Social Workers’ Experiences of Clinical Psychology Consultation regarding Complex Cases of Children in Care

Lucy Rathbone
Academic supervisor: Suzanne Hodge
Field supervisor: Sarita Dewan
Background: Children in Care

- As of 31\textsuperscript{st} March 2014, there were 68,840 Children in Care in the United Kingdom (UK), an increase of 7% from the figures recorded in March 2010 (Department for Education, 2014).
- The majority of Children in Care (62%) are receiving a service from the local authority due to abuse or neglect.
- Research highlights the challenges more often faced by members of this population than children and young people who have not experienced the care system. (Harker & Heath, 2012; Darker, Ward & Caulfield, 2008).
- Children in Care have been recognised in research literature as a “vulnerable population at risk” (Bruskas, 2008).
Background: Consultation

- Guidelines for working with Children in Care stress the importance of warm and nurturing care, collaborative working between services and professionals, and support from specialist and dedicated services (NICE, 2013).
- One primary form of inter-agency working used in this context is consultation. Consultation involves working within the network of people and agencies which surround the client, with an explicit focus on that client’s needs and best interests (Dent & Golding, 2006).
- By consulting with other professionals, the limited resource of psychology is made available to a wider number of individuals. This model of consultation is in-keeping with the current guidelines of best psychological practice (Health & Care Professions Council, 2012).
Background: Complexity

• Despite the recognition of the need for an effective multi-agency approach, the media continues to highlight examples of cases in which the care system and multi-agency working have been said to fail (Donovan, 2013; Perraudin, 2014).
• Such examples often concern ‘complex cases’, a term which is regularly referred to in the literature but seldom defined (Rankin & Regan, 2004).
• A literature review has highlighted the lack of consensus around the meaning of the term “complex” (Rosengard, Laing, Ridley, & Hunter, 2007).
Research Aims

• Primary aim - to develop an understanding of social workers’ experiences of the consultation service provided by clinical psychologists in relation to complex cases of Children in Care.

• Secondary aim - to develop an understanding of what social workers consider the term “complex cases” to mean in practice.
Methods

Design

• Semi-structured individual interviews
• Qualitative research design using a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Participants

• Social workers were recruited through the local authority teams accessing clinical psychology consultation from a specified NHS Trust
• A total of six participants expressed an interest to participate, all of whom met the inclusion criteria
• Four female and two male participants
Results

• Five themes were established regarding social workers’ experiences of accessing clinical psychology consultation regarding complex cases of Children in Care.

• Four themes were established regarding social workers’ understanding of the term “complex cases”.

• The themes will be discussed in turn.
Analysis 1 - Consultation

ACCESSIBILITY
- Formal and Informal Routes
- Familiar and Approachable
- Service-level Implications

WORKING TOGETHER
- Relationships
- Sharing Information, Knowledge and Skills
- Training
- Gaining a Different Perspective

FINDING A WAY FORWARD
- Bridging the Gap
- Practical Support
- Achieving Clarity

VALIDATION AND SUPPORT
- Impact on Practice
- Understanding Behaviour
- Outcomes
- Consultation Providers
- Foster Carers
- Risk Management
- Evidencing Decisions
- Shared Responsibility
- Power of Psychology
- Learning Nothing
- Validating Thoughts / Actions

Interacts with:
- Leads to:
- Depends upon:
Analysis 2 - Complexity

MULTIPLE NEEDS AND DIFFICULTIES

Specific Characteristics

DIFFICULTIES DEFINING COMPLEXITY

The Scale of Complexity

Subjectivity

COMPLEXITY AS COMMONPLACE

INVolVEMENT OF MULTIPLE PROFESSIONALS

Impact on Professionals
Reflections on the SRP

• Time delays often felt out of my control – it was important to chase up the progress of emails etc in order to keep the project on track.

• Putting back-up plans in my ethics application would have been beneficial in preparing for delays/ problems with recruitment.

• Draft reads were incredibly useful – ensuring full drafts were submitted in good time was a really helpful part of the process.
References


