



Social Work Doctoral Programs: Challenges and Opportunities in the Modern Society

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Abstract

This article offers a review of the major literature about the modern status of social work as a science within the western context and its implications for Georgia, the former Soviet Union Country. It identifies the most appropriate types of social work research (e.g. translational research) that can be used for bridging the science and service communities to directly affect the provision of services across different social work sectors.

It also summarizes the current situation of doctoral social work education in the western countries as well as in Georgia and outlines the main features of a sound social work doctoral program.

Keywords: *Social work education; Social work science; Social work research; Doctoral education in social work; Translational research.*

Introduction

The growing recognition that scientific research is the critical component of the social work profession requires establishing doctoral programs in the transitional countries where social work is a newly emerged profession and social and human services are in the process of development. In this context it is critical to base social work practices and services on an empirically derived knowledge base. This article offers an overview of the major literature about the modern status of social work as a science within the western context and it also identifies the most appropriate types of social work research (e.g., translational research) that can be used for bridging the science and service communities to directly affect the provision of services across different social work sectors.

In this article the major literature about the modern status of social work as a science within the western context is reviewed. To this regard it also identifies the most

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appropriate types of social work research (e.g., translational research) that can be used for bridging the science and service communities to directly affect the provision of services across different social work sectors. Finally, the current situation of doctoral social work education in the western countries as well as in Georgia is summarized. Some of the imminent issues such as importance of scientific funding and standardization of curriculum design are highlighted. It is important to discuss some issues of concern and the direction in which a strong and sound doctoral social work education can be developed.

Social Work as a Science

While Social Work education has historically been grounded in professional practice, reconsideration of Social Work as a science has recently been urged (Fong, 2012). American and European colleagues-initiated discussion about increasing Social Work's visibility as a scientific discipline and making a more demonstrative contribution to expanding the scientific knowledge base in social and human services (Anastas 2014; Shaw 2014; Sommerfeld 2014; Brekke 2012, 2013; Marsh 2012; Longhofer & Floersch 2012).

Social Work along with sociology, psychiatry, public health, psychology is an applied integrative science, not a natural or core science that engages in the development of knowledge for its own sake (Anastas 2014). According to the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), Social Work is both interdisciplinary (several disciplines working jointly from their discipline-specific bases to integrate, combine, or synthesize perspectives, concepts, and/or theories to address a common problem) and transdisciplinary (a collaboration between several academic disciplines and practitioners in professional fields outside academe to address a complex real-world problem). In contrast to the core or natural scientific disciplines (such as biology, chemistry, etc.), the integrative scientific disciplines seek to push disciplinary boundaries for solving 'problems in living' (Brekke, 2013, p. 522). They are defined by their explicit focus on the application of disciplinary knowledge in integrative ways. Thus, their knowledge is always applied and technological (Brekke 2013). Social work as an integrative applied discipline provides new applications of existing theories (from social sciences and humanities) to problems in life and develops new social work integrative theories, 'indigenous knowledges' (IFSW) and models and guides in solving critical social work problems, which can be replicated.

Sommerfeld (2014) defines social work as an 'action science' which means that it is constituted by the real-life problems of social work practice and it is also 'transdisciplinary' as it is building a consolidated knowledge base of social work where the main challenge consists of integrating multidisciplinary knowledge in a transdisciplinary way. This approach of action science goes beyond evidence-based practice. It does not evolve from adding and meta-analyzing empirical data rather than composing specific theories of action so called 'technological knowledge' comprising of multidisciplinary knowledge (Sommerfeld 2014). Action theories are theories of a special kind. They are theories on the relation between ends and means, theories of rational target-oriented action and it meets four criteria: (1) they are based on verified theories that explain the causal factors that lead to the emergence of a problem of a concern in a field of practice; (2) the treatment has to be described and there has to be at least plausibility that this treatment affects the causal factors; (3) a scientific explanation of how treatment affects the causal

factors – how the treatment works – is developed and (4) the treatment has been proven effective (Sommerfeld 2014).

The aim of transdisciplinary action science of social work is to enable the profession and professional practitioners to make responsible and informed choices that would become a solid ground for legitimacy of professional social work. In addition, the knowledge produced in practice must be integrated as well (Sommerfeld 2014).

A critical task is to distinguish social work from other integrative scientific disciplines. Social work is the only helping profession that explicitly promotes social change and social justice (Payne 2006). In fact, the international definition of social work (IFSW 2014) claims that social justice is fundamental to it. Accordingly, social work has three functions: (1) therapeutic, which may promote change on an individual bases; (2) problem solving in human relationships, promoting interpersonal and social ‘harmony’ and (3) promoting social development and/or social change (Adams, Dominelli & Payne 2009, p. 2).

Brekke (2012, 2013) defines the framework of the science of social work with (a) core constructs (biopsychosocial, person-in-environment and service systems for change), (b) core domains such as to understand marginalization, disenfranchisement, the individual and social factors in disease and supporting health, and to foster change: empowerment, inclusion, reducing disease, and increasing health, and (c) aesthetic characteristics (complexity, synthesis, and pluralism). In addition to this, a science of social work must encompass the issues relevant to an evidence-based approach to social work practice (Brekke 2012) as evidence-based practice (EBP) is the area where social work has an explicit relationship with science. EBP provides science informed practice (so called the scientific practitioner – Rosen, 1996) and it also includes development and implementation of evidence based or evidence supported practice interventions (e.g., problem solving therapy; assertive community treatment etc.). Thus, EBP can be seen as a central feature for a scientific, accountable, informed, and ethical approach to social work practice (Brekke 2012).

Importance of Research in Social Work Science

Social work’s commitment to rigorous research is the major indicator for defining social work as a science. According to both Action Network for Social Work Education and Research (ANSWER); National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2015, social work research benefits consumers, practitioners, policymakers, educators, and the public through the examination of societal issues such as health care, substance abuse, and community violence; family issues, including child welfare and aging; well-being and resiliency; and the strengths and needs of underserved populations. Social work research identifies strategies and solutions that enhance individual, family, and community well-being by exploring the social, behavioral, and environmental connections to health and mental health issues, and examines the inter-relationships among individuals, families, neighborhoods, and social institutions by conducting research in schools, communities, health care facilities, and human service agencies. Social work research provides empirical support for best practice approaches to improve service delivery and public policies (NASW, 2015).

In 1988 the task force on Social Work research consisting of 13-members appointed and funded by NIMH and it developed a 108-page report entitled ‘Building Social Work Knowledge for Effective Services and Policies’. This report consists of six sections

beginning with a discussion of the ‘crisis’ in social work research and moving through research education, research productivity and research careers, research dissemination and utilization, support systems for research, and a plan for research development. Conclusions from this report are valuable as it helps others who view social work as a profession demonstrates that social work has a significant and important research dimension. This report advocates for more government funding, it calls for more research training for social work students with an emphasis on utilization and proficiency in methods and analytic techniques, and it advocates for strengthening accreditation standards pertaining to research and the integration of research and practice (National Advisory Mental Health Council, 1991).

In the past two decades historic improvements in the scope and quality of social work research and research capacity have been made through enormous investments by federal entities such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research (ASWR), and concentrated efforts by deans, directors, and faculty members. All of these have led to important advances in research infrastructure and capacity in many social work programs (Jenson, Briar-Lawson & Flanzer 2008).

In 2009, at the 13th Annual Meeting of the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR), the quality and quantity of social work was still criticized. Some scholars mentioned that ‘social work students, faculty, and the intellectual leaders of the profession (that is, editors, reviewers, and deans) are ill-prepared for the intellectual rigors of professional scholarship’ (Howard, 2009, p 4). In fact, there are indications of growth in the quantity and quality of social work research; however, serious systemic issues currently limit the production, utilization, and utility of social work research (Howard 2010).

Social work leaders have long debated the patterns of how social work researchers pursue scientific inquiry (Guerrero 2013). The general concern was the extent to which social work has adopted a methodological rather than substantive approach to conducting research (Brunswick Heineman 1981).

According to Tripodi and Potocky-Tripodi (2005), social work research is defined as the use of social research methods (e.g., qualitative research, participatory research, ethnographic field studies, case studies, needs assessments, program evaluations, single-subject designs, participant and nonparticipant observation, secondary data analyses, experiments, quasi experiments, surveys, etc.) for producing and disseminating knowledge (hypothetical, qualitative-descriptive, quantitative descriptive, associational or correlational, causal) that is pertinent to policies and practices that affect and/or are implemented by social work organizations, practitioners, administrators, and educators. The research methods employed depend on the level of knowledge sought, financial and ethical considerations, the sociopolitical environment, and expertise in the use of research methods (Tripodi 2005).

There are some authors who consider social work research in different context as the social work profession has its unique ethical values as it emphasizes human rights and human dignity, a commitment to serving marginalized and oppressed people, and a mission to foster a more just society (Witkin 1995). This ethical context is augmenting the value of social work research. In comparison with other helping professions, social work claims to embrace a very distinctive mission: to oppose the roots and effects of social oppression. Thus, social work research is considered as anti-oppressive research and it should be assessed from an anti-oppressive social work perspective (Strier 2007). Strier

(2007) argues that to match the liberating mission of the profession, social work research should defy the dominant traditions of social science research.

DePoy, Hartman and Haslet (1999) suggest a critical action research model as a framework for social work inquiry that is consistent with the mission, values, and aims of the profession. The philosophical foundation of this model is purposive, inclusive, empowering, and action oriented. Moreover, in concert with the contemporary trends for accountability and evidence-based practice, action orientation using this model is well informed by sound and participatory inquiry. This model provides a bridge between the university and the community and between research and practice. Although implementing such a model is a complex process, the critical action model provides systematic guidance through which multiple groups can assume a critical approach to knowledge that informs the development and implementation of social and human services. Action research can use action processes from either experimental and naturalistic traditions or an integration of the two. However, consistent with its principles, all research occurs within its natural context, and it relies on strategies that characteristically are interpretive in nature (DePoy, Hartman & Haslet 1999).

Proctor (2003) proposes so called intervention research as the most relevant for social workers. Moreover, social work researchers are encouraged to conduct not only intervention research, but also intervention informative research. Research about practice, its challenges, its priorities, and its participants, has the potential to inform intervention development and guide the application of existing interventions to new practice contexts. Thus, research needs to help us better understand problem severity, duration, variability over time, costs, and consequences for social and interpersonal functioning. Also important are clinical epidemiological studies that document problem prevalence among the clients served by social services agencies as they can inform treatment priorities and assessment protocols (Proctor 2003).

Social work needs to make a greater investment in producing scientific knowledge to enable community change (Coulton 2005). Social work research agendas should have more rigorous research designs, drawing on matching, time series, and other principals of experimentation (Coulton 2005). The use of statistical analyses to examine community influences should be multilevel, and spatial statistics should be incorporated into community intervention studies. For this reason more systematic and comparable methods of documenting community interventions and boundaries should be engaged (Coulton, 2005). Moreover, social work needs to invest in echometric, not just psychometrics Unick and Stone (2010). Unick and Stone (2010) also indicate the importance of employing more complicated measurement procedures for social work research. They focus on IRT (Item Response Theory) modeling as it provides greater capacity for understanding and accounting for measurement bias across diverse populations.

Current trends in social work research development show more focus on interdisciplinary and collaborative research. NIH aims at advancing social work research through four types of social work investigations: (1) studies that assess the effectiveness of existing social work services and interventions on health outcomes; (2) investigations to develop and test the effects of innovative social work interventions on client functioning; (3) proposals that aim to improve health outcomes through interventions delivered in nontraditional health care settings; and (4) studies that examine effective program implementation strategies in communities (Jenson 2006, 2008). Thus, Creating and sustaining interdisciplinary research is a significant challenge in the larger context of

infrastructure and research capacity which translates into competitive grant awards are increasingly inter- or multidisciplinary (Jenson 2008), Building investigative teams across disciplines occurs more quickly in a school or department culture that values input and scholarly contributions from other disciplines (Jenson, Briar-Lawson & Flanzer, 2008).

In response to interdisciplinary and collaborative research, the authors also offer a set of strategies for building and sustaining research collaborations between university and community-based social work professionals (Begun et al. 2010). Social work researchers, social work educators, and social work practitioners should engage in collaborative partnerships that improve social work practice through research and advance the knowledge base of the profession (Begun et al, 2010). Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is an emerging methodology for bridging gaps between research knowledge production and community-based practices (Ahmed, Beck, Maurana & Newton 2004; Currie et al. 2005; Jason, Pokornyji & Kunz 2005; O'Fallon & Dearry 2002; Viswanathan et al. 2004).

Finally, the notion of importance of building a translational science agenda in social work research became very actual issue (Brekke, Ell & Palinkas 2007; Fong 2012). Translational science takes both research informing practice competency and the practice informing research competency and operationalizes them to tie the researcher and the practitioner more closely together (Fong, 2012). There is a great need for translational research in mental health services for children and adults, schools, corrections, child welfare, and services for elderly (Brekke, Ell & Palinkas 2007).

The goal of translational science is to support research that will build the models and methods needed to bridge the science and service communities, and thereby directly affect the provision of services in all these usual care settings across sectors and populations. In this regard, NIMH prioritizes two goals for social work research: (1) to speed the use of promising and evidence based mental health practices into usual-care settings and (2) to train service researchers to develop and participate in interdisciplinary investigative teams (Brekke, Ell & Palinkas 2007). Thus, practice-based research or critical action research, intervention research and community based participatory research (so called translational research: a new horizon for social work research by Nurius, Brekke & Fong 2010) share an overarching theoretical framework and can be considered as the most appropriate types of social work research.

Doctoral Educational Standards for Social Work

Social work has significantly grown in terms of developing doctoral programs, scientific journals, a large body of published studies, and access to governmental and private funding to pursue research activities (Guerrerro 2014). However, the status of doctoral social work programs varies country by county (Ashley, et al. 2017).

In 1915, Bryn Mawr College established the first PhD program in social work in the United States. Since then, various forms of post-MSW education have been promoted, such as the research oriented PhD programs championed by Edith Abbot and Sophonisba Breckenridge in the 1920s and 1930s, the “third year” programs in psychiatric social work funded by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), and the practitioner-based doctoral programs (DSWs (Doctor of Social Work)) that emerged in the 1940s and 1950s (Lightfoot & Beltran, 2018). NIMH also funded various committees and task forces including the American Association of Schools of Social Work, and later the Committee on Advanced Curriculum of the CSWE (Council of Social Work Education), to study, monitor, and guide doctoral education in social work from the 1940s through the 1960s.

These task forces and committees developed three sets of guidelines for doctoral education in social work in 1946, 1953, and 1964, which were the precursors to the modern GADE PhD Program Quality Guidelines first published in 1992 (Lightfoot & Beltran, 2018).

In the United States the Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work (GADE) revised its Quality Guidelines for PhD Programs in Social Work (Fong, 2013). In the revised version the science of social work is mentioned (Harrington, Petr, Black, & Cunningham-Williams 2013). Today US social work applicants have two choices of doctoral degrees: the DSW (Doctor of Social Work) and the PhD. A doctorate in social work (DSW) prepares graduates for the most advanced jobs, such as administration, supervision, and staff training positions. The DSW is an applied degree in the sense that it prepares DSW holders for roles in practice settings as administrators, trainers, and evaluators. The DSW is a specialized, degree for social workers who wish to gain advanced training in research, supervision, and policy analysis. The course work tends to emphasize research and qualitative and quantitative analysis methods as well practice and supervision issues. Graduates engage in teaching, research, leadership roles, or in private practice. Typically the degree entails 2-4 years of coursework, and a doctoral candidacy examination, followed by dissertation research. The DSW program in clinical social work prepares licensed social workers for leadership roles in academic and agency settings.

The PhD in social work is a research degree. The DSW and PhD differ regarding emphasis on practice versus research. The DSW emphasizes training in practice, so graduates become expert practitioners, whereas the PhD emphasizes research, training graduates for careers in research and teaching. College and university teaching positions and most research appointments require a PhD and sometimes a DSW degree.

In contrast to doctoral programs in the United States, doctoral studies in social work in Europe do not have a long tradition. Laot (2000) conducted the research on doctoral studies in social work in several European countries before the Bologna reform. The survey showed that the courses are conducted as part of other disciplines. The programs differ from each other according to the time allocated to the research (Lyons 2010). The European Qualification Framework (EQF) defines the requirements for qualification at the doctoral level of education. An increasing number of European countries are offering doctoral degrees in social work, which relate to level 8 (the highest level) in the EQF. The general formulation of this level refers to academic degrees higher than MA (Leskošek & Matthies 2017).

Comparison of knowledge, skills and competences in social work doctoral education defined by GADE (quality guidelines for PhD programs in Social Work) and European Qualification Frame for doctoral studies are presented in the table below:

Table no. 1: Social Work knowledge, skills, and competences at doctoral level by GADE (2013) and European Qualification Frame for doctoral studies (European Parliament 2008; Matthies 2011)

	GADE	General descriptors defining level 8, European Qualifications Framework (EQF)
<i>Knowledge</i>	Theory and knowledge, research methods,	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of social

	<p>philosophy of science, history of the profession, social policy, diversity, ethics, content in any discipline relevant to program goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate their work in the intellectual landscape of social work. • Critically analyze theories, practices, policies, and research. • Understand the relations among social work education, research, and practice. • Understand how knowledge in social work is relevant to public issues, including promoting social justice and increasing equity. • Understand the role and importance of social work values and ethics in research and knowledge development. • Develop expertise in at least one specialized area of knowledge. 	<p>services, social work, and social sciences as well as at the interface between fields</p>
<p><i>Skill/Competences</i></p>	<p>Research Skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptualize significant, meaningful, and relevant social work research questions. • Critically evaluate and review published work in the student’s area of expertise. • Identify the strengths and limitations of their own research. • Conduct research that is guided by theory. • Understand both the technical aspects and conceptual underpinnings of a broad range of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most advanced and specialized skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice of social work • The ability to demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity, and sustained commitment to the

<p>methodological and statistical techniques.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate in-depth knowledge in the selection and application of the most rigorous, feasible, and appropriate methodological and data analysis approach(s) for the research question(s) posed.• Proactively and consistently implement plans for the responsible and ethical conduct of research.• Design and implement appropriate procedures for sampling and data collection.• Widely disseminate knowledge that contributes to the advancement of social work research, practice, and policy, including: writing publishable, peer-reviewed manuscripts; presenting at local, national, and international conferences; and producing policy briefs /white papers. <p>Teaching Skills: Understand and apply theories of adult learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Design and teach a course in a social work curriculum.• Create a learning culture and classroom climate that is inclusive of a diverse population of students and diverse learning styles.• Address ethical dilemmas that might arise in teaching.	<p>development of innovative ideas or processes at the forefront of social services and social work contexts including research</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the place of social work education within the larger context of higher education. 	
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The above described frame establishes a shared global idea of doctoral degrees as offering the ‘most advanced’ knowledge, skills, and competences in the following areas: in-depth knowledge of social work as a profession and discipline, research and scholarship, and teaching. Further, persons with a doctoral qualification should have a capacity to develop innovative, critical ideas and professional authority that enables needed changes in the field of social work. All of these correspond with the discipline’s understanding of both critical practice research (Marthinsen & Julkunen 2012) and critical realism (Pease 2010).

The sound doctoral education in social work can build long-term social work research capacity. Social work doctoral training should give opportunities for students to identify and study meaningful topics and social problems. Moreover, the doctoral education is the context for acquiring advanced methodological and analytical skills necessary to participate in knowledge development activities. Doctoral students need to become scholars of the academy, which means that they should be required to take courses that make social work distinctive in the PhD program like Social Justice and Human Behavior in the Social Environment (Fong 2013).

It is important to highlight intersectionality and a transdisciplinary approach for faculty who are teaching courses for doctoral students. This approach expands the scope of learning and mitigates the dichotomy between basic and applied research (Fong 2013). Thus, doctoral education needs multiple mentors from different disciplines to understand and use a multidisciplinary approach and doctoral programs should incorporate team-taught courses presenting a multidisciplinary framework (Fong 2012). For instance, a best practice is designing multi-professional teaching clinics, bringing together expertise from different social sciences/disciplines, e.g. psychology, public health, mental health, social policy to advance solutions to difficult social issues in the country.

Thus, the success of social work doctoral training is measured partially by the capacity of doctoral graduates to plan, propose, and implement research that contributes to the profession's knowledge base (Jenson, Briar-Lawson & Flanzer 2008). Social Work has not yet embarked on a significant review of the nature of doctoral research training. Strategies are needed to ensure that social work doctoral students contribute to the research capacity and knowledge development missions of our profession (Jenson, 2008).

Infrastructure support and research capacity are also critical at the department and university levels. Currently, many schools lack the fiscal resources necessary to help faculty members establish productive research programs. Consequently, common supports such as course releases, class buyout policies, and proposal development funds are simply unavailable in many schools of social work (Jenson, Briar-Lawson & Flanzer 2008).

Internationalization of social work programs is exceedingly difficult as this profession is highly dependent on language and the interpretation of culture and is thus country specific. Social work can be quite fragile inside its own country specific settings, especially in the current times of rapid and extensive changes to the welfare state (Leskošek & Matthies 2017). According to Jones (2013), the varying political and social histories of different states require broader international alliances that would enable a common social work identity.

There are new forms of international activity that can support the development of doctoral studies. Since 2011 the European Conference of Social Work Research (ECSWR) has been held, and in this frame a European Social Work Research Association ESWRA was established in 2014. Together with the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) they may also offer opportunities of internationalization for doctoral students of social work globally. They not only enable PhD students' networking but also offer an exciting platform for training and presenting research to one of the highest levels of international audience (Leskošek & Matthies 2017).

Doctoral Education in Georgia

The post-Soviet states have gone through multiple reformation processes at all levels of social life including the dramatic reconstructing of their economic, political, and welfare systems. Such transformation has created opportunity for social work as a new profession responsible for dealing with the prevailing social needs of its citizens (An 2014). Consequently, the priority task became preparation of a social work force through university and academic education. As a result, Bachelor, Master and, rarely Doctoral programs were established to prepare professionals in Social Work. However, the new profession of Social Work is significantly challenged within academia, as it is not seen as a scientific and research field and sometimes, is seen as a vocation and "secondary" profession. The consequent lack of qualified social work practice and policy researchers, as afforded in the research university setting, prevents internal and comparative research, as well as the delineation of best social work practices at micro and macro levels, and the production of adequate professional workforce (Sadzaglishvili, 2017).

The social work programs developed at two universities of the country - Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (TSU) and Ilia State University in 2006. Graduate, undergraduate and post doctoral programs in social work count more than 500 graduates at the time of the writing of this article. However, there are only two graduates from doctoral programs in Georgia.

Doctoral program is three to five years program that requires prerequisite of MSW degree or BSW degree. The program also includes bachelor and master graduates from the broader field of Social and Behavioral Sciences and Social Welfare and Health. Candidates are required to present certification of English Language on B2 level that is TOEFL (P/B at least 513 points; I/BT at least 78 points); IELTS (at least 5.5 points); FCE. Candidates also must present their doctoral research statement and participate at oral exam/interview.

The program at Ilia State University is elaborated according to the GADE standards and by support of the individual Fulbright Research Grant ID # 68141013 – "Enhancing Research Capacity and Knowledge Development through Social Work Doctoral Education" that aimed to study Silver School of Social Work doctoral program at New York University and adapt this model into Georgian reality.

To facilitate internationalization of the program, there are several international scholars involved in students' scientific mentorship and supervision. They are also involved in competence development workshops and seminars. The major interest is in joint research project development.

The purpose of the PhD in social work is to prepare students to be scholars who function as "stewards of the discipline." (GADE, 2013). The aim is to improve the art and

science of social work by generating, disseminating, and conserving the knowledge that informs and transforms professional practice. The domains of social work inquiry

derive from the social work’s mission and purpose: “to enhance human well-being and help meet the needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty” (GASW Code of Ethics 2021).

After completion of the program students will be able (1) by locating their work in the intellectual landscape of social work, critically analyzing theories, practices, policies, and research, to create new knowledge in social work through using innovative methods for accomplishing social work research independently; (2) To safeguard professional and academic ethics within social work context to work with stigmatized and oppressed individuals and group systems; (3) To reflect outcomes of research in international peer-reviewed journals to extend knowledge in social work theory and practice; (4) To transfer knowledge to auditorium through teaching and learning process; (5) Based on the modern knowledge to develop further processes and new ideas in the spheres such as child welfare, probation and criminal justice systems, rehabilitation of disabled people, elderly, addiction, alcohol abuse, HIV/AIDS prevention and etc. in other words, tot develop expertise in at least one specialized area of knowledge; (6) to develop research and funding proposals, both independently and in collaboration with others.

The main infrastructure for doctoral program (research center) was created by the support of the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation. (SRNSFG) [#FR 17_31] under the research grant “HIV prevention Among Street Connected Youth” that was funded by This research”. PhD students were involved in this study to prepare their dissertations. This is Transdisciplinary Research Center (TRC) named “Research Center for Advancing Science in Social Services and Interventions” at Ilia State University, Faculty of Arts and Science, which comprised of ISU professors, senior local investigators, community/civic organization members, social service providers and practitioners, and international experts to facilitate transdisciplinary social intervention research in Georgia by using translational research tools. This center provides information, workshops, consultation, and other resources to assist young scholars: master and doctoral students. There are 9 professors and 3 international consultants assigned for this program.

During the PhD program students must accumulate 60 credits and publish one peer-reviewed article in international journal. Below there is structure of the program.

Table no. 2. Structure of the program at Ilia State University

Components	Semesters										ECTS	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
Mandatory Courses (48 credits)												
Doctoral Seminar 1												6
Doctoral Seminar 2												6
Preparation of Doctoral thesis												-
Writing for Academic												6

Publication											
Modern Social Work Research and Methods											6
Social Work Research Methods											6
Teaching Assistance											12
Curriculum development and learning and teaching strategies in higher education											6
Dissertation											-
Mandatory Elective (6 credits)											
Statistical Modeling											6
Qualitative Research Methods											6
Free Elective (6 credits)											
Elective course from Social Science Field											6
											Total: 60 credits

Ilia State University, Research Center for Advancing Science in Social Services and Intervention conducted a 4 day- conference in 2021 on the topic “Social Work – Science for Social Change”.

The conference was dedicated to the celebration of the World Social Work Day. The goal of the conference was to support and promote social work as practical science in Georgia by holding the first scientific conference in the field and by increasing the interest of young professionals in research and science as some of the most critical areas and roles for a social worker. An additional goal was to share the Georgian scientific experience with the scholars in the field of social work, researchers, practitioners, experts, students, representatives of related fields and other interested persons. As a result of the discussion, the main characteristics of the social work scientific research were developed. The results were printed and published with the support from Ilia State University (57 Aspects of Social Work Research). This material is used by the doctoral programs in Social Work to set standards for doctoral education.

Conclusions

Social work as a scientific field is still at the developmental stage in Georgia as well as worldwide. For example “Social Work Research” itself is not clearly and coherently identified by well-known American and European social work scholars. Thus, it is critical

to promote an idea of Social Work as Science, especially, in the countries where social work is a newly emerging discipline (Sadzaglishvili, 2017).

As historical analysis of social work development showed one direct way of promoting social work as a science is to establish sound doctoral programs in research university settings (Reid, 2011). Sound doctoral education in social work should be based on the international standards (GADE, EQF) and should focus on teaching qualitative as well as on quantitative and positivistic approaches and comprehensive research methodologies to identify and study meaningful topics and social problems.

In combination with establishing sound doctoral programs in social work it is necessary to develop research infrastructure (e.g. research centers, grants) for social work doctoral programs. For this reason forming social work research lobbying organizations is critical for advancing “Social Work Research” opportunities.

Finally, Schools of Social Work should implement Translational Research as an advanced social work research modality that will open ways of dialogue and collaboration between university and community. Consequently, social work will gain stronger position among other well-developed scientific disciplines by promoting its theoretical and practice basis comprehensively. Translational Research opportunities in the transitional contexts of the post-Soviet countries will have a positive effect on dissemination practices of social interventions by facilitating evidence-based, sustainable solutions to emerging public health and social challenges.

Authors contributions

S. S. - Conceptualization, Literature Review, Methodology, Data Analysis and Interpretation, Writing – review & editing.

J. T. D. – Supervision and Final Revision.

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Authors biographies

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