Sociology and Social Work Research
Challenging Knowledge about Social Problems
Nissen, Maria Appel; Jacobsen, Michael Hviid

Publication date:
2012

Document Version
Early version, also known as pre-print

Link to publication from Aalborg University

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at vbn@aub.aau.dk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from vbn.aau.dk on: February 16, 2020

Abstract

Maria Appel Nissen, PhD. Sociology, Associate Professor, maan@socsci.aau.dk
Michael Hviid Jacobsen, Professor Sociology, mhj@socsci.aau.dk
Aalborg University, Department of Sociology and Social Work
Kroghstræde 7, 9220 Aalborg, Denmark

Sociology and Social Work Research

Challenging knowledge about social problems

Despite differences – some say substantial, others superficial – in scientific traditions, one of the obvious relations between sociology and social work research can be characterized as a mutual interest in the social, and by using sociological theories and methods in the practice of research, both sociology and social work research face the challenge of understanding and explaining the social. This challenge is related to the complex forms and processes of social realities, but also to the ‘reservoir’ of sociological theories. Social realities challenge sociological knowledge, and in particular when they appear to us as what we perceive as unanticipated social phenomena and/or social consequences difficult to explain. When given a sociological explanation, such phenomena can be termed social problems. Following this, another relation between sociology and social work is a mutual interest in social problems as a social phenomenon and, in particular, within social work research, as a practical problem of social action and change.

The aim of our paper is to outline a potential approach to understanding the intricate relationship between sociology and social work research as a relation of knowledge constituted by a mutual interest in investigating the social, in approaching social problems as practical problems and thus facing the same challenges in terms of sociological understanding and explanation. This approach is outlined in two steps. The first is a critical reflection on the book Understanding the Social – Sociology and Social Work (Jacobsen & Pringle 2008), as well as the contributions to this book. The book explores the interdependencies between sociology and social work from various perspectives and fields of research. However, we argue that there is a need to focus more specifically on the mutual interest in social problems as a practical problem which requires sociological understanding and explanation. The second is an actual attempt to outline a sociological approach to social problems as practical problems which requires sociological understanding and explanation. This is an approach which stresses the liquid, complex, unanticipated and sometimes paradoxical forms of and shaping of social problems. Eventually such an approach will be useful for social work as a sensitive and reflective approach and guide to social problems.