Preface

The focus of this book is on evidence-informed social work practice. The Institute of Medicine defines evidence-informed social work practice as the consideration of empirical research evidence, clinician expertise, and client values in addition to contextual variables used in clinical decision-making. Evidence informed practice differs from evidence-based practice in that the former centers on probability; a client(s) may be likely to respond to research evidence, but may also respond to his or her own evidence. An important issue is that previous research may not be applicable to the folks in treatment.

Thus, we were very interested in what social workers do when their knowledge of research does not appear to be very applicable to those in treatment. We have suggested and learned through this work that the evidence-informed approach is a much more appropriate approach to dealing with clients. It incorporates the existing knowledge base—which must be tested in practice to learn how good fit it is with clients and to learn from the clients themselves. In this way, a client’s experience and knowledge is incorporated into one’s practice, enriching the work and its applicability.

As an example, evidence-based research centered on youth and young adults who are white may not apply to a similar population who are basically from a minority. They may also differ in age, race, ethnicity, etc. Such work needs to be tested to learn what, if any, research applies, and to what degree. This is important so as to be more helpful and on target. There are many ways in which clients may not “fit” research studies, in that their applicability does not “fit” properly in practice.

Evidence-informed practice is more productive as a client does not have to fit in the context of previous research. A worker can test the evidence-based knowledge to learn what is most practical, and then proceed with assisting clients. A worker can proceed to help clients without having a large background of research. Thus, the focus of this book is to take note of how evidence-informed practice can be implemented and demonstrate how it can be effective and useful when working with all types of clients.

The chapters are written by practitioners whose central focus is on evidence-informed work. The book has three distinct sections. The first centers on the context for providing evidence-informed assessments. The second centers on actual
field-tested evidence-informed assessments, and the third addresses field-tested evidence-informed interventions. Together they provide a backdrop for using research in an effective manner in social work practice.

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