

# A Systematic Review of Socialisation Strategies for Dealing with Involuntary Clients

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## Abstract

In order to conduct a systematic review on the subject of socialization strategies for dealing with involuntary clients, a search protocol was designed and implemented. The search engine Google's Google Scholar filter was used to find relevant articles through a search conducted with relevant and specifically designed search terms. These search terms yielded a paucity of results that were relevant to the systematic review at hand. Therefore, only three articles were studied further. The systematic review found that a majority of the work on this specific subject matter was by two authors and that there remained a lot of work to be done in the field to improve on this. The review also found that the work generally supported socialization as having a positive impact on the involuntary client's ability to engage with the social worker and improved their overall behaviour.

**Keywords:** Involuntary Clients, Socialisation Strategies, Social Worker, Social Work

## Introduction

Involuntary clients often pose a challenge to social workers who must deal with them despite their lack of engagement in the process, as the clients are forced to deal with the social worker. This puts the social worker in a predicament as they must work to first elicit the involuntary client's engagement before then proceeding to help them in whatever situation they find themselves in.

Plenty of research has been conducted to ascertain the best practices and strategies to deal with involuntary clients. One of the strategies is that of socialisation.

In order to conduct a systematic review, a search protocol was devised keeping in mind the specific topical interest of 'socialisation strategies for dealing with involuntary clients.' This protocol was applied and the resultant hits were then narrowed down to relevant ones. Those relevant results were then further described and analysed. Finally, a number of key observations from conducting the systematic review were presented with a view to making recommendations for further research to be conducted in this area.

## Involuntary Clients and Socialisation Strategies

It is important to understand the two relevant terms that have been used in the specific topic that acts as the basis of this systematic review. These two terms are 'involuntary clients' and 'socialisation strategies.'

Involuntary clients can be stated as those that are forced to engage with a social worker against their own will. These involuntary clients may be forced to ask for or seek help due to a variety of circumstances outside their control. For example, they may be forced to seek help by a legal entity such as a court order or in lieu of facing more serious charges. They may also feel social, societal or familial pressure to reach out for help, such as being required to do so as part of a

custody battle or due to pressure at work. In all above cases, the client is not engaging with the social worker on a voluntary basis; hence, they are termed as involuntary clients. (Rooney, 1992)

Socialization can be broadly defined as the process through which a person or individual learns to become a part of a social group or society at large by adjusting their behaviour to fit social or societal norms. It is not the act of socializing or engaging with others; rather, socializing is one of the processes by which socialization occurs. Through socialization, a person can become a productive member of a social group or society, understand the importance of social constraints and norms and alter their behaviours to fit with those values deemed necessary by society. (Little & McGivern, 2013) (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica)

## **Methodology**

In order to conduct a search, the first step is choosing the mode through which the search will be conducted as this will aid in developing the search protocol more clearly. In order to cast the widest net possible for relevant research works, it was decided that individual digital libraries such as Springer, JSTOR or the digital library of any university or college would not be used as it would be laborious to individually search through each of them. Instead, the search engine Google was chosen. In order to narrow down to only scholarly works, and avoid news articles, videos, and posts on social media websites, the Google Scholar search engine was used.

Search terms that had the potential to bring about a maximum number of results were devised. In order to maximise results, different combinations of search terms were devised that could be input into the Google Scholar search engine. These compound search terms are listed below, in no particular order.

- Socialization strategies for involuntary clients
- Social strategies for involuntary clients
- Socialization of mandated clients
- Socialization strategies for mandated clients
- Socialization strategies for non-voluntary clients

These search terms, once entered into the Google Scholar search engine, brought about a number of results. In order to streamline the process further due to the constraints of time and the brevity of a review article such as this one, only the first forty search results, that is the first four pages of results, were considered in each case. Thus, in total, around two hundred search results were considered before the final, most relevant articles were narrowed down for further analysis. It was evident that there were only a limited number of relevant research works on the topic. By page two in each case, the number of relevant research works were no longer visible. Moreover, in the case of the a majority of the search terms used above, the same results were repeated, pointing to the fact that there were only a limited number of research articles on the subject. The final selected articles are analysed further in the next section.

## **Results and Discussion**

Each of the finalized research works are explained in detail below, including the most important details such as author name, aim of the research, results of the research and methodology used to conduct the research. As explained previously, there were a limited number of relevant works. Therefore, only three research works were chosen to be reviewed further. It is important to note that these do not include some influential research written by author Ronald H Rooney in the

form of books published by him in 1992 and later. As these were books and not journal articles, they were deemed to fall outside the scope of this systematic review.

- “Socialization strategies for involuntary clients” by Ronald H Rooney. In this work, the previously-mentioned author Ronald Rooney hypothesizes that ‘reactance theory’, is useful in understanding and working with involuntary clients. In particular, Rooney contends that reactance theory could provide necessary guidelines for the socialization and contracting of involuntary clients. Reactance theory posits that when a person believes that their choices are being restricted in some way or taken away entirely, they are likely to resist or oppose such an action. Therefore, a person being pressured to act or feel a certain way may resist and actually go in the opposite direction in defiance. According to Rooney, this theory can help in ascertaining or predicting a potential response from an involuntary client who is being forced to work with a social worker; in fact, the theory may help the social worker create a model to intervene with the involuntary client. Moreover, according to Rooney, socialization of the involuntary client aids in the mitigation or reduction of the reactance of the involuntary client. Therefore, the socialization of the involuntary client may help reduce a negative response from being forced to seek help. Rooney adds that socialization would also help in the involuntary client respecting his or her ability to self-determine in those areas that are not controlled or governed by a legal or court order. The author defines and discusses two different phases of socialization; one, worker preparation and two, conducting the initial socialization sessions. (Rooney, *Socialization Strategies for Involuntary Clients*, 1988)
- “Working with mandated clients: A pro-social approach” by Christopher Trotter. In this paper, Trotter works to create an approach for dealing with involuntary clients, specifically mandated clients who are required to see a social worker due to a legal order. In this case, Trotter creates this approach by using the example of child protection. He uses a study that was undertaken in Victoria, Australia in corrections. The study’s findings indicated that by using a pro-social approach and combining it with other relevant skills in a caseworker’s arsenal, the risk of recidivism was reduced by 30-50%. The pro-social approach can be said to be one that uses modelling of desirable behaviour, encouragement or desirable behaviour and challenging of undesirable behaviour, wherein the desirable behaviour can be said to be pro-social and the undesirable behaviour can be said to be anti-social. Trotter points out that study conducted in Victoria is not alone in this supposition or conclusion; in fact several other research studies have found that a pro-social approach led to improvement amongst other types of mandated clients. Trotter argues further than systematic use of rewards to encourage pro-social behaviour and actively challenging or discouraging anti-social behaviour must be development amongst social workers as one of their key skills and tools. (Trotter, 1997)
- “Involuntary Clients, Pro-social Modelling and Ethics” by Christopher Trotter. This is another work by the same author that was mentioned before. In this worker, Trotter contends that social workers who are engaged in working with involuntary clients have the potential to influence the behaviour of their clients. In this regard, Trotter believes and states that one significant way in which the social worker can influence the behaviour of the client is by modelling, encouraging or reinforcing the comments and behaviours of the involuntary client. Trotter goes even as far as to say that often, social workers themselves may not be aware of the extent to which they can influence their involuntary clients through the above-mentioned behaviour. In his paper, the author not only the

modelling, encouragement and reinforcement of behaviour, but also some relevant ethical issues that may be raised by the social worker having such a significant means of impacting the behaviour of the involuntary client. Trotter outlines some ethical guidelines that can be put into place to allow the social worker to engage with their clients while preserving the human dignity of the client. Trotter makes recommendations to ensure this balance. (Trotter C. , 2013)

The analysis of these works and the overall search process as well led to certain observations that are outlined below.

- Despite the efforts taken in conducting the search, only three relevant research articles were found for further analysis.
- As mentioned previously, some books relevant to the subject were also found but for the purposes of this review article, were deemed not to be a good fit to review.
- Two authors have written multiple works on the subject.
- Author Ronald Rooney has written a few books on the subject as well as the earliest article reviewed here from 1988. His books were written in 1992 and thereafter.
- Two articles were reviewed by author Chris Trotter.
- In fact, both authors are considered to be subject matter experts in dealing with involuntary clients.
- It was interesting to see that socialization was viewed repeatedly as a means of helping social workers creating strategies to deal with their involuntary clients. Therefore, the focus of the article was not the involuntary client, but the social worker, as the objective was creating a means of helping the social worker.
- Both of author Christopher Trotter's works were focused on dealing with the aspect of the social worker modelling or encouraging societally acceptable behaviour from the involuntary client as a means of socializing them. He speaks of both positive and negative modelling and reinforcement – basically encouraging pro-social behaviour and discouraging anti-social behaviour.
- In the third paper analysed, Trotter takes his research one step further by suggesting that the social worker's own behaviour is a key determinant in the socialization or lack thereof of the involuntary client. This is an interesting area that requires further study and analysis, as well as further testing in various clinical and non-clinical settings.
- In the third paper, Trotter also considers the ethical ramifications of a social worker having such an outsized potential impact on the client. It would be easy for a social worker to misuse such an influence. However, Trotter also adds that the social workers may themselves not be aware of having such an influence. Therefore, the social workers are unaware of their influence and their clients are unaware of being influenced. This is an interesting dynamic that also requires further examination.
- Rooney interestingly uses reactance theory in his work as reactance theory is predicated on a person being forced into doing something he or she does not wish to. This perfectly encapsulates the situation of the involuntary client who is being forced to seek help against his or her own personal wishes.
- Rooney, in his article, also states that socialization is a key factor in reducing the reactance of the involuntary client. On the other hand, in the second article reviewed, Trotter states that a pro-social approach was believed to have been influential in reducing the rate of re-offending amongst mandated clients by as much as 30-50 percent.

- Therefore, according to both approaches, socialization has a positive impact on the involuntary clients and aids the social workers in dealing and helping the involuntary clients.

## Conclusion

It is important to note that the biggest limitation to this review was the fact that there was a significant lack of relevant research done on the topic of socialization strategies for dealing with involuntary clients. Therefore, it was clear that this is a big gap in the field. Apart from this, limitations were caused by the size and scope of a short review article, resulting in only a certain number of articles being searched for and analysed. Ideally, more search results should have been further examined, but could not be due to the constraints of writing a short systematic review article.

This review has shown that there is considerable work that can be done on the issue of socialization strategies and involuntary clients.

For one, socialization is heavily dependent on the society in which the client is based. This would mean that socialization in a democratic country would be different from a communist one; it would be different in a religion-heavy society than a society where religion is separated from public life; it would be different in socially conservative societies like those in the Middle East, than it would be in socially liberal societies like in Western Europe, and so on. This alone is a rich area for further study.

Moreover, as the main two voices in the subject, Rooney and Trotter's research and their results have not been further interrogated, studied or challenged in any significant way. This is an area that requires more focus and effort from the scientific community working on issues related to social work and involuntary clients.

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