

## **Example – Workshop**

### **Social Network Analysis in Social Work Research**

#### **Abstract**

Social network analysis (SNA) is a theory and method that views relationships as a fundamental building block of the social environment, and uses techniques to explicitly examine and model these relationships and the patterns created by them. In social work, SNA is well-suited to examine the way humans are socially organized and how these patterns of organization are associated with health and human behavior.

The overall goal of this workshop is to give participants who may not be familiar with social network analysis or are otherwise new to the field an opportunity to examine their current research interests from a network perspective.

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- Describe the main features of SNA as a theory and method
- Articulate the benefits and challenges in developing a research design, obtaining IRB approval, collecting network data, and analyzing network data
- Develop network-inspired research questions or hypotheses related to the participant's field of interest
- Discuss how network science can be incorporated into intervention research, with particular attention to how a network perspective can both inform and evaluate interventions

We divide this workshop into four sections:

#### **Section #1: Introduction to SNA as a theory and method**

This section will introduce participants to SNA and will highlight both how SNA functions as a theory that informs a social work person-in-environment perspective and as a methodology that provides specific analytic tools to examine the relationships among people and organizations. Topics will include (1) ego-centric networks and sociometric networks, (2) key concepts in SNA methods, including centrality, cohesion, homophily, contagion, and subgroup analyses, and (3) key theories associated with SNA, including social capital, weak ties, structural whole, small world, and hyperdyadic spread, among other theories.

#### **Section #2: SNA Research design and implementation: A social network analysis of MSW students**

We use a case study of SNA research conducted by one of the presenters to illustrate unique features of SNA research. The study, which examined the friendship, academic, and

professional networks of MSW students, offers lessons in SNA design and ethics, IRB approval, data collection, data management, and analyses. Study results are used to demonstrate key concepts taught in Section #1.

### **Section #3: Asking questions and testing hypotheses from a network perspective**

In this section, we present a wide variety of network-inspired research questions from diverse fields including social work, education, public health, sociology, psychology, management studies, and computer science. The goal of this section is to expose participants to the wide range of questions that could be asked from an SNA perspective and to inspire the generation of original network-based questions within their own fields within social work research.

### **Section #4: Small- and whole- group discussion**

Participants will be given the opportunity to discuss with other colleagues their areas of research, ideas they may have about how to incorporate network questions into their own fields of study, and discuss common interests. We also hope to gauge interest in the development of a special-interest-group (SIG) dedicated to social network analysis within social work research.