Exploring parents’ understandings of their child’s journey into offending behaviours: A narrative analysis

Parents are perhaps the best placed individuals to comment upon their child’s life story, including early life experiences, transitions and their child’s needs. However, little literature has focussed on the views of parents of young people who have committed serious offences. This research aimed to explore parents’ opinions of which factors may have led to their child becoming involved with the criminal justice system. Interviews were undertaken with six parents who were asked to narrate their child’s life journey into offending behaviours. The data were then analysed using narrative analysis techniques, and a shared story was created which incorporated the main transitional stages in the children’s journeys, as seen by the parents. The findings suggest that it is not just the child, but the whole family who have been in a state of distress throughout the child’s life. Systemic and environmental factors are argued to contribute to this distress, and the use of diagnosis for this population is critically evaluated. The research highlights a life story in which the child’s and family’s distress remains unheard and therefore unresolved. Clinical implications for working with this population are discussed.