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A Decade of Knowledge Without Borders: Open Access and Global Reach of School Social Work Research

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Abstract

As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the *International Journal for School Social Work (IJSSW)*, this article provides a reflection on a decade the last decade of breaking barriers and building bridges across practitioners, researchers, communities, and continents and looks forward to our responsibility for the future. This article discusses the benefits and challenges related to Open Access publishing, and addresses how Open Access is a public good—ensuring that practitioners, researchers, students, and policymakers can engage the best evidence regardless of geography, resources, or institutional affiliation. The impact of IJSSW is reviewed, including a summary of accomplishments, most downloaded and cited articles, and goals for the future. The IJSSW community that has grown around the mission to democratize knowledge—authors, reviewers, editors, school social workers, educators, and students—reminds us that scholarship thrives when it is shared. Open access has helped transform international school social work into a more connected, responsive, and globally informed field.

Keywords

Open Access, Global Social Work, School Social Work

Cover Page Footnote

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Tory Cox, IJSSW's co-editor, for his support in editing this article, and for his collaborative work in ensuring the success and continued advancement of the journal.

A Decade of Knowledge Without Borders: Open Access and Global Reach of School Social Work Research

As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the *International Journal for School Social Work (IJSSW)*, we reflect on a decade of breaking barriers and building bridges across practitioners, researchers, communities, and continents. From its inception, IJSSW was founded on the belief that knowledge is a public good—and that open access ensures practitioners, researchers, students, and policymakers can engage the best evidence regardless of geography, resources, or institutional affiliation. Over ten years, this commitment has not only democratized scholarship; it has amplified the global voice of school social work, connecting diverse perspectives to advance children's learning, wellbeing, and rights worldwide.

The articles included in this anniversary issue are an excellent representation of what we have achieved. *Trauma-Informed Care in Education: Reflecting on School-led Interventions to Foster Community Resilience*, by Dhomhnaill and Maria Lotty, addresses trauma-informed practices in an elementary school in Dublin, Ireland. This article provides a uniquely ecological and community-based approach to the implementation of trauma-informed care in school settings in an area of extreme marginalization in Dublin. Anne Cohen's article, *School-Based Trauma-Informed Care to Increase Educational Engagement Among Zambia's Rural Girls* also addresses the needs of an extremely educationally marginalized population. They explore trauma-informed approaches in schools in Zambia and how they can foster resilience and improve educational engagement. The article, *Getting Started: A Case for Intervention Research by School Social Workers* by Christina L. Helfrick and Tonya L. Eberhart provides a model for how school social workers can participate and lead intervention research as practitioners. Their case example considers an intervention developed to support youth experiencing homelessness. Finally, Terriyl Rivers-Cannon's piece, *When They Try to Erase Us*, addresses the contributions and experiences of practitioners of color and how experiences of racialization can shape leadership experiences. She urges institutions and organizations to reckon with a social work history that often silenced the contributions of social workers of color, and reimagine a profession that truly embraces and uplifts communities of color and upholds the values of social justice. This issue highlights the global perspectives this journal promotes, and centers voices often excluded or silenced in other spaces.

Open Access as a Publishing Model *and* an Ethical Stance

In schools where social workers navigate intersecting challenges—attendance, mental health, safety, inclusion, family engagement—timely access to high-quality evidence can be the difference between a promising intervention and a missed opportunity. By removing paywalls, IJSSW has ensured that new findings reach rural districts as readily as flagship universities; that a practitioner in a community-based organization has the same access as a doctoral student; and that education leaders can consult rigorously vetted studies without administrative hurdles. The result is a living ecosystem where ideas circulate freely, and where practice informs research as much as research guides practice. Moreover, the access to knowledge and dissemination of research is a global imperative (Drake, 2023; Pinfield, 2025).

The movement towards open access is a response to the “deeply dysfunctional” publishing processes driven by the largest for-profit conventional publishers (Suber, 2012b, p. 29). Researchers describe a pricing crisis, documenting that subscription prices for journals have risen faster than inflation and library budgets (Poznanski et al., 2024; Suber, 2012b). This pricing crisis has led to an access crisis (Kodua-Ntim & Fombad, 2024; Suber, 2012b). Even libraries such as Harvard cancelled subscriptions due to budgetary reasons (Suber, 2012b). Given the access gaps exists within the Global North between the world’s most affluent institutions such as Harvard compared to other less resourced schools, this access gap is an even more serious crisis on the global scale (Beyene, 2022; Suber, 2012b). For example, a well-funded research library in India subscribed to 10,600 journals while Harvard subscribed to 98,900; and several sub-Saharan university libraries subscribed to ZERO, leaving their library users to rely on donated journals and with no access to conventional journals (Suber, 2012b). Furthermore, to offset prices, libraries are offered large bundles, giving libraries little choice about which journals to select and harming smaller nonprofit publishers which tend to be higher in impact and quality (Suber, 2012b). In addition, given these price increases, there are rarely individual subscribers to journals. Thus, most readers of toll-access journals are those who have access to a library that has those subscriptions.

According to Suber (2012b), the “deeper problem is that we donate time, labor, and public money to create new knowledge and then hand control over the results to businesses that believe...that their revenue and survival depend on limiting access to that knowledge” (p. 38). A publisher’s key assets are the articles submitted by

academics who hand over their work for free and give up their rights to their work in order to publish it. Editors and reviewers also donate their time to review and validate the quality of those articles. Rightfully, and in line with social work values, Suber argues that while there are very serious issues of crisis, inequity, and profit associated with publishing, that we should complement these challenges in the publishing world with an open access discussion that is “joyful, curious, and opportunity-oriented” (p.43). Since the publication of Suber’s book, *Open Access*, in 2012, we have seen a massive transformation paralleling an expansion of digital tools that support the growth in open access publishing and an increase in global access to computers and the internet increasing the ability to access those publications. This has led to increasingly sharing knowledge on a global level in a way that is responsive and fast.

Understanding Open Access

Open access is defined as literature that is available at no cost on the public internet, permitting any users to read it, download it, and share it without financial gain (Budapest Open Access Initiative, 2022; Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities, 2003; Pinfield, 2025; Suber, 2012). However, open sharing does not mean that there are no copyright regulations. In fact, the author retains the copyright and therefore maintains the integrity of their work and the right to be acknowledged and cited. It is also important to challenge misinformation about Open Access and describe what it is NOT. Open Access is not an attempt to bypass peer review. Open Access is compatible with any form of peer review that journals would like to implement and public statements on Open Access emphasize the importance of peer review (Suber, 2012a). In addition, Open Access is not intended to abolish copyright. Copyright works in a very similar manner to traditional publishing, with the exception that the author retains the copyright, and the article can be widely distributed without charge. The Open Access movement also focuses on articles, not print books, because traditional journal article authors do not make royalties from articles. There is Open Access book publishing, but it is not as large of a movement as Open Access journals. Open Access is also not about replacing or harming traditional publishers that require subscriptions and have paywalls. Open Access is focused on advancing the interests of research, researchers, research institutions, communities, and practitioners, and reducing the access gap.

Overall, authors experience the benefits of Open Access by retaining more control of their work and their ability to widely share their work. In addition, authors who publish in Open Access receive a

greater number of citations (Hadad et al., 2024), and those citations are represented among a more diverse citation source by institution, field, country, and region (Huang et al., 2024). Finally, funders are increasingly requiring that research be disseminated through Open Access sources to ensure a wider reach, and promote faster research developments.

Our International Reach Has Reshaped the Conversation

Submissions and readership now span every region: multilingual classrooms, culturally responsive practices, trauma-informed approaches in conflict-affected settings, inclusive education for students with disabilities, and cross-sector partnerships integrating health, social services, and education. This global perspective has challenged us to interrogate assumptions, adapt frameworks, and elevate historically marginalized voices. It has also broadened our methodological toolbox—mixed methods, community-based participatory research, implementation science, and practice-based evidence—better capturing the complexity of real-world schools from Edinburgh to Enugu, Seoul to São Paulo. Open access ensures that research findings are communicated rapidly and widely, benefiting researchers, practitioners, policymakers and others (Pinfield, 2025).

Moreover, accessibility must extend beyond the article. To deepen impact, IJSSW has championed research transparency, ethical data sharing, concise practice briefs, and piloted multilingual abstracts that meet readers where they are. We have experimented with practitioner commentaries and student perspectives, inviting those closest to the work—and to its outcomes—into scholarly dialogue. We have diversified our editorial board and reviewer pool, mentored early-career authors, and offered guidance for teams working with limited resources. These practices have strengthened rigor while honoring the principle that excellence and inclusion are complementary, not competing, values.

The Next Decade Demands Even More of Us

International school social work stands at the nexus of pressing global concerns: learning recovery and wellbeing post-pandemic; climate-related displacement; the ethical integration of technology and AI in student support; and persistent inequities along lines of language, race, disability, gender identity, migration status, and poverty. Open Access positions IJSSW to respond rapidly and responsibly—to foreground community-defined needs, to surface solutions that travel across borders, and to ensure innovations do not remain siloed. But Open Access alone is insufficient without

intentional dissemination: plain-language briefs for educators and families, toolkits for implementation, and partnerships with ministries of education, social work associations, and youth-led organizations that can carry evidence into policy and practice at scale. We seek to create opportunities for more diverse forms of submissions as well as increasing our partnerships with school social work organizations, ministries and departments of education, and universities.

Open Access publishing is also evolving, leading to new questions about what exactly is Open Access, and the development of new terminology such as “epistemic openness,” “scientific openness,” and “participatory openness” (Pinfield, 2025, p. 1). As *IJSSW* grows in impact and reach, it is imperative that we stay true to our anti-oppressive social work values that center lived experiences, values local knowledge and different ways of knowing, and work against the colonialist challenges that can emerge with Open Access. Without intentionality, Open Access can be another tool of neo-colonialism, expanding the output from the Global North while excluding voices from the Global South (Pinfield, 2025). As editor, I am committed to ensuring that *IJSSW* continues to uphold maximum integrity and rigor, that we are aware of power dynamics, and ensure that we center multiple ways of knowing.

A Note on Predatory Journals

As Open Access grows, new questions emerge regarding predatory journals and their use of Open Access. Unfortunately, this has caused some confusion and misunderstanding about the connection between Open Access and predatory journals. It is true that some for-profit publishing houses are predatory and Open Access. Oviedo-Garcia (2021) documents a major for-profit press that is Open Access for a fee (i.e. the author must pay to publish an article), and demonstrates how they use practices that are consistent with predatory practices. Oviedo-Gracia (2021) provides recommendations for institutions and scholars for properly identifying predatory journals, which often favor quantity over quality, and models that privilege professional rather than market and profit logic. Boston College library (n.d.), for example, offers guidelines for evaluating Open Access journal quality. I encourage everyone to do their due diligence and avoid predatory or predatory-adjacent publishing houses and journals. Don’t publish in them and don’t cite them! Otherwise, we all contribute to this pattern of exploitation, negatively impacting the dissemination of rigorous and properly vetted science.

As an editor, scholar, and practitioner I have a commitment to educate others about predatory publishing practices. Thus, I encourage anyone seeking to publish in any Open Access journal to do the research so that one ensures that the work is shared through a reputable journal that upholds rigorous standards. Publishing in predatory or predatory-like presses hurts science, hurts authors who publish in rigorous and reputable journals, hurts an author's own reputation, especially as an early career scholar, and hurts small journals and presses that privilege quality over quantity and seek to uphold ethical and high-quality standards. Given today's pressure to publish high quantities, it is easy even for the most experienced researchers to fall prey to predatory or predatory-like journals.

Our Commitments for the Decade Ahead

1. **Equity in authorship and readership.** Build collaborative editorial pipelines that reduce barriers for under-resourced teams, especially in the Global South and Indigenous communities.
2. **Actionable research.** Prioritize studies with clear practice implications, robust implementation guidance, and reproducible tools—and publish intervention adaptations that honor local context.
3. **Multilingual access and knowledge mobilization.** Expand translated summaries, practitioner webinars, regional special issues, and international co-hosted symposia to meet readers linguistically, culturally, and practically.
4. **Co-creation with practitioners, families, and young people.** Deepen participatory approaches and embed lived experience into editorial decision-making, peer review, and dissemination.
5. **Continue advancing our academic rigor.** The next step for our journal is to obtain an *impact factor* that can help with demonstrating the reach of the journal. We will also continue recruiting reviewers, editors, and authors to create the pre-eminent space for global scholarly dialogue in the field of school social work.

A shared celebration—and a shared responsibility

Ten years ago, IJSSW set out to build a journal that treated access as a right and impact as a responsibility. Today, the community that has grown around this mission—authors, reviewers, editors, school social workers, educators, families, and young people—reminds us that scholarship thrives when it is shared. Open access has helped transform international school social work into a more connected, responsive, and globally informed field. As we enter our next

decade, we invite you to lead as an editor and to publish, review, read, and apply the evidence—to keep knowledge in motion, to keep equity at the center, and to ensure that every child, in every school, benefits from the best of what we learn together.

Here's to ten years—and to the future we are building, openly, together!

Highlights from Our First Decade (2015–2025)

Global reach

- Readers in 211+ countries across six continents.
- Nearly 150,000 article downloads, with the most popular article reaching nearly 30,000 downloads!
- Submissions from over 40 nations, including Canada, Brazil, India, Kenya, South Korea, and the United States.

Figure 1: Global Representation of Article Downloads



Top-cited articles

- [*Exploring 21st Century Skills and Learning Environments for Middle School Youth*](#) by Annahita Ball, Hillary D. Joyce, and Dawn Anderson-Butcher.
- [*Ego Functions, Defenses, and Countertransference: A Beginning School Social Work Student's Way to Professional and Personal Growth*](#) by Hili Tsarfati
- [*Evaluating the Zones of Regulation Intervention to Improve the Self-Control of Elementary Students*](#) by Stephanie Ochocki, Andy J. Frey, David A. Patterson, Freida Herron, Natalie Beck, and David R. Dupper.
- [*Socio-ecological Factors Associated with Adolescents' Psychological Well-being: A multilevel analysis*](#) by Yuqi Guo, Laura M. Hopson, and Fan Yang.

- [*Leadership in School Social Work: Implications for Promoting the Preparedness of Tomorrow's Practitioners*](#) by Yasmine Perry, Susan E. Elswick, and Matthew J. Cuellar.

Most-downloaded articles since publication

- [*Music and Art in School Social Work with Socially Isolated and Marginalized Students: A Participatory Action Research Enhancing the Educational Inclusion During COVID-19*](#) by Styliani Farmaki and Agapi Kandylaki
- [*Exploring 21st Century Skills and Learning Environments for Middle School Youth*](#) by Annahita Ball, Hillary D. Joyce, and Dawn Anderson-Butcher.
- [*School Social Work with the Use of Arts in the Context of a Participatory Action Research: Enhancing a Roma Student's Educational Inclusion during COVID-19*](#) by Stylani Farmaki, Konstantinos Kaplanis, and Agapi Kandyklaki
- [*Urban Hassles and Navigating Education: Perceptions of Urban High Schoolers from a School Needs Assessment*](#) by James P. Canfield, Kennesha J. Smith, Wendy L. Wilson, and Laurent Shute.
- [*Evaluating the Zones of Regulation Intervention to Improve the Self-Control of Elementary Students*](#) by Stephanie Ochocki, Andy J. Frey, David A. Patterson, Freida Herron, Natalie Beck, and David R. Dupper.
- See a full list of [most downloaded articles here](#).

Innovation in access

- Student perspectives introduced in 2021.
- Inclusion of Practice Wisdom section for School Social Worker narratives.
- In 2024 we were included in the ERIC and EBSCO databases.

Ensuring rigor and quality

- In 2024, we became listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). DOAJ is the “best directory of quality-controlled” open access journals (Suber, 2012). See our listing here: <https://doaj.org/toc/2161-4148>

How can I contribute?

- As a journal we would be proud to have sponsorship and co-sponsorship from universities and state and regional school social work organizations. If you belong to an organization or program who might be interested in being affiliated or sponsor/co-sponsor the journal, contact us for more information. Your logo or school name would be listed as a journal sponsor.

- Consider a leadership position such as section editor, co-editor, and editor.
- Consider becoming a member of the advisory board.
- Submit an article for peer review.
- Volunteer to be a reviewer.
- Propose and guest edit a special issue.
- Share articles and the journal on your social media accounts.

Together we can take this journal to the next level, and ensure that multiple voices and views are part of the global school social work dialogue, advancing the profession to the benefit of children everywhere.

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