the following:

- 1) The research question(s)
- 2) Brief overview of methodology
- 3) The research analyses and findings
- 4) Implications for policy or practice

The second assignment (abstract and slides/report) is due on **26 October 2020**.

Programme Instructors and Mentors

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