SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS (SNA): is it the next best thing for social work?

S Gillieatt, A Hendrick, R Martin, A Fielding

3 Oct 2013
Introduction

The paper will:

- Examine the degree of resonance and integrity that SNA methodology holds for contemporary social work
- Examine how changes in the characteristics of partnerships and strength of connections may be beneficial to understanding service integration for clients
- Share our progress in applying SNA to Commonwealth-funded networks of agencies
Understanding social phenomena

- Interest in social network analysis (SNA) exploding
Research and evaluation

- Networks of mental health, alcohol and other drugs and homelessness
- Lead organisations tasked with improving the delivery, coordination and integration of services
- SNA provides a means to measure, map, evaluate and report on degrees of change in organisations
Exemplar: changes in organisational affiliations

The average number of people connecting any two organisations (affiliations) grows from 2.76 to 4.20 over the 19 month period (Ennis and West, 2010)
Degree of resonance and integrity for social work

- Genograms/eco-maps

Genogram Symbols

![Genogram Example](image)
Structure and process

- **Structure**
  - network size
  - connectedness between people
  - concentration of people
  - degree of clustering
  - accessibility of the network

- **Process**
  - what information being exchanged
  - frequency of communication
  - degree of intimacy between people
  - direction of ties
AASWWE: Social Network Analysis

3 Oct 2013
SNA as a foundational framework for social work

- Steve Trevillion (2000) - networks central to SW and SNA enables the production of “network knowledges” which afford features important to SW like:
  - Multiple perspectives
  - Enables dialogue
  - Is owned by all involved
  - Is reflexive
  - Lends itself to SW concerns
Exemplars of SW employing SNA

- Canadian Eilene McIntyre (1986)
- UK Philip Seed and Steve Trevillion (80s and 90s)
- UK and Australian Stephen Webb (2008)
- Australians Gretchen Ennis and Deborah West (2010 and 2013) embedding SNA into community development practice
SNA can be devoid of context

- BUT when combined with qualitative methods, then understandings of the dynamics of power, culture and history which operate in networks can be acquired
  
  how discourse produced
  
  alternative or “subjugated” ways of understanding does not need to need to privilege institutional official ways of knowing
How do we know we are making the most of collaborations of service providers?

- Examine networks of agencies to understand:
  - whether referral pathways are improving
  - information is being shared more
  - service networks are becoming more accessible
  - clients experience better coordinated care
  - service partnerships are expanding
  - service partnerships are strengthening
Data collected

- Roll-call of service partners
- Referral pathways
- Information exchange (type, direction, quality)
- Working relationships (satisfaction, areas for improvement)

Pictorial representation using Pajek software as Ennis and West have done
Benefits of utilising action research with SNA

- National and local programs are incorporating ideas of participation, collaboration and partnership

- Action research systematic and rigorous

- Means that lead agencies and service network members can receive feedback and attend to problematic relationships
Conclusion

- SNA holds much more for SW practice and research than has been recognised
- Offers a means to measure, map and describe complex networks that seek to achieve service integration
- But whether it’s the next best thing is still up for debate!?!
References