Dissemination of applied research to the field: attitudes and practices of faculty authors in social work

In applied research disciplines like social work, there is a clear disconnect between the production and dissemination of research and the access and use of research in practice. This research/practice divide is particularly problematic for practitioners required to work within evidence-based or research-informed frameworks. To explore this issue, we conducted a nationwide survey and qualitative interviews with social work faculty regarding their research dissemination attitudes and practices, especially to non-academic audiences. The survey and interviews provide data on faculty dissemination methods, attitudes toward gold and green open access and promotion and tenure considerations. Results demonstrate that faculty are primarily engaged with traditional publishing models and much less engaged with dissemination to non-academic audiences. Faculty are skeptical of open access journals, avoid article processing charges and are only minimally engaged with institutional repositories. Faculty are conflicted regarding the dissemination of their research, especially in the context of promotion and tenure. Shifting dissemination outside of non-academic audiences would require increased confidence in open access, support for the creation of practitioner-focused materials and prioritizing the impact of research on practice.

Keywords

applied research; research dissemination; open access; social work

KIMBERLY PENDELL

Social Work and Social Sciences Librarian
Associate Professor
University Library
Portland State University

ERICKA KIMBALL

Associate Professor
School of Social Work
Portland State University

Introduction

As in other professional practice fields, social work researchers produce research meant to be directly applied to work in the field. But the barriers to research utilization in practice are complex, involving everything from lack of generalizability and relevance on the research side, and lack of training and workplace support on the practice side. Gray et al.[1] provide a quick distillation of the situation, 'Repeated claims are well recognised, on the one hand that practitioners make too little use of research and on the other that researchers pay insufficient attention to making their findings known, useful and usable'. An often-mentioned barrier to practitioners making use of research is that they do not have access to research in the first place. Meanwhile, the lack of broad or substantial discussion

on the access barrier supports the claim of the researchers' 'insufficient attention'. This disconnect within social work exemplifies that of other practice-oriented fields where the majority of graduates will enter the workplace, lose their affiliation with higher education institutions (and therefore institutional subscriptions to expensive journals) and also face an expectation of informing their practice decisions with recent research findings. Access to research articles in the field is bare-boned – even the core professional association, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), only provides its members full text access to one of its four scholarly journals.

Our previous research on social workers and barriers to evidence-based practice (EBP) informed this study. We found that practitioners rely heavily on research articles but are unable to access those to the extent needed.[2] To examine the flip side of this problem, in this study we explored the research dissemination practices of social work researchers based on data from a nationwide survey and follow-up qualitative interviews. We inquired about faculty attitudes and practices towards reaching non-academic audiences, gold and green open access (OA), research dissemination in the context of promotion and tenure, and impact in the practice field. While we focused on the discipline of social work, similar barriers exist in other applied practice disciplines, especially those that employ the EBP framework, such as education.

'practitioners rely heavily on research articles but are unable to access those to the extent needed'

Literature review

Social work research is most often produced and disseminated to inform practitioners working in the field. However, there are a myriad of disconnects and complications that stifle the flow of information between researchers and practitioners throughout the knowledge production cycle. Lack of access to research is commonly cited in the social work literature as a problem for practitioners.[3] This problem was identified much earlier as well by the federally funded Social Work Policy Institute's Task Force on Social Work Research[4] in 1991, who determined that the dissemination of research to the practitioners is 'fragmented and inefficient'. More recently, the issue of access is almost exclusively discussed in EBP implementation studies, as EBP (or research-informed practice) is the framework that most explicitly requests social workers utilize research in practice.

In their substantial review and analysis of the EBP implementation literature in social work, Osterling and Austin[5] identified four key factors related to the dissemination and utilization of research: individual, organizational, research and communication. Each of these factors encompasses sets of 'barriers' and 'facilitators'. While many of the factors involve education, training, organizational problems and differing priorities between researchers and practitioners, the lack of access to research stands out as structural to scholarly communication.[6] Similarly, Teater[7] concluded that four interrelated barriers impact the use of research by practitioners:

1. Researchers' ability to conduct research rigorous enough to be of use by other researchers and practitioners.
2. Social work practitioners' ability to understand research and value its importance.
3. Inaccessibility of research articles published in academic journals.
4. Incentives in the university system that center on academic journals and conferences.

Our survey of social workers demonstrated that they rely on peer-reviewed research articles in order to keep current with the profession, to inform their practice on both general and specific practice issues. This use of the research literature also aligned with their frequent use of EBP, which emphasizes the use of primary research literature. Of the respondents who could not access research articles, 91% cited cost as the barrier.[8]

Remaining with the status quo of academic publishing is sensible for social work faculty operating in a rewards system that does not prioritize non-academic audiences. In examining the public dimensions of scholarship in a large body of promotion and tenure guidelines, Alperin et al.[9] noted that 'measures of prestige and impact reinforce the most commonly found publishing formats and venues … at the expense of other forms that might serve public needs more directly …' Teater[10] also concluded that social work researchers experience tension between their need to meet the requirements of the university, which emphasizes writing for their academic peers, versus meeting the need of the profession itself. Perhaps key to the dilemma here is the absence of incentives or clear metrics for the impact of one's scholarship outside of the academy.[11]

Though this tension is present across disciplines, it seems more remarkable in social work considering that almost all research is applied, and that the field overall is so social justice and equity focused. Recently, some in social work have advocated for 'public impact' scholarship. Silva et al.[12] propose that 'public impact scholarship in social work is characterized by intentional efforts to create social change through the translation and dissemination of research to nonacademic audiences'. In regard to dissemination, proponents of public impact scholarship set aside access to research articles in favor of more easily digestible secondary products such as blogs and podcasts for practitioners. While secondary and less traditional research dissemination is important, it is unclear how the proponents of public impact scholarship intend to reconcile this recommendation with EBP and practitioners' expressed need for peer-reviewed research articles, as well as the demands of promotion and tenure guidelines that almost always prioritize peer-reviewed research articles.

Proposed solutions from within the field almost never involve shifting scholarly publication practices, rather the suggestions work within the traditional subscription-based publishing model and center on increased funding to pay for journals and databases.[13] One exception is that of Holden, 'Publishers should consider ways in which they can increase the free flow of scholarly communication (e.g. removing restrictive practices regarding the use of copyrighted materials, becoming a green journal and removing publication process obstacles in the production realm).'[14] Five years later, Bowen et al.[15] argued for open access as a pathway for social workers in the field, citing the high cost of subscriptions. Since then, even as the open access movement grew significantly and the access barrier became well documented, the field of social work has made little movement towards either gold or green OA practices. Very few journals related to social work are gold OA and the deposit of preprint or author accepted manuscripts in either institutional or disciplinary repositories is negligible.[16] No evidence of challenging the status quo of research dissemination as it relates to academic publishing could be found via searches of social work association websites such as the NASW and the Council for Social Work Education. However, as Alperin et al.[17] proposed, 'OA could alleviate this tension and facilitate access to research outside of academia: OA could be a bridge that links research activities, published in traditional formats, to expanded engagement with more diverse groups of users and stakeholders, fulfilling the public patronage imperative of universities.'

The many practitioners who rely on research to inform their work constitute a large, interested group of stakeholders. Yet, in the social sciences overall there appears to be low motivation to publish OA, or otherwise make articles available publicly.[18] In addition to social sciences writers questioning the usefulness of OA, lack of explicit encouragement or support to pursue more publicly accessible publishing practices in promotion and tenure guidelines are also likely to have an impact on their engagement. In their analysis of over 100 representative promotion and tenure guidelines from universities in the U.S. and Canada, Alperin et al.[19] discovered that while the idea of serving the public and community frequently appeared in guidelines, there was a lack of incentive or structure for this work and no effective way of measuring these contributions. The consequence is that faculty prioritize what can be counted in the academic environment, even if that is contradictory to the values of the institution and discipline, just as Teater described.[20]

Methods

This study was approved by the Portland State University Institutional Review Board. We conducted a purposive sampling of tenure and non-tenure line faculty in Council of Social Work Education accredited schools and departments of social work in the United States to recruit participants for the survey and interviews. The list included 200 faculty members across the ranks of professor, associate professor, assistant professor and non-tenure track, as well as across institutional Carnegie classifications, ranging from very high research activity institutions to baccalaureate colleges. We sent an e-mail invitation to participate in the survey and two reminder e-mails were sent after the initial recruitment e-mails. Informed consent was obtained prior to beginning the survey and participating in the follow-up interviews. We received 42 responses, which is a response rate of 21%.

We based the 15-question survey on a review of social work and library science literature and piloted the survey with a small number of faculty in our home institution. In the finalized survey, participants were asked about their degree, rank and institution type, the percentage of time allocated to research, teaching and service, metrics used in promotion and tenure process, application of research to practice and methods of dissemination, including open access. We used display logic to ask follow-up questions based on the previous response, particularly regarding OA publishing and repository use. At the end of the survey participants were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview to discuss these topics further.

We conducted and recorded follow-up interviews using a video-conferencing application and then fully transcribed the discussion. We performed a thematic analysis of the data by reading the interviews in depth, independently coding two sample transcripts, discussing emerging themes, independently coding of all interviews, cross-checking of identified themes across interviews and performing a final coding of all interviews. Direct quotes from participants were identified to provide context, and to ensure that the themes reflected the viewpoints of the participants. To ensure confidentiality, interview participants are referred to by number and any potentially identifying information was eliminated from direct quotes.

Results

Participants

A total of 42 faculty members responded to the survey; see Table 1 for their age and rank distributions. None of the non-tenure track faculty recruited for the survey responded, this is an unfortunate limitation of the data collected.

Age	Assistant Professor (n = 13)	Associate Professor (n = 16)	Full Professor (n = 13)
20–30			
31–40	10	4	
41–50	3	3	1
51–60		5	7
61–70		4	4
70+			1

Table 1. Survey participant age range and rank

The majority of respondents had a PhD in social work, otherwise one doctorate in social work, a PhD in clinical psychology, and a doctorate in education. Fifty per cent indicated that they were from a very high research activity classified institution; 29% from a high research activity institution, and the remaining 21% from a teaching intensive institution.

A total of 12 survey participants volunteered to be interviewed for the study – all who volunteered were contacted to schedule the interview. After non-responses and declines, we interviewed a total of seven faculty members; see Table 2 for the participants' rank and institutional classification.

Interview Participant	Rank	Carnegie Mellon Classification
Researcher 1	Associate Professor	Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity (R2)
Researcher 2	Assistant Professor	Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity (R1)
Researcher 3	Associate Professor	Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity (R1)
Researcher 4	Professor	Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity (R2)
Researcher 5	Assistant Professor	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs (M1)
Researcher 6	Associate Professor	Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity (R2)
Researcher 7	Professor	Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity

Table 2. Interview participant rank and institution classification

Research for practice

In order to create a baseline regarding the relationship between research and practice, we asked the participants if they conduct research with a direct practice application: 86% replied 'yes', with an almost even distribution across the ranks of assistant, associate and professor. We also asked respondents to indicate to what extent their interactions with practitioners shape their scholarship: a combined 70% replied 'always' or 'usually', with more assistant and associate professors in this group than professors.

Interview participants often cited their previous experience as social workers/clinicians as foundational to their academic careers and research interests. Researcher 5 (Assist. Prof., M1) noted that the disconnect between research and practice shaped her path, '… because of my experience in clinical practice and kind of seeing how there was at times a disconnect between some of the more popular and nuanced evidence-based practices and the applicability of them in the field that I was always curious and interested in pursuing research at a higher degree.'

Methods of research dissemination

Survey participants were asked to indicate which traditional and less traditional dissemination methods they use for their research (see Tables 3 and 4). Overall, there was little difference between ranks and their use of either traditional or less traditional research dissemination methods, with almost even distribution across rank for each variable. Even though 86% survey respondents conduct research with a direct practice application, it appears their means of disseminating research via journals and academic conferences prioritizes fellow social work researchers.

In regard to the less traditional dissemination venues, ResearchGate and Academia.edu were the dominant choices versus more broadly accessible platforms. Researchers are sharing findings with the field primarily via professional conferences and community/agency-based training. Fifty-four per cent of those who indicated using Twitter were assistant professors versus 24% associate professors and 24% professors, an exception to the even distribution across ranks. Facebook use was also higher among assistant professors, 57% versus 29% and 14% respectively.

Academic conference (e.g. SSWR, CSWE)
Peer-reviewed journal
Professional conference (e.g. NASW)
Community or agency-based training
Webinar via an academic or professional organization
Agency or Government White Paper/Report
Professional/practice-focused publications (e.g. magazine, website)
Other
Institutional or disciplinary archive/repository

Table 3. Which formal, or more traditional, methods do you use to disseminate your research/scholarship? (Select all that apply)

ResearchGate or Academia.edu	69%
Twitter	31%
None	17%
Personal website site or blog	17%
Facebook	17%
Podcast	10%
Other	10%
Instagram	5%
Video (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo)	5%

Table 4. Which social media, or less traditional, methods do you use to disseminate your research/scholarship? (Select all that apply)

Participants acknowledged that the traditional dissemination methods did not reach practitioners, with one respondent, Researcher 3 (Assoc. Prof., R1), mentioning that practitioner friends ask them to download articles 'because they can't get behind those paywalls'. Researcher 3 further articulated the inherent contradiction with research dissemination and the EBP-related demands of the field by ending with, 'They can't get access to stuff, and we expect them to do evidence-based practices.'

'Participants acknowledged that the traditional dissemination methods did not reach practitioners'

Promotion and tenure versus impact in the field

In the interviews, participants were asked about the perceived impact of their research in the practice community and how they might include these impacts into their tenure and promotion process. These questions elicited responses that demonstrated the tension between research and practice, and their associated dissemination practices, which are often thought of as wholly different and separate. Dissemination to the practice community was often described as 'translation' and took the form of local agency training, continuing education events or practice-focused publications. Some of the researchers relied on their relationships with practitioners to share their findings or partner with other research dissemination entities. For example, Researcher 5 (Assist. Prof., M1) relies on speaking with agency staff to 'translate it [research finding] in a way in which it's digestible, it's comprehensible, it's applicable directly to the work they're doing at all different levels'. Researcher 4 (Prof., R2) was working on partnering with the 'National Clearinghouse kind of folks that practitioners tend to go to before they go to peer-reviewed literature' and writing a brief for them in order to 'put stuff in those spaces'.

While most believed these other forms of dissemination to the field to be of value overall, interview participants indicated that time, energy and funds to disseminate to non-academic audiences necessarily become secondary to that of academic audiences, and that it was unclear how to measure or count research dissemination in the field in promotion and tenure documentation. The tension between dissemination outside of academia and the demands of academia were exemplified by the comments such as Researcher 3's (Assoc. Prof., R1) '…[W]e often got those research reports done; we rarely got the publications done, right? And now that I'm in a faculty position, I feel like it's almost the opposite way. I get those manuscripts done, and I don't always have the time to really dig in deep and get the research findings disseminated.' Researcher 2 (Assist. Prof., R1) also described the challenge and lack of clarity on the issue with, 'My understanding of the tenure and promotion process in my college is that a bulk of the weight is still put on the traditional metrics of publication and grant submissions and getting grants funded. However, I know that, at least within the college of social work, that there is still a piece of that pie that is geared towards community interaction … it's not very clear what that means, or like how it's measured.'

Open Access Publishing and Repository Archiving

In response to the survey question 'Have you submitted to an OA journal?', 55% indicated 'yes', 45% indicated 'no'. The distribution across ranks in response to this question shows that associate professors have submitted to an OA journal more than the other ranks

(Table 5). Those who had submitted to an OA journal were then asked about their reasons for doing so (see Table 6); those who had not submitted to an OA journal were asked for their reasons for not doing so (see Table 7).

	Yes	No
Assistant Professor	5	8
Associate Professor	12	4
Full Professor	6	7

Table 5. Have you submitted to an open access journal?

	% of N = 23 responses
Coincidence; journal was a good fit for the research, open access was secondary consideration	78%
Practitioner and/or community member access	39%
Feeling of social responsibility, contributing to public good	35%
Possibility of increased citations	30%
Other	13%

Table 6. Please identify all applicable reasons for submitting to an open access journal

	% of N = 19 responses
No funding for article processing charges (if applicable)	79%
Concern about the quality of open access journals	68%
Concern about academic peers and/or administrators' perception of open access journals	37%
Concern about the impact of open access journals	32%
No open access journals that fit a specific paper or project	11%
No open access journals in my area of research/scholarship	11%
Other	11%

Table 7. Please identify all applicable reasons related to not submitting to an open access journal

Concern about the quality of OA journals was cited frequently as a reason for not submitting to OA journals. This concern is likely exacerbated by predatory journals, as two participants noted in their interviews. Researcher 6 (Assoc. Prof., R2) explained her dilemma with a manuscript, 'So then we just tried to find another reputable open access journal, but that was actually very tricky – to try and figure out like which one is predatory, which one is not …' Researcher 2 (Assist. Prof., R1) explained that their thinking on OA publishing had evolved from concerns of quality to cost:

> 'I think if you would have asked me this a couple years ago I would have said "It's all a scam", like, 'cause you know there's so many predatory journals out there, but as the reputable journals have started to offer these possible options, and as more open access journals have kind of solidified their ethical practices in the peer review process over the last five to ten years, I feel like it's now become much more acceptable to me to seek it out as I've kind of matriculated into a faculty position and moved it forward for my career. But it's not 100% yet, in part because of the cost associated with it.'

'Concern about the quality of OA journals was cited frequently as a reason for not submitting'

Funding for article processing charges (APCs) poses an ongoing problem for social work faculty who desire to publish OA. Both survey and interview results demonstrate this; in addition to funding cited as the primary barrier in the survey data, five of seven interview participants also referred to APC cost as the barrier. Researcher 3 (Assoc. Prof., R1) stated '… I would happily pay those open access fees if I could, right? If I had them in the budget, I would publish all of my articles open access 'cause I do think that that really helps.'

Among survey participants, archiving research in either institutional or disciplinary repositories was engaged with less than OA publishing: 60% had not deposited an article (preprint, author accepted manuscript, or publisher PDF) in a repository. Fifty-seven per cent indicated being unfamiliar with repositories as the reason for not doing so, followed by much smaller percentages citing concerns about copyright, not having time or knowing how to submit, or that there was not an appropriate repository for their research. Two participants who entered reasons for not submitting under 'other' stated, 'No incentive to do so' and 'Just not something I would think to do'. For those who had submitted to a repository, 41% did so because it was a requirement of the grant funder. Researcher 3 (Assoc. Prof., R1) mentioned that their university's institutional repository was very helpful in the dissemination of research reports and noted that it made research 'much more available to the practitioners'.

Discussion

Our survey and interview data provide a window into the tensions and gaps between research and practice, particularly the dissemination of research. Most researchers design their studies in order to have direct practice application, but the dissemination of those same studies is primarily to other researchers, not to the field. Researchers, often former practitioners themselves, know this, but working in the context of academia drives even the most well-meaning of them to focus their time and energy on scholarly dissemination first. Fifty-five per cent of researchers also present at professional conferences and community or agency-based training,[21] given that social workers heavily rely on these types of events to inform their practice, this is a valuable dissemination pathway for researchers trying to reach the field. However, less than 20% of survey participants are disseminating research to the practitioner audience via professional or practice-focused publications. It is possible that the low engagement with publishing in these spaces is a reflection of the low weight they might be given in the context of promotion and tenure. ResearchGate and Academia.edu easily bested other less traditional venues as means of sharing research. These monetized platforms were built for researchers to network and build their academic reputations,[22] not to share research with non-academic audiences. However, one interview participant described ResearchGate as a space for the public to find their articles and thought of it as an alternative to OA journal publishing.

Researchers could use gold or green OA strategies to facilitate practitioner use of their work. Research articles could either be published in an open access journal or a version of the article deposited in an institutional or disciplinary repository. The survey data indicated that over half of the participants had submitted to an OA journal. However, this appears contradictory to the comments of almost all of the interview participants who remarked that OA publishing was unavailable to them due to APC cost. Additionally, the availability of OA journal titles in social work overall is quite small, only 12 of 281 titles.[23] Also, in our study faculty unfamiliarity with institutional or disciplinary repositories remains high, despite most of the survey respondents being from R1 (very high research activity) institutions, where one might expect a higher level of awareness and more institutional support for repository archiving. Funder requirements appear to be the primary driver of repository, rather than a broader understanding of how the repository provides access to scholarship to the public.

Occasionally, social work researchers frame the research/practice gap as a product of the practitioners themselves, braiding together lack of access, interest and skill, at least for research articles. It is difficult to unwind these comments, such as that of Researcher 1 (Assoc. Prof., R2), 'So for most of the people that I've worked with here in the community, they don't care. They don't see it. They don't have access to it…' and Researcher 6 (Assoc. Prof., R2), 'They didn't really want to read the articles, even at that high level, they don't read the articles…. I say they don't, it could just be a reflection of they don't have library access, so that's why they don't.' Additionally, there was concern expressed that practitioners do not have the skills to properly interpret research findings as presented in a scholarly article, 'And then we also know that clinicians are paywalled all the time behind actually getting to this research let alone being able to fully understand what the research means … they only have one or two stats courses and that doesn't really teach you how

to read and understand some of these research articles' (Researcher 5, Assist. Prof., M1). Comments such as this were ubiquitous, and point to problems in practitioner education and, yet again, the disconnect between what happens in the academic environment versus the practice environment. Could there be other approaches to teaching research methods that are more grounded in how research is accessed and digested in the field? And could prioritizing other means of dissemination more suited to the field increase practitioner engagement with research?

Overall, the researchers who participated in the interviews appear to recognize the bind that both they and those in the field experience: their research is supposed to inform practice, but many barriers prevent effective access and utilization of their research. Researcher 5 (Assist. Prof., M1) expressed that social sciences research has clear value outside of academia, but the means of dissemination is problematic:

> 'So I guess I'm just trying to say that there's no one right way to do research or no one right way to disseminate research, but definitely that having these paywalls that do exist in some places and not in others, especially when it comes to some of the higher-tier research, is definitely not conducive to the purpose of most social science research, which is science that helps practitioners, science that helps humanity, science that helps the communities in which we collect the data from.'

'could prioritizing other means of dissemination more suited to the field increase practitioner engagement'

Based on this study, we recommend that faculty in practice-focused disciplines, such as social work, reshape promotion and tenure metrics to explicitly encourage dissemination to practitioners and communities via OA publishing and other, more accessible, venues. For example, alternative metrics can provide data associated with dissemination in social media, blogs and news outlets, which could be included in a candidate's portfolio. Schools and departments of applied research disciplines should also consider how they want to capture demonstration of community impact and add this information to their guidelines.

Grant funders and institutions could also support better dissemination into the field by building communication infrastructure (people and resources) to help researchers translate their research into practitioner-friendly materials; for example, Researcher 2 (Assist. Prof., R1) explained that their institution has a public relations office that helped create infographics and press releases for new research publications. This strategy appeared to increase the amount of public engagement with the research, demonstrated by website traffic and download statistics with the research, and 'it really showed us the benefit of trying to think about how this is consumed by communities'.

While OA journal articles might not be the ideal solution versus more digestible, applied practice publications, our previous study found that practitioners are relying on primary research articles to inform their practice.[24] We recommend increasing the amount of OA in social work and applying pressure to professional associations like the NASW to move to OA would make a difference in the field. Additionally, social work journals could support practitioners by integrating 'implications for practice' or 'clinical bottom line' in their abstracts, which are often publicly accessible.

'Librarians play a pivotal role in increasing access to research in the field'

Librarians play a pivotal role in increasing access to research in the field by engaging with faculty on the topic of publishing and research impact. Faculty demonstrated bias against OA journals, indicating the need for increased outreach from librarians on OA publishing, funding models and journal quality. Resources to support this outreach could include the Open Access Quality Indicators created by Beaubien and Eckard, *Think. Check. Submit.* and the Committee on Publication Ethics' *Core Practices*.[25] Building interest and engagement in alternative metrics among faculty could encourage the value of broader dissemination practices. When performing outreach on OA publishing and repositories, librarians can advocate for practitioner research access, using the research/practice divide dilemma to illustrate the importance of sharing research more broadly.

Librarians also need to be on the frontlines of developing and promoting OA funding models that do not include APCs. APCs are recognized as problematic, especially for researchers in underfunded fields or at under-resourced institutions.[26] In the findings of this study, APCs are a significant barrier preventing faculty from publishing OA. Though the idea of increasing available funding for APCs might be attractive, funding APCs via library budgets long term could be throwing good money after bad, especially if the hybrid journal model continues to exploit the research and library community's good intentions. In order to resolve this stumbling block, we encourage other models such as platinum OA or 'subscribe to open', where library funding is redirected to supporting publishing that is free to both the author and the reader. Finally, librarians should consider highlighting public access citation databases (e.g. PubMed and ERIC), Google Scholar and full text access via institutional or disciplinary repositories when providing instruction to students, as these better reflect what will most likely be available to them in the field. For effective implementation of EBP or research-informed practice, practitioners need to know where they can access research, rather than be cut off after graduation.

We recognize the limitations of this study and that areas of further research are needed. The limitations of this study are primarily those of selection bias. While the survey recruitment e-mail was sent to faculty across rank and institutional classification, those faculty who are interested in research dissemination self-selected to participate. The smaller, teaching-intensive colleges with accredited social work programs sometimes lacked faculty directories, so recruiting participants from those institutions was limited. Most unfortunately, none of the 16 non-tenure track faculty recruited for the survey participated; the perspective of this group would have been valuable as they are often working in the field as well as serving in an academic role. Further research on access to research in the field is warranted, such as a cross-disciplinary study including fields like education and nursing. Also, in order to resolve the contradictory data regarding OA journal publishing by social work researchers versus the very small number of OA social work journals, a citation study is needed to determine if faculty are publishing OA, but outside of journals commonly considered to be social work titles. A forthcoming publication based on the data obtained for this study will explore researchers' relationships with practitioners and the research/practice feedback loop, particularly in the context of the Council of Social Work Education's accreditation standards and competency requirements.

Conclusion

While the research/practice divide dilemma consists of many factors, dissemination is an important piece of the puzzle. We cannot extrapolate beyond our sample in social work, but it is fairly safe to say that other professional fields have the same problematic divide and issue of effective research dissemination. For example, studies by Cooper, and Cooper, Klinger and McAdie[27] support very similar conclusions in the field of education as those described here. Some of the problem can be ameliorated by individuals publishing OA, archiving in publicly accessible repositories and creating materials targeted to non-academic audiences: these are all beneficial steps towards providing needed access to research. However, placing these burdens on individual faculty is likely to be unsustainable, similar to the problem of APCs. Larger conversations are needed within applied practice disciplines about how to better recognize research impact in the field and adjust their practices and priorities as a whole accordingly.

Data accessibility statement
The survey data are available as a .csv file at **https://osf.io/sj3e6/**
Interview data is not publicly available in order to ensure participant confidentiality.

Abbreviations and Acronyms
A list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in this and other *Insights* articles can be accessed here – click on the URL below and then select the 'full list of industry A&As' link: **http://www.uksg.org/publications#aa**

Competing interests
The authors have declared no competing interests.

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Corresponding author:
Kimberly Pendell
Social Work and Social Sciences Librarian
Associate Professor
University Library
Portland State University, US
E-mail: kpendell@pdx.edu
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-3149-1271

Co-author:
Ericka Kimball
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8750-6666

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