

The Relationship's Evaluation between Child Protection Workers in Collaboration with Other Keys of Referral System

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Abstract:

Child protection is necessary to be studied because children are in the focus of every society and their maltreatment occurs all over demographics. In Albania, this concept is relatively new, although not lacking efforts to strengthen child protection system as the civil society sector as well as local government structures.

Actually, the establishment of Child Protection Unit is still at a piloting stage. The researchers point out that anxiety especially in high-risk fields, such as child protection, is a powerful motivator for working together, as no single agency wants to operate alone with such a problem. Furthermore, constructive relationships between professionals and family members, and between professionals themselves, are the heart and soul of effective child protection practice.

The main purpose of this paper is the reflection of some findings about the relationship that exists between child protection workers and other major chains of the referral system, problems encountered in collaboration between them and the factors that influence its improvement.

In order to realize the creation of a more complete view, a detailed review of contemporary domestic and foreign literature was undertaken, including scientific articles which are published recently and internationally recognized addresses which study this phenomenon.

This introductory article will help professionals in a better understanding of the situation and will provide them with point of views from different researchers. Findings will explore new perspectives on the role of child protection workers, in terms of identifying new interventions, networking and support mechanisms against child protection system.

Key words: Child Protection Unit, child protection workers, professional relationship, collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Every society has established a special focus on the child. Each one of us is aware of that children need particular attention, care and protection.

They are not responsible for the harm that may be caused to them. Children are vulnerable due to their age, lack of power, limited status, gender, lack of a voice and the trust they give to adults to care for them. (Evaluation Study of Child Protection Units, fq 27).

We often consider them as values, the future of a nation, therefore any investment in this regard is valuable and important. Each of us is responsible and must contribute to the maintenance of security of the child. According to Herbert Hoover²⁶ "Children are our most valuable resource natural".

Many years ago, child protection pioneer Vincent De Francis lamented, "No state and no community has developed a Child Protective Service program adequate in size to meet the service needs of all reported cases of child neglect, abuse and exploitation."⁵⁴. DE FRANCIS, supra note 16, at 11.

President George W. Bush recognized the need for a comprehensive integration of services in an April, 2007, proclamation stating that, "Family members, educators, public officials, faith-based and community organizations all play

important roles in helping to ensure that children are safe and can grow surrounded by love and stability” (n.p).

Similarly, President Barack Obama has expressed a strong commitment to child protection, stating in his 2009 proclamation “every American has a stake in the well-being of our Nation’s children...we all have a responsibility to help” (Obama, 2009, n.p.) and has called for increased partnerships between community and faith-based organizations with the creation of the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

Even according to the Albanian Constitution, article 54, paragraph 1, children enjoy the rights and protection by the state. Child Protection Law, No. 10 347, dated 04/11/2010, states "special protection of children's rights through the implementation of a comprehensive legal framework and institutional, execution to the Constitution, international Acts that operate in this field, as well as legislation in power; measures to ensure children’s rights in accordance with the development and personality, based on the supreme interest of him; life insurance, survival and development of the child; ensuring cooperation between the structures of central and local authorities and organizations that protect children’s rights."

Child protection is necessary because maltreatment occurs across all demographics (Belsky, 1993). Child protection services are not voluntary and are used as an intervention strategy into child maltreatment; the chance of a child having experienced a traumatic event prior to child protection involvement is the rule more than the exception.

The field of child protection is an area which requires qualified and motivated professionals.

Morrison (1996) has suggested that anxiety especially in high-risk fields, such as child protection, is a powerful motivator for working together, as no single agency wants to be left alone with such a problem.

Wolfe notes: "For a team to grow and thrive, each individual should acknowledge his or her own role in their disciplines and be respectful of the roles of others, both on and off the team" .

Dale et al. (1986) proposed that professional relationships were analagous to the variety of formal and informal communication patterns, healthy and destructive patterns of behaviour that develop between members of a family. Just as a family may obstruct or block change, workers may accidentally or deliberately hinder interagency communication (Dale et al., 1986; Preston-Shoot & Agass, 1990; DoH, 1991).

METHODOLOGY

The paper intends to present a clear picture of the child protection, focusing on the importance of this process, to mechanisms that make it functionable, to estimate the relationship of cooperation between workers and child protection of referral system links.

In order to realize the creation of a more complete picture, a detailed review of contemporary domestic and foreign literature was undertaken, including scientific articles which are published recently and internationally known addresses who study this phenomenon.

CHILD PROTECTION

Child protection social work is unique because the traumas experienced by children who enter the child protection system are due to varying reasons. These reasons make the child protection social worker a professional who has to have a grasp on multiple levels of trauma related to all forms of abuse and neglect (CPS Training Institute, 1996).

A lot has been written about outcome measures in child protection and it has been argued that multiple outcome

measures offer more validity than any single measure (e.g. Huxley, 1994; Quinton, 1996).

The Child Protection Worker is the person in charge of protecting and promoting children rights. He defends them from harm or abuse, neglect or exploitation and he ensures children to develop his/her full potential.

The Child Protection Worker will take the responsibility for gathering information about a child's health, education, and family, stage of development, living environment, concerns regarding his/her welfare and/ or protection and community.

The Child Protection Worker will work in partnership and cooperation with specialists and/ or organizations dealing with child's rights protection and have an interest in the child's welfare or development. This form of cooperation is formally known as "multi-disciplinary" and is widely acknowledged as the most appropriate form of support and assistance to any child who requires child protection services.

The research suggests that effective child protection workers make use of collaborative problem-solving processes (sometimes referred to as working in partnership). They help clients to identify personal, social and environmental issues that are of concern to them. They then help their clients develop goals and strategies to address these issues. The more effective workers tend to work with the clients' definitions of problems rather than their own (the worker's) definition and they deal with a range of issues which are of concern to the client or client family. The workers take a holistic and systemic approach and focus on the issues that have led to the abuse or neglect, rather than the abuse itself. (Trotter 2002, p. 39)

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COOPERATION LINKS

There is consensus in the child welfare field that "the quality of the helping relationship is one of the most important determinants of client outcome" (de Boer & Coady, 2003, p. 2).

“The social worker is the glue that holds a team together,” says Debra Schilling Wolfe, MEd, executive director of the Field Center for Children’s Policy, Practice & Research,

According to Wolfe, by virtue of their training and perspective, social workers are adept at working with multiple disciplines and across multiple systems to direct team efforts.

“Each discipline obviously brings their respective skills, and an effective multidisciplinary team can greatly enhance the child’s outcome,” Snider notes.

There is a consensus in the field that “the quality of the helping relationship is one of the most important determinants of client outcome” (de Boer & Coady, 2003) and research has consistently shown the worker-client relationship to be a key component in change processes.

The National Network for Collaboration defines collaboration as “process of participation through which people, groups and organizations work together on strengths of the family and /or community to achieve desired results.”

All the evidence indicates that children are safeguarded best where there is clarity and understanding between different agencies about roles and responsibilities, underpinned by good working relationships at all levels (CSCI 2005 p.33).

Collaboration is an advanced form of an “interagency linkage,” the traits of which include shared vision and goals, well-developed and formalized roles for participants, sharing of power and decision-making, and joint assumption of risks and resources.

Operationally, this study employed a definition laid out by Mattesich, Murray-Close, and Monsey (2001) in their studies on behalf of the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation:

A mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations. The relationship includes a commitment to mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual

authority and accountability for success; and sharing of resources and rewards. (p. 22)

Defining “Successful” Collaboration

Mattessich and Monsey (1992) performed an exhaustive literature review of the factors influencing successful collaboration and ranked the following traits as the most important:

1. Mutual respect, understanding and trust
2. Appropriate cross-section of members
3. Open and frequent communication
4. “Sufficient funds”

Within each partner organisation, there are multiple layers of participation in the collaboration (Rubin, 1998; Gray, 1996) and open communication between partners (Austin, 2000). Members share power equally (Shaw, 2003).

Collaboration itself has been defined by Bruce Frey in ‘Levels of Collaboration Scale’ as “the cooperative way that two or more entities work together towards a shared goal.’ Barbara Gray in her book ‘Collaborating: Finding common Ground for Multiparty Problems’ (Jossey-Bass 1989) states that “collaborations are designed either to advance a shared vision, or to resolve a conflict, and they result in an exchange of information, a joint agreement or commitment to action.’

Partner organisations are compatible; they pursue a common mission and believe they will benefit from collaboration. Yet they also show flexibility in their dealings with each other (Shaw, 2003; Hertzlinger, 1997).

Often, when we refer to collaboration we strongly emphasize the effective communication. It is assessed as a key component for establishing trust (Das & Teng, 1998). Communication is significant at three levels: communication between members of the partnership, communication between the partnership and individual organizations, and

communication between the partnership and the wider community (Huxham & Vangen, 1996).

“Every multidisciplinary team is a work in progress, whether due to longstanding issues between agencies or to new membership through staff turnover and attrition. The most effective teams strive towards open communication with agency members and mutual respect for the roles and expertise other team members bring to the table,” Snider says.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION

The presence of social networks and social supports to children and families, as well as positive balance between supports and strains, has been posited to be important to child well-being and the prevention the child maltreatment (77-79).

The cross-cultural literature support the hypothesis that social networks and embeddedness of child rearing in a social context are crucially significant protections against child maltreatment (4,5). Fq 38

The cross-cultural record suggests that children with diminished social networks are vulnerable to maltreatment (80). social networks have the potential to serve multiple protective functions for children (82,5)

1. networks provide the personnel for assistance with child care tasks and responsibilities.

2. networks provide options for the temporary and/or permanent redistribution of children.

3. networks provide the context for collective standarts and therefore, for the scrutiny and enforcement of such standards.

Tomison (1999) points out that coordination in child protection networks has been generally adopted in the western world as a desirable work practice (Jones, Pickett, Oates & Barbor, 1987; Morrison, 1994).

Such co-ordination may provide more effective assessment of family needs and to provides a response that can positively affect family wellbeing and ensure the protection of children from abuse and neglect (Tomison 1997). Specifically, good coordination can lead to greater efficiency in the use of resources, improved service delivery by the avoidance of duplication and overlap between existing services; the minimisation of gaps or discontinuities in services; clarification of agency or professional roles and responsibilities in 'frontier problems' and demarcation disputes; and the delivery of comprehensive services (Hallett & Birchall, 1992).

However, in 2010, the first study proposing expert consensus on child protection team performance and effectiveness was published (Kistin, Tien, Bauchner, Parker, & Leventhal). This study surveyed professionals working on or with hospital-based child protection teams and reported that a collegial atmosphere and interdisciplinary collaboration are major keys to effectiveness.

Morrison (1998) distinguishes between interagency coordination 'different agencies working together at an organisational level' and multidisciplinary collaborations, 'committed individuals from different disciplines working together' (Morrison, 1998:6).

Similarly, collaboration is compromised if there is no one person responsible to orientate the new person to the ways of the team (Burbank et al, 2002).

Collaboration is the subject of a growing body of research. Within this, there are two distinctive streams: the first, which deals with strategic alliances and joint ventures between business organisations and the second, which examines mainly cross-sectoral collaboration between nonprofit organisations, business and government organisations (Gray, 2000).

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

Cooperation between links remains important for the functioning and efficiency of the child protection system. But referring to the studies it is noticed that achieving coordination of links remains a challenge itself.

Reder et al.(1993) note that some overlap of skills and responsibilities is inevitable between the various professions working with child maltreatment cases. Provided clear interprofessional communication is maintained and the actions each worker will take are known, they believe workers can share overlapping roles. Conversely, a lack of clarity as to the roles and functions to be fulfilled by the various agencies and professions in involved with child protection cases may lead to confusion, territorial disputes and the breakdown of interagency collaboration (Blyth & Milner, 1990; Birchall & Hallett, 1995).

In Australia, the state of Victoria has the Strengthening Families program, which advocates network coordination (Tomison, 2001).

Problems regarding interagency collaboration have beset child protection systems since the 1960s (Dale, Davies, Morrison, & Waters, 1989; Joint Chief Inspectors, 2002; Reder, Duncan, & Gray, 1993; Sanders, 1999; Stevenson, 1998). The problems are well documented (Calder & Horwath, 1999; Department of Health, 1995; Hallett, 1995; Milbourne et al., 2003; US General Accounting Office, 1992; Webb & Vulliamy, 2001). They include issues regarding lack of ownership amongst senior managers; inflexible organizational structures; conflicting professional ideologies; lack of budget control; communication problems; poor understanding of roles and responsibilities and mistrust amongst professionals.

Both Hallett and Birchall (1992) and Ovretveit (1996) stress the need for the partnership to be composed of appropriate members. This is often a challenge at the higher

levels of collaboration where there might be a wide variety of agencies seeking representation, especially from the non-government sector (Huxham & Vaugen, 2000).

However, it remains the case that “partnership” is still seen more as a means to promote interprofessional working rather than a way of placing service users at the center of agencies’ attention, as the primary stakeholder for collaboration. This was reflected in Morrison’s survey (described in Morrison & Lewis, 2005) of over 200 English members of 16 Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs).

Establishing the goals for collaboration can be complex because of differences in use of language, organizational cultures and procedures (Huxham & Vaugen, 2000). Lipsky (1980) also notes the goals set by senior managers may be differently interpreted by front-line practitioners.

“If members are unclear about the structures of the collaboration, they cannot be clear where the accountabilities lie” (Huxham & Vaugen, 2000, p. 800).

Tomison (1999) undertook research designed to evaluate the decision making of the various professionals involved in the management of suspected and confirmed child abuse and neglect cases. The study was carried out in the predominantly urban, Barwon region of the State of Victoria. The study found that the child protection network under investigation suffered from a number of inter-professional coordination and communication problems. Missing cases and missing data was a problem. In extreme instances this meant that basic child demographics were not collected and/or the official designation applied by the worker to identify the type of maltreatment that was suspected for specific cases was omitted (Tomison 1999).

Turnell and Edwards point out that: The challenge is to create a structure and models of child protection practice that address the seriousness of alleged or substantiated maltreatment while maximizing the possibility of collaboration between families and workers. (Turnell & Edwards, 1999, p. 27)

An essential element of communication is the exchange of relevant and timely information between professionals. Reder and Duncan found a lack of information sharing between professionals – as well as delays and inaccuracies – was recorded in most of the case reviews they examined.

CONCLUSIONS

According to literature we emphasize the idea that collaboration is the key of success in a child protection system. We know that a child protection worker will take the responsibility for gathering information about a child's health, education, and family, stage of development, living environment, concerns regarding his/her welfare and/ or protection and community. All this makes the collaboration more essential.

The field of child protection is an area which requires qualified and motivated professionals because high-risk fields need more support. Collaboration is estimated as a desirable work practice all over the world. To conclude collaboration is the subject of a growing body of research.

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