Creation of Social Exclusion in Policy and Practice

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Preface

This report is the result of a research project carried out at the Centre for Media and Economic Psychology at the Economic Research Institute at the Stockholm School of Economics.

This volume is submitted as a doctoral thesis at the Stockholm School of Economics. As usual, at the Economic Research Institute, the author has been entirely free to conduct and present her research in her own ways as an expression of her own ideas.

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Introductory Chapter

Overview

Social exclusion is often a chronic problem for diverse, dynamic societies. Certain populations may get marginalized as a country develops and exclusion occurs as a, sometimes inevitable, consequence of economic progress. Economic reforms and policies take time before any changes can be measured at the grass-root level. In the meantime, it is the everyday practice that remains pivotal to the people. It is this social element of policy change through which people experience the efficacy of new policy. The efficacy of policy in realistic terms should then be measured by observing the impact of practicing the policy on targeted populations - in this case, the socially excluded. That is, the practice of policy for combating social exclusion must generate experience of inclusion for targeted groups. Keeping this in mind, it is the social construction of exclusion that is explored in this research.

The neglect of children's rights perspective in social services practice in the UK is taken as the moment of creation and/or continuation of social exclusion in practice of social policy. That is, this research adheres to a children's rights value perspective on social policy. Fieldwork for this research is carried out in the United Kingdom (UK) because it forms a suitably complex, socially diversified platform for studying the phenomenon. Historical influences that may have led to neglect of children's rights perspective in current practice are reviewed as the first step towards understanding social construction of exclusion. The study also observes the subjective realities of social agents at the micro-level, and the sociological and psychological forces at the macro-level, which influence past and present production of social exclusion.

Vulnerable children and families that are classified as being at 'high risk' (of significant harm) by the UK social services constitute the socially excluded sample. These children and families suffer from social exclusion due to chronic problems of poverty, lack of education, and unemployment. Some of these cases are chronic in the UK, resulting in cycles of exclusion for this sample. For example, the majority of child protection cases referred to social services that lead to state intervention belong to the category of 'Care Leavers' (Care Leavers is a term used to refer to individuals that legally leave residential care as adults after being placed there by social services before their eighteenth birthday). This research also explores everyday situations that can collectively be considered representative of 'creation and propagation of social exclusion' when interacting with this socially excluded sample.

This chapter introduces the first step of this research in which the history behind the emergence of the concept of respecting children's rights is reviewed. The main argument put forth in this research is that it is important to first understand the social processes (both historical and current) that may lead to creation and/or propagation of social exclusion in everyday life before one can suggest realistic ways of mitigating it. The national policy-makers may get better returns on their investments combating social exclusion if there is additional knowledge of how practice can realistically be improved. This research hopes to highlight potentially fruitful future paths for policy and practice that may prevent loss of considerable financial and social capital in terms of return on State investment.

The four articles that follow this chapter form the second part of the research. Where this chapter presents the historical and theoretical perspective, the articles present the current and empirical perspective on social exclusion processes. Empirical observations in these articles suggest the present instances of production of social exclusion. They also provide an empirical basis for reflecting on the contextual relevance and feasibility of best practice prescriptions. For example, the first article, *Psychological Distance Among Proximal Groups: Barriers to Joint Efforts Against Social Exclusion,* argues that the prescribed method of joint effort by social workers and teachers to help children and families at risk is currently unachievable. Similarly, the subjective realities of the representatives of groups intimately involved in the process of creation of social exclusion, (for example, social workers in Article two and care leavers in Article three), present evidence that Government-led initiatives to achieve best practice may be far removed from reality.

Article four is a study of the interaction patterns between social workers and service users. The preceding three articles focus on discovering the subjective realities of individual groups that either are at risk of social exclusion or comprise of state agents in charge of combating social exclusion. The fourth article addresses potential barriers to their fruitful interaction with each other. It concludes this research endeavor with a glimpse of barriers currently in place between concerned parties. It gives context to the oft-prescribed need to establish participatory processes amongst socially distanced groups as a pre-requisite for preventing exclusion. Where the previous three articles present a static view of how social exclusion may be created or propagated in practice by affecting psychological states of individual groups, this article presents a snapshot of the process in action. It concludes this research on a slightly optimistic note, suggesting that application of the principles of negotiation research for lifting barriers to participation may be a fruitful way forward.

Chapter Outline

The definition of social exclusion adhered to in this research is presented first and is followed by introduction of the theoretical approach adopted for its study. The Social Services in the UK is the main Institution responsible for delivering services to vulnerable populations and child protection social workers are the protagonists. After establishing the theoretical foundation, the role and current situation of Social Services and social workers in the UK is introduced to the reader. Social forces such as media and political ideology are briefly discussed as influences on the selection of national policy and formation of public perception of socially excluded populations as well as social workers. It is followed by literature review that includes analysis of current issues in social services performance and prescriptions given to improve it.

The empirical agenda and methodology is presented at this juncture. A summary of the articles, contributions, reflections and suggestions, shortcomings in this research, and suggestions for future research follow the section on methodology and conclude this introductory chapter. The four articles that follow the introductory chapter form the second and final part of this work. They capture the current processes that may lead to the creation and/or propagation of social exclusion. The articles observe the interactions amongst concerned parties (social workers and populations at risk) in an everyday setting, taking into account the potential influence of the subjective realities of each group on their social interactions.

Social Exclusion and Children's Rights Perspective

Social Exclusion can be defined as, '*a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed attributes of the society in which they live*'. (Power & Wilson, 2000).

A children's rights approach to combating social exclusion is being promoted internationally. For example, the European Commission has been actively working towards establishing a children's rights approach to eradicating child poverty (and resulting cycles of social exclusion) in Europe. This approach instructs policy-makers to embrace the child-rights perspective in their national strategies and policies for social protection and social inclusion. The core principles of children's

rights established by the United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are upheld as the guidelines for improving children's well-being internationally and national policy-makers are expected to incorporate these principles in their national policies (Eurochild, 2007). The UK Government has been trying to become more child-friendly in its social policy and practice over the years, yet there is little improvement in the state of socially excluded children and families.

Theoretical Framework

Pareto laid the foundation of Welfare Economics and placed psychology and mainly sociology at an equal footing with Economics by highlighting the limitations of pure economic theory for achieving Pareto-optimum conditions. Pareto acknowledged the sociological element in every day life of Homo Economicus. He not only rejected the utilitarian approach of economics, but also emphasized that the non-rational needs to be examined along with the rational. Later, welfare theorists established the discipline as a study of conditions under which Pareto-efficient allocation of resources is possible, a point that was initially mooted by Pareto.

Pareto had opened the door to sociology as the means of developing a social policy for treating problems of welfare allocation (Mulberg, 1995). The problems of policy related to the problems of exclusion, therefore, cannot be adequately addressed, or understood, without including the sociological aspect of poverty and inequality. The Economic Welfare theory is essentially a macro-level theory. On the other hand, sociology and social psychology driven approaches are better suited to studying the micro-level dynamics of poverty, social exclusion, and inequality. It is through the interaction of these sociological and psychological forces that social exclusion is created in practice.

Sociological and Psychological Influences on Creation of Social Exclusion

Bourdieu (1991) defines Inequality in terms of power differences. Society and social interactions are inconceivable without power plays and the intricate web of socio-political fabric creates and reinforces these power differences and relationships. The class system represents the cultural power that is accumulated by a small percentage at the expense of many that are dominated by the powerful members of the society.

Various social transactions and relationships are structured in such a fashion that these class (or

power) distinctions are reproduced over time. The 'powerful' in a society are marked by concentration of economic, social, and cultural capital that manifests itself in the form of wealth, social status, and higher educational achievements respectively. The members of these groups bear the responsibility of reproducing the existing power networks and strengthening them responsibly by granting entry to a select few. Education is an important means of transition from a less powerful group into the elite circles because it provides 'legitimate access' to positions of power and dominance in the society, irrespective of status at birth. Education, then, can be seen as the means of acquiring exclusive advantages (Bourdieu, 1986).

Power imbalances and unequal access to dominant positions are a mark of an unequal society that is highly differentiated in terms of wealth, education, and social status, very similar to current times in the UK. The mechanics of the social systems reinforces the symbolic power and the superiority of the social workers over the socially excluded populations that they serve. For example, the institutionalization of children (when placed under State care) and subjugation to authority (of Social Services) shapes their identities as passive objects rather than subjects capable of influencing their lives. They get used to others taking decisions for them, consequently comprising their control and power over their lives. The effect of this institutionalization has to remain a powerful force in the life of the children who are taken under State care because it impacts their chances of experiencing autonomy and independent decision-making, and consequently, of socialization after leaving care. Goffman emphasizes the impact of Institutions for socially excluded in the following words, "*whether a particular (total) institution acts as a good or bad force in civil society, force it will have*" (Goffman, 1961, pp. 22).

The force of a (total) institution is felt by children in care in terms of an invasion of their private sphere and the replacement of social order of a family by the structure of an institution. For example, if a child misbehaves in a home, the matter is dealt in private within the boundaries of the home. To the contrary, if a child in care behaves aggressively, external authority figures are called in (this violation is severe for children in care, as illustrated in Article three of this research). Their personal information is made public by law, a phenomenon termed as "*violation of one's informational reserve regarding self*" (Goffman, 1961, pp. 32). Most private information is shared amongst the caseworkers and the right to privacy is invaded, a process that can lead to feelings of mortification (Goffman, 1961).

When institutionalized individuals leave care, they are the dominated class with poor education and

little or no self-confidence. They often exhibit 'learned helplessness', a state where after many years of unquestioning obedience and submission to authority, individuals develop an oppressed mentality devoid of critical thought or action. Freedom is a new concept for them and they are only physically free. Their psyche is still dominated, domesticated, and incapable of perceiving the power that they now possess, essentially negating the first assumption of their being *empowered* parties in the participation process (Seligman, 1967; 1975; Freire, 1973). This interplay of socio-psychological forces can potentially nullify whatever benefit initially sought by the social services when they intervene in the lives of socially excluded populations. The neglect of psychological wellbeing can lead to the creation of cycles of exclusion where care leavers fail to achieve social integration even after substantial investment of State funds and effort.

Education and Social Exclusion

A lack of education is another important mitigating factor in the lives of these children (and young adults). It enforces the stigma attached to being placed under State care[1]. The lack of education not only places these children in a socially disadvantaged position but also reinforces the class differences and social barriers based on educational achievement and refinement (Bourdieu, 1984).

Language has a strong role to play in creation and perception of self-identity. It is used to establish superiority or allegiance to the elite (Goffman, 1959). Within Institutions where socially excluded reside, language was used by the staff to establish superiority over the inmates with the former using more refined words and better pronunciation than the 'unrefined' inmates (Goffman, 1961). Education, therefore, is necessary for the socially excluded not only for its economic benefits in terms of developing economically viable citizens but also for psychological strength.

Social exclusion is a stigmatizing experience that needs to be understood with its sociological and psychological ramifications. It not only affects the psychology of the socially excluded but also influences the social relationships of these individuals. Stereotypes are created of socially excluded populations and they act as, sometimes conscious and mostly unconscious, psychological barriers to social interactions (Goffman, 1963).

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[1]   Lack of proper education for children in care in UK has been a cause for serious concern. See http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2008/06/26/108657/education-of-children-in-care.html for review.

Research Aim

This research adopts a social constructivist view as proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1966) in examining the phenomenon of social exclusion in the UK. It highlights the role of everyday reality and social interactions amongst actors as the process that can mitigate or create social exclusion. The rationale behind this approach is that the subjective reality of multiple policy actors need to be understood before barriers to joint efforts against exclusion can be lifted. Some scholars have proposed a similar strategy in reforming social work education and practice in the UK (Laird, 1993; Parton & O'Bryne, 2000). They have started a campaign to restructure social work into 'constructive social work' that focuses on an interactive, participatory approach to interacting with clients (Parton & O'Bryne, 2000). This approach has received much support amongst the social work community in the UK, forming a coalition that is critical of current social work practice (references given in literature review).

Though constructive social work is a promising strategy to combat social exclusion, I argue that it cannot be implemented in absence of a supportive social policy that is similarly aligned with children's rights perspective. Therefore, the first step in this research is to explore the causes behind the neglect of a children's rights perspective in social policy, which may lead to social exclusion. In practice, the creation of social exclusion is observed as a process of interaction amongst multiple 'symbolic universes'. The aim, therefore, is to explore the process of creation of social exclusion in practice, that is, at the everyday level of social interactions between policy agents and socially excluded population. Potential for achieving better alignment of social policy practice with children's rights principles hopefully emerges during the process.

Social Construction of Exclusion

Berger & Luckmann (1966) state that institutions are created when the subjective reality of individuals is transformed into an objective social reality through the passage of time. That is, Institutions are socially constructed through "*a reciprocal typification of habitualised actions by types of actors*" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, pp. 72). Norms and values are passed on the progeny that takes that social reality as a given objective reality. All institutions gain legitimacy with the passage of time where tacit knowledge precedes values that get passed on. An Institution, therefore, is a 'symbolic universe'. Awareness of its subjective creation gets lost in the transition. Berger &

Luckmann (1966) remind us that, "*symbolic universes are social products with a history. If one is to understand their meaning, one has to understand the history of their production*" (pp.115).

The institution of Social Services is seen as a product of habitualized actions by a group of actors in this research. It is viewed as a symbolic universe. This universe is created through a reciprocal relationship between policy makers' directives and the main institutional actors, the social workers[2]. Social actors outside the social services possess another symbolic universe, unique to their experiences at each level of legitimation. The novel viewpoint introduced here is that the transformation that different social actors undergo during the production of their symbolic universe diverges into separate paths. Consequently, differing parallel realities, or symbolic universes, are created. In the present context, the dynamics of the differences between realities of groups of social actors (such as social workers, teachers, children at risk, care leavers, journalists, and policy makers) may create social exclusion instead of combating it when policy is translated into practice.

Research Problem

Currently, there are approximately 60,000 children in England that are "*looked after*" by the State (DCSF, 2008)[3]. It is a formidable challenge to improve the living conditions of these (known) [4]children at risk of exclusion because the problem is embedded within complexities of high poverty and inequality within the UK. Recent research on social exclusion in the UK has highlighted that the current society shows deep class divisions and highest levels of inequality over the last 40 years. The poll results showed that 89% respondents feel they are judged by class and social mobility has remained static after ten years of Labour Government (Glover, 2007; Ward, 2007).

Expenditure on Children's and Families' Services has increased considerably after New Labour Government came into power, showing an increase of 30% from 1996/97 till 2000/01 (Department of Health, UK, 2003). This increase in investment was called for because the UK had the highest percentage of children living in poverty (32%) amongst all EU countries[5] at the beginning of the

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[2]   The target sample group of policy actors in this research is Child Protection Social Workers. The terms 'Social Workers' and 'Child Protection Social Workers' are used synonymously in the text.

[3]   http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000810/SFR23-2008Textv1oct.pdf

[4]   The actual number of referrals made to Social Services is much higher. For example, for the year ending March 2008, 538,500 referrals were made - out of which only 34, 000 children became subject to child protection plan.

[5]   The UK Government defines child poverty as children living in a household on less than 60% of median income, adjusted for the composition of the household. The median is the halfway point between the nation's highest and lowest incomes. This measure is based solely on net disposable income and does not include 'free' goods like

new millennium (the average for Europe is 20%) (Coles et. al., 2002). Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in the UK spent GBP 50.3 billion on projects aimed at improving children's well-being in 2007-08. It is estimated that this expenditure will increase to GBP 59.4 billion by 2010-11 (DCSF, 2008)[6].

Labour Government established the Social Exclusion Unit in 1997, and in 2006, established the Social Exclusion Taskforce to target the most difficult groups within the socially excluded populations[7]. Children in care (referred to as 'looked after children' in the UK and used synonymously with children in care henceforth) were identified as the one of the most difficult to reach groups. Despite considerable financial investments (1.9 billion pounds were spent on the provision of services to 'looked after children' in 2006) and various policy initiatives, there is little improvement. A recent study of children's well-being across 23 rich nations placed the UK at the bottom (Pickett & Wilkinson, 2007). Tony Blair acknowledged the failure of the Government in his speech on Social Exclusion in 2006:

"The state spends some 1.9 billion pounds acting as in loco parentis for children in care it costs about a 100,000 – 110,000 pounds a year to keep a child in residential care and this is the problem: There is very little relationship between spending and outcomes."

The Role of Social Services

The institution of Social Services in the UK translates social policy into practice. The child protection function of social services is the most potent tool to combat social exclusion because it deals directly with children and families in need of protection and state intervention. However, the failure of social services system has captured much attention of late and has been subject to policy and practice reforms. Labor Government has skewed public expenditure in the direction of improving services to poor[8] children. Public spending per child has grown by 20% between 1996/97 and 2002/02 (versus only 2% for working age adult and 13% for pensioners). In education as well,

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Schooling and may lead to more cynical statistics as compared to countries with more inclusive child poverty measures.

[6] http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/aboutus/reports/pdfs/7493-DCSF-AnnualReport.pdf
[7] www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk
[8] A child is 'poor' if s/he does not have access to basic necessities (such as meals, toys, and clothes) resulting in material deprivation and lives in an absolute low income family. This measure of child poverty has been introduced by the UK Government in 2003 based on a combination of income measurement and material deprivation (Department for Work and Pension, 2003, *Measuring Child Poverty,* DWP).

spending on schools has increased with a reduction on spending on higher education. Expenditure on children's welfare under Labour Government is higher than average (compared to previous Governments) and continues to rise since 1997 (Sefton, 2004).

However, despite the increased expenditure, increased focus on children's well-being, outcomes for poor children in education, health, etc., remain much worse than for children from higher income families. In the case of education, the resources are not reaching those schools that need them the most. Similarly, in social services, there is a lot of local variation in the amount spent per child, indicating that in some areas, most deprived children are not getting the help they need due to these bureaucratic constraint. Access to resources remains dependent on the existing inequality in society and those that need the services the most are still not receiving them (Sefton, 2004). The fact that higher expenditure therefore may not be the only answer to these multidimensional problems has become evident.

Moreover, New Economics Foundation (nef) in the UK carried out an extensive survey of vulnerable children in Nottingham in collaboration with the Nottingham City Council in 2005 and found that poverty had a weaker than expected link with both personal development and socializing. Poverty does remain the most important factor influencing children's well-being but the results suggest that there are other avenues for alleviating the detrimental effects of poverty. This finding suggests that quality of interactions with social agents (such as social workers and other professional working for child welfare) can play a central role in affecting children's well-being.

Main Policy Actors – Child Protection Social Workers

Child protection social workers are considered to be the main policy actors responsible for converting policy vision into everyday practice. However, in the UK, child protection social workers are held responsible for failing to save children at risk from harm and the social services have been subject to strong criticism. Research on the efficacy of child protection social workers as reliable decision makers in child protection cases has produced dismal results. All 45 child protection inquiry reports in the UK between 1973-94 were studied and it was found that professional error was responsible for the failure of recognizing risks to the child (Munro, 1999). Traditional enquiry into cases that go wrong focuses strongly on scrutinizing and judging the professionals involved (Munro, 2005).

Emotional exhaustion, detachment, or distancing the self from the job and a slump in personal achievement are the three classical symptoms of burnout and researchers state that social workers exhibit all of these symptoms. Low morale and poor performance of the workers seems inevitable under such circumstances (Maslach et al., 2001, Munro, 2005). Consequently, some of London boroughs have 40% vacancy rate and generally most of the workers are recruited from overseas. The rate of applications for training programs has also decreased by 59% and advertising campaigns have led to little improvement (8%) (Munro, 2005).

Scandalous stories about child protection social workers in UK failing miserably at their jobs[9] are often published. Social workers were criticised heavily in the British media following horrific death of a 10-year-old girl, Victoria Climbie, while under social services care. The case led to massive public outrage and after an intensive enquiry ('Laming Enquiry', 2003[10]), multiple changes were made in child protection policy and practise. The Social Services went under major reforms, with a multitude of new procedural guidelines introduced to improve practise.

There was much emphasis on the lack of a well-trained workforce, and in the public eye it has been the social workers responsible for poor practice. In 2001, a public poll was conducted regarding social workers' image in the UK and The Guardian (one of the leading newspapers of the UK) reported the findings in the following words:

"*It's official: the public does not like social workers, according to a new poll out today. Tell us something we don't already know. Social workers have always been in a tricky situation. They are either seen as useless incompetents who can't stop abuse even when it is going on right in front of them, or they are no better than the Stasi, the old east German secret police*".

(Adam Woolf, www. guardian.co.uk, Thursday, March 15, 2001)

Contrary to predominantly negative media reports of UK social workers, there was research claiming that the *attitudes* of social workers in UK and in Sweden were almost identical and they shared common concerns about the welfare of their clients[11] (Sundell, Vinnerljung & Ryburn, 2001). This evidence suggested there was a need for further research in this area that could help

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[9] See http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2003/sep/07/children.childprotection for an analysis of "disastrous mistakes for vulnerable children" made by social workers and public outrage against them.

[10] http://www.victoria-climbie-inquiry.org.uk/finreport/finreport.htm

[11] Nordic countries have achieved lowest rates of relative income poverty and highest rates of child well-being. Sweden is ranked number one in the world in material well-being of children and number three in overall well-being of children (UNICEF, report Card No. 7, 2007- http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc7_eng.pdf)

highlight the causes of failure of child and family welfare services in the UK that lay beyond the shortcomings of the workforce. It guided the current research towards exploring production of current situation from historical point of view where policy actors, as well as policy makers, may be driven by social forces operating from beyond their current spheres of existence. Adhering to the concept of social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), the history behind currently taken-for-granted social value perspectives and child welfare practice is analyzed in the following section.

Historical Trends in Social Construction of 'Childhood' and Child Welfare

The concept of 'Childhood' began to emerge in the late nineteenth century. It is referred to as 'the classic period in which childhood was transformed' (as argued by Hopkins, 1994). The process began when compulsory schooling replaced wage earning as the accepted occupation for children aged five to around 12 or 13. 'Childhood' became independent of the rural-urban world, the respectable-non-respectable working classes, and the social classes themselves. Their identity independent of adults was established as childhood became classified and accepted as another realm of existence.

The economic worth of the child was reduced as its sentimental worth increased and this happened in conjunction with changes in the relationship between economic and non-economic factors in life generally. The place of the child was seen outside the market and in classrooms and playgrounds. In 1881, Dr. Abraham Jacobi organized the Pediatric Section of the American Medical Society, and in the following years, children's hospitals had been opened in almost all major cities in the US. Increasing attention started being paid to psychological health of the children, a process that gained momentum after the devastation of World War I.

Towards the end of nineteenth century, scientific progress played an important role in further transforming 'childhood'. By the 1900s, school medical check ups had been introduced and the 'body' of the child had become interesting for doctors as part of the concern for children's physical welfare, a phenomenon referred to as the technology of 'social hygiene' (Armstrong, 1995; 1983). Politicians, doctors, and scientists began to focus on children because of the emergent perception of children as a hope for the future. Children became focus of legislative attention, a focus of future

social development, and used as 'symbols of social hope as serious representatives of the human condition' (Steedman in Cooter, (ed.), 1992).

'Standardization' came into effect by early twentieth century, with compulsory schooling, welfare provisions, youth groups, and the juvenile justice system in place (cf: Sommerville, 1982; in Hendrick, 1997). The new society attempted to mould young children in the desired shape and pattern. This plan originated from the middle class attachment to notions of domesticity and spread of the 'domestic ideal', especially for the poor, as effects of the Industrial Revolution became evident. Social problems largely restricted to rural areas, such as poverty, lack of proper housing and congested living conditions, diseases, substance abuse, prostitution, illegitimate parentage, orphans, etc., now were brought to the cities. This can be seen as the birth of social work, where city-dwellers desperately wanted to control and educate the poorer classes in order to safeguard their own middle-class morality. Thus, the roots of social welfare and social work lay embedded within the notions of charity and religious salvation, where the vulnerable classes were seen as a threat to society.

Approaches to Child Welfare

At the beginning of the 1920s, two new approaches of child rearing developed. The first was the 'scientific method' of child rearing, advocated by Dr F. Truby King, a doctor in New Zealand who advocated breast-feeding, toilet-training, and sleeping according to fixed timetables. The second, and more popular, approach was that promoted by John B. Watson, a behavioral psychologist who wanted mothers to raise superior children. Both approaches were authoritarian and disciplinarian, emphasizing 'habit-training' (behaviorism). They were not empathetic toward the child but introduced 'scientific motherhood' to produce children who never cried, were self reliant, well behaved, and independent, suited to follow the American way of life at a time where there was shortage of nannies and middle class women were trying to enter the labour market. Such a shift of women from households into the labour market required well-behaved children who could survive independently of the mother through habit-training.

It is evident that the concept of childhood and child welfare is intricately linked with the economic situation of parents. During the pre-war era, children were seen as an economic resource and the style of parenting used was one that would raise economically beneficial children, who would be

good workers and help support the family. The relationship between child welfare and material situation is summarized by Vincent (1997) in the following words: "*If we want to understand the process of change... we must discuss the problem as one of an evolving pattern of material and emotional considerations, neither ever dominant, the balance between them varying as between classes over time*" (David Vincent, quoted by Hendrick, pp. 21, 1997).

Strict child rearing remained predominant until the 1920s, especially within the working classes. However, by 1930, the economic value of children became secondary and childhood acquired a sacred status. The market value of children accepted from the early nineteenth century (child labour) was replaced by the 'emotional and affective' value of children, emphasizing that regardless of social class, children belonged in a world of a nurturing home, school, and play. The economic value was thus replaced by emotional worth (cf: Zelizer 1994). Zelizer examines this shift from the sociological perspective and studies the inherent paradoxes in the changes that occurred in the perception of children as economically worthless and emotionally priceless at the same time. She argues that this shift occurred due to adults' changing evaluations of children and childhood (Zelizer, 1994).

Emergence of 'Softer' Approaches to Child Welfare

More attention was given to psychological wellbeing of children since the end of nineteenth century. One of the most well received theories was Bowlby's Attachment Theory, which gained momentum in the 1940s. Bowlby complemented the work of developmental psychologists (such as Mary Ainsworth) and presented a comprehensive theory of attachment formation in childhood. Attachment theory transformed the way children and childhood was perceived (Bowlby, 2004).

Bowlby focused on the mental health of children in post-war Europe in the 1950s and emphasized that separation from primary care-givers (mainly mothers) was the cause of neurosis in adulthood (Bowlby, 1951). His psychologically-grounded approach to child rearing was well-received because of the devastation of World War II, which left Europe abhorring Fascist, authoritarian codes of conduct. Child Psychology developed as an independent discipline during this time and 'softer', more child-centered theories of psychology were introduced. Simultaneously, the decline of Industrial revolution led to changes in the family structure and mothers could now afford to stay at home. The focus of child-rearing practices shifted from hard discipline to nurturing the child

(Hendrick, 1997; 2003)

Another trend that emerged was 'New Psychology' (cf: Susan Isaacs), which focused more on the needs of the child as against ignoring their 'wants', as advocated by King and Watson. This approach was more sympathetic to the child and allowed more freedom (by encouraging play). Isaacs, the psychologist leading the trend, interpreted children's anti-social tendencies as 'emotional dilemmas' (see Smith, 1985 for a review of Isaac's work). The 'fun morality' of the post-war era was introduced by Anderson & Aldrich's *Understand your baby: An Interpretation of Growth* (1939). However, in a post-war atmosphere of strict regimentation, many mothers stuck with the Truby King style baby-care methods clinics (an example of stickiness of contextual embeddedness).

In 1946, Spock's book *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*[12] served to revolutionise child care practices in the post-war era. Though it was a strong shift, it was still mitigated to a large extent by regional and social class barriers. These trends in child rearing literature reflect society's attitude towards children and connection of perceptions of childhood to political objectives. At the start of the Industrial Revolution, the emphasis was on producing 'mechanical babies' (King and Watson). After World War II, the emphasis was on 'New Psychology' because it could explain children's aggression.

Aggression was a major political concern with the rise of Fascism and Nazism, coupled with a fear of Communism (leading to a rejection of previous 'habit training' practices and their recognition as totalitarian and 'Prussianism'). Consequently, the impact of World War II was of a reaction against totalitarian child rearing regimens and resulted in a proliferation of literature on liberal child care methods, such as the emergence of John Bowlby and the focus on mother-child separation (borne from medical and psychoanalytical consideration given to the effect of evacuation on children in 1939).

The family was shown to have a central place in future policies that came into effect after 1939 and until the 1960s because of the effect of mass evacuations during war. Also, child abuse emerged in the UK in the 1960s and social structural analysts considered it to be a consequence of inequality and poverty (Parton, 1985). Social structural explanations of child abuse emphasized the role of socioeconomic factors as a cause of abuse. However, one weakness of this work is that is

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[12]   Full-text available for download from http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1625859

marginalizes the child.

The post war period (1960s) showed more warmth in relationships, with parents trying to reduce the psychological distance that they had felt in their own childhoods. A mitigating variable here was social class. For instance, middle class mothers were more likely to read and follow manuals and be aware of the trends of leading psychologists and psychoanalysts of their times and were also more likely to repeat the way their mothers raised them in the 1930s and 40s. More humane attitudes prevailed as the century progressed. Hendrick (1997) summarizes this transition in the following words:

"*Among the reasons put forward to explain this change are improvements in all aspects of the standard of living, including the very important expansion of domestic living space, together with smaller families. There was also the 'new' psychology, the decline of those strict religious views that looked upon children as 'evil', coupled with the rise of educational theories that saw them as 'flowers' instead of 'weeds' and an increasing, if grudging, respect for their rights and freedoms.*" (Hendrick, pp. 35).

The 1980s depict long term tensions between public child care policy and parental responsibility and rights, and the jurisdiction of the state finally snapped. The Cleveland affair (1987) hit the headlines when a lot of children were placed under state following suspicions of sexual abuse (sexual abuse was the only recognized abuse at the time). The UK childcare policy in those years is described as an *'uneasy synthesis.. a pragmatic response reflecting a number of different, often conflicting positions.. Laissez fare, paternalism, the support of the family, and children's rights'* (Packman, 1981, pp 224).

Social Value Perspectives in Child Welfare Policy

Based on the historical developments of 'Childhood' and child welfare, Harding (1991) has identified the following 'Social Value Perspectives' in child welfare policy:

1. **Laissez-faire**: This was common in the nineteenth century and saw some revival in the twentieth century. The welfare of children was the concern of their parents and families. Children were not yet seen as independent social agents of relevance outside the family sphere. This perspective assumes a Patriarchal stance and the state intervenes only in extreme cases.

2. **State paternalism**: This perspective developed late nineteenth century onwards. It was inspired by the then evolving view of children as the future of the nation. Ensuring child welfare becomes crucial to the progress of the nation and thus an implicit responsibility of the state. Therefore, the state intervenes and biological bonds are undervalued in social policy when influenced by this perspective of childhood and child welfare.

3. **Defense of the Birth Family**: This perspective became popular since establishment of the welfare state in 1945. It is informed by the past developments in developmental psychology and emphasizes the importance of healthy family environment. The focus is on the role of the state in assisting disadvantaged families in creating a nurturing environment for the children.

4. **Children's Rights**: This is the perspective formed by culmination of knowledge about child development and nurturing. It emphasizes that each child should be treated as an independent, capable 'subject' rather than a passive object with little or no say in her/his life events. Though this perspective has received much support internationally, its effect on policy remains marginal.

Hendrick (1997) argues that there is only a marginal effect of children's rights perspective on social policy in the UK specifically because of a predilection for Foucaldian philosophy in child welfare policy and practice. This means that through welfare, health, education, and legal provisions, children are 'monitored', 'surveyed', and 'calculated', nearly always in relation to their families, and that their health and welfare is fused with the broader political health of the nation. Foucault rejects overarching structural theories of class and patriarchy to explain power and domination in favor of an approach that focuses on 'power' as 'knowledge', with the former being dispersed through, for example, science and education. Foucault maintains that via the process of children being submitted to scrutiny, new forms of 'knowledge' are produced, primarily in the social sciences, which are then used to further regulate the children (and their families). This is achieved via infant welfare schemes, school medical inspections, juvenile courts, child guidance clinics, and social work with neglected and abused children.

Thus, regulation and control is imposed not by physical force but by the ability of those possessing 'knowledge' - doctors, teachers, lawyers, psychiatrists, probation officers, social workers – to determine what is acceptable, respectable, and above all, normal. By and large, those children who disobey, who are abnormal, are deemed to require 'treatment' (medical, psychological, social, educational) – sometimes together with their families – rather than punishment. After being successfully 'treated', they can be returned to the 'normality' of the normal family, so that they may

have the opportunity of realizing their potential as future adults. Child welfare scholars in the UK argue that social policy reforms and initiatives introduced by New Labour Government reflects preference for such monitoring and control of children at the cost of neglecting the children's rights perspective (Hendrick 2003; 2005).

The reason for this alleged shift towards greater preference for monitoring the vulnerable children could be the introduction of a radical third category of children as those capable of being 'pure evil'. This notion emerged during and after the James Bulger murder case in 1999[13]. The event changed the predominant image of children as essentially good and innocent to possibility of them being evil, as against 'abnormal' which was a morally acceptable category.

The UK was shocked when three year old Bulger was kidnapped and killed by two ten year old children. Headlines such as '*Bulger murder uniquely evil*' (BBC, Tuesday, 14 December, 1999, 17:59 GMT) and '*Innocence Lost – James Bulger's Murder*' (MSN Special Report, UK) spread across the nation. The case is referred to as "*the murder that changed UK*" (Morrison, 2003, *Life After James,* The Guardian). This event strongly affected the UK society and a strong child-hate campaign ensued that made the abnormal/normal perception of children redundant as this new category of "*evil*" was considered possible for the first time.

This violent behaviour of the children was seen as beyond abnormal and introduced the concept of children being capable of being (and perceived as) devoid of innocence and natural goodness (concepts associated implicitly with 'Childhood'). Devoid of these 'angelic', good properties that made children and childhood sacred (and harmless), risk from deviant children assumed centre-stage. Following this public outrage, anxiety, and fear for the moral fibre of the nation, New Labour's policies aligned with the idea of re-establishing a civil society where such acts would be eradicated. Socially excluded children began to be defined mainly in terms of risks and liabilities.

It has been shown in history that public perception and dominant ideology influences child welfare practice. For example, during the 1880s, laws against cruelty to children were passed not based on concern for the children but for combating the threats to the rising 'respectable' middle class. The British society was preoccupied with the Industrial Revolution and its ramifications for the people. As mentioned earlier, social work was introduced at this time to deal with 'immoral' problems that had earlier been associated with the rural class. They had now become threats to the middle-class

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[13] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder_of_James_Bulger

because of increased mobility of the poor to the cities as a result of the Industrial Revolution. The movement changed the socio-political agendas of the UK. Since political and ideological goals have been pivotal in influencing child welfare legislation, "*We should recognise that social policy initiatives were part of a wider socio-economic and cultural change*" (Cooter, 1992, pp. 4).

Child welfare laws in the UK have been influenced by scandalous social events and their media coverage in the past. For example, media interest in child abuse exploded in 1974 with the death of Maria Colwell. This report established the issue as a major social problem and led to fundamental changes in policy and practice (similar to Laming Enquiry in 2003, which followed the death of Victoria Climbie). The Children Act of 1975 reintroduced state intervention, placing much more emphasis on first consideration to be given to the child, and then the family, not the other way around (which had become the norm before the 1970s) The incident caused a 'moral panic', a phenomenon oft repeated in the UK over the years.

Current Child Welfare Practice in the UK

The complexity of the research problem is better understood after reviewing the historical perspective of child welfare approaches, attitudes towards 'childhood', and social policy processes in the UK. It elucidates the roots of the ideology in the New Labour policies where children are viewed predominantly in terms of risks and liabilities. Based on Harding's classification of Value Perspectives (1991), child welfare and social policy under New Labour fall into the category of 'Paternalism', where the State intervenes and biological bonds are undervalued. This conclusion is validated with the New Labour being criticised for promoting a "Nanny State"[14] (O'Neill, 2007).

Unlike his predecessors, Tony Blair gave much attention to the Public Sector and Social Services specifically. Public sector and the Social Services became centre-stage and target of much investments and reforms as well as media coverage. Figure 1 on the next page shows the shift in media attention given to Social Services from 1988 until 2008. The attention is measured in terms of number of articles published on 'Social Workers' in a national newspaper in the last twenty years[15]. The newspaper is selected based on criteria of (a) publication quality, (b) popularity, and (c) political stance.

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[14] *Tony the Nanny: Tony Blair's Shameful Record on Civil Liberties*: http://www.reason.com/news/show/120250.html).
[15] 'Social Workers' was used as the keyword for searching newspaper archives.

The Times, The Daily Telegraph, The Independent, and The Guardian are the leading national newspapers in the UK. They fall within the 'quality broadsheets' category, satisfying criterion (a). However, The Times lacks popularity and the Daily Telegraph is strongly supportive of The Conservatives, also known as 'Tories' in lieu of The Tory Party founded in 1678 (that later became the Conservative Party). The Daily Telegraph is also referred to as the Daily "Torygraph" (Cridland, 2004). The Guardian and The Independent satisfy all three conditions, but between them, only The Guardian had an accessible archive for articles ranging back twenty years.
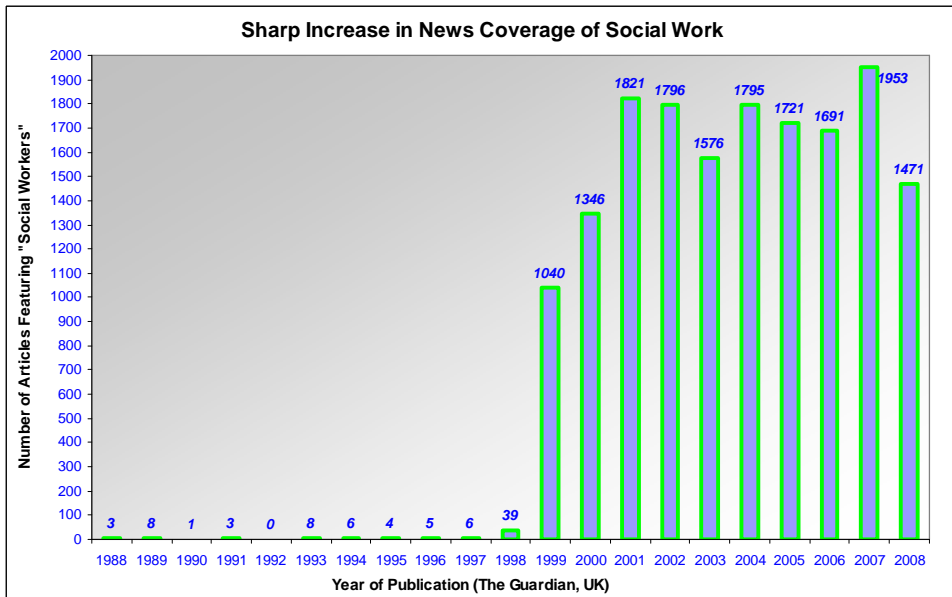
Figure 1: Media Attention to Social Work in UK, 1988-2008

There is a sharp increase in the number of articles published on issues related to social workers and social services generally from 1998 onwards. New Labour came into power from 1997 and the sudden increase in attention given to Social Services could be interpreted as the effect of political shift in the nation with much greater focus on Public Sector in general and on reforming the Social Services specifically. New Labour has actively initiated discussions on child poverty and children's well-being as part of its political campaign. From the social welfare perspective, discourses initiated by the State on social exclusion are seen by scholars as the pre-requisite for legitimating new social surveillance systems. They argue that the category of socially excluded people is generated by the 'operations of the contemporary political economy' (Penna, 2005).

Media (Journalists) Influence and Public Perceptions

Berger & Luckmann (1966) argue that Institutions are created to compact chaos of disorder and threats of nihilation that constantly surround our symbolic universes. The familiar, constructive norms and subjective values are typified and congealed into objective Institutionalised reality that is stable and comforting. Elements that threaten this stability lead to formulation of strategies that protect the sanctity of our known symbolic universe from unknown threatening forces. Media plays a crucial role in this process. It has the power to divert and manipulate public perception of what is threatening and what is not. Increasing attention given to issues of child protection by the Media during the Blair regime may have an important political implication of facilitating shifts in child welfare policy and general attitude towards social services. For example, Richard Garside, the director of the centre for crime and justice studies at King's College, London, said "*In the mid-nineties Tony Blair made a big thing about crime, calling on the conscience of the nation that contributed to a sense of crisis.*"[16]

Most of the articles on social workers are emotionally charged and negative in content, reporting extreme negative events, such as death of a child in care or stories of neglect and abuse of children (detailed review in Article 4). Kahneman and Tversky (1979) highlighted the impact of presentation of information on decision processes of people. Their theory states that our judgment (and decision-making) is influenced not only by the type of information provided, but also by the way it is presented (or framed). Similarly, exposure to stimuli leaves an impression on our memory. These impressions are involuntary and implicit, that is, they cannot be verbally explained. Our reasoning capability acts as a filter between our intuitive thoughts and actions based on these expressions and our judgment that is explicit and voluntary. Therefore, intuitive judgments can be understood as those judgments that directly reflect our impressions without reasoning (Kahneman, 2003). The stereotypes of Social workers are created through media, leading to social exclusion of this group in society.

Visual perceptions (such as disturbing images of children incorporated in UK newspaper articles) play an important role in influencing accessibility of impressions (Kahneman, 2003). By enhancing the properties or attributes of a certain object, attention can be deliberately drawn to other attributes of the object that normally would have been overlooked. Deliberate attention through instruction

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[16]   http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2007/aug/23/youthjustice.gunviolence

can enhance accessibility of all its features more readily and in greater detail (Kahneman, 2003). Shocking images of distressed children have a powerful impact on public opinion. They generate an outrage against the evil existing in society and calls for immediate, drastic measures from the State to safeguard the society. In such situations, the public may be more accepting of draconian laws and their implementation.

Another way in which media can influence the attitude of the public and get it more aligned to a Foucauldian perspective of controlling and monitoring children (at the cost of neglecting children's rights perspective in practice) is through influencing risk perceptions. Research shows that the risk assessments vary depending upon the way information is presented to the decision maker. For example, *description*-based risk perceptions may be more extreme than *experience*-based judgments. When subjects are asked to rate the riskiness of certain task, they consistently gave it much higher than average ratings. On the other hand, subjects that participated in the task gradually reduced their risk ratings as their experience increased, till the final ratings came very close to the average (Weber, 2003). Child protection social workers are the only ones with experience-based judgment. Judgment of the public is based on the description of events published by the media.

To summarize, contrary to child-rights centered practice, a Foucauldian perspective on children's rights seems to be predominant. For example, Reducing Youth Offending Generic Solution National Project (RYOGENS) is one of the approximately 23 projects that the UK Government has funded as part of its aim to e-enable all local governance systems by 2005 (Penna, 2005). The project is based in sharing information across social services, police, health, and education sectors to *identify* and *monitor* children or youths that have high probability of committing crimes. The creation of Information, Referral, and Tracking (IRT) System proposed by the Children's Act 2004 is a step further in the direction of creating a surveillance system that proposes creation of a database accessible to all professionals involved in ensuring well-being of children in the UK. The emphasis is on protection of social order from potential threats of anti-social behavior of vulnerable, socially excluded populations.

Literature Review – Exclusion of Child Right's Perspective from Practice

Preliminary literature review revealed that the exclusion of children from decision making processes regarding their lives is given as the main cause behind ill-informed child protection practice (Laming Enquiry, 2003; McNeish & Newman, 2002; Bannister et.al., 1990; Barford & Wattam, 1991; DfES: Children's Act 1989). The children are not consulted, their voices are not heard, and their opinions are largely neglected during child protection case proceedings (Morrow, 1999). Inclusion of children in the decision making process is heralded as the optimal and the most desirable route towards better decision making and services provision in the child welfare sector (Winter, 2006; Tisdall et.al., 2006; Bannister et. al., 1990; Barford & Wattam, 1991; Schofield & Thoburn, 1996).

Overall, there appear to be two main strands of research within child welfare literature focusing on State intervention as potential solution. One strand of research focuses on assessing the risks to the children resulting from bad judgment and decision-making on part of the welfare professionals. Various risk assessment and management theories and models are presented within this research group and the emphasis is mainly on reducing the biases or threats to good analysis and decision-making process (for example, Anderson, 1976; Romelsjö et.al. 1992; Ruscio, 1998; Schaffer, 1998; Lyle & Graham, 2000; Arad et.al. 2003; Britner & Mossler, 2002; Hjern et.al. 2002; 2004; Crisma et.al. 2004; Johnson & Petrie, 2004; Little, Axford & Morpeth, 2004; Schwalbe, 2004; Schwartz et.al., 2004; Rzepnicki, 2005; Vinnerljung et.al., 2006). There are two aspects under consideration within this body of literature. One is a concern for judgment and decision-making capabilities of social workers and the other is with their understanding of 'risk'.

Both aspects of practice, judgment and decision-making and risk assessment, are intricately linked. Child protection professionals are guided by legislation to take joint decisions with other professionals. Their decisions are guided by the input of case psychologists, police, judges, or physicians depending upon the circumstances of the case. Risk perceptions may vary depending upon differences among professionals' attitudes and perception. Multiple sources of information during investigative procedures regarding children and families at risk of significant harm and social exclusion create inevitable ambiguity for the decision makers.

There are a number of parties involved in the decision and they all have different ways of gathering information, and also, of reacting to it. Social workers, mental health workers, police, guardians, judges as well as Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) (volunteers trained in the US with the explicit of goal of safeguarding the best interests of the child, similar to *guardians* in European countries that represent the children in court) are concerned with the same objective of providing a safe and secure environment for the child. Despite the commonality of purpose, the way that these professionals gather and process the information differs and consequently, the decision-making processes yield varying results.

Research on decision-making in different professional groups has shown that the decision is guided more by the affiliation of the person to a certain group rather than the situation of the child per se. For example, CASA workers rely more on the information regarding the stability of the family whereas social care and mental health workers are more concerned about gathering information regarding the pattern and severity of abuse along with the past incidences of abuse (Britner & Mossler, 2002). On the other hand, the police are motivated more by extreme cases of abuse at present rather than the possibility of it occurring some time in the future.

Commenting on this myriad evidence that confronts the front line workers, Lindsey (2004) explicitly negates intervention decision because it lacks sufficient scientific or clinical basis in the literature so far to justify it and views the demand on the social workers to decide for or against intervention as unrealistic. The situation is not helped much by the ambiguity surrounding the definitions of the term 'children at risk'. It is an umbrella term that is used for children in less than ideal situations, ranging from threats of severe abuse to domestic disturbance. The term is used for describing the plight of child soldiers as well as when referring to children living with their parents, in foster homes, on the streets, or in disturbing neighborhoods.

Moreover, time pressure has been reported as one of the major work stresses for child protection social workers (Sanders & Mace, 2006; Munro, 2005). This has a direct bearing on decision making capability. For example, psychological evaluation of errors in decision making and judgment highlight time pressure, simultaneous involvement in another task, performing tasks during low efficiency phases (viz. working in the morning for 'evening people' and vice versa), and good mood are the most common causes of errors when making decisions (Kahneman, 2003).

Time pressure leads to a redistribution of the weight assigned to attributes, with more weight given

to salient attributes. It is combined with shallow processing of information, adaptation of alternative decision routes, neglect of peripheral cues, and enhanced effect of affect on judgment and decision making. That is, negative attributes are weighed more negatively when in a negative mood than when judged in a positive mood. Negative mood also weakens framing effects and there is an insufficient search for information with low confidence in their final decisions (Hammond, 2000).

Time pressure may also lead to selection of alternate strategies of decision making, differential processing of information with more emphasis given to negative aspects of attributes, shallow processing of data, neglect of peripheral cues, and focus on central information only (Svenson & Maule, 1993). Research on group decision-making has shown that task goals are important and influence the coping strategies of decision makers when performing under a time constraint. We also know that stress has a negative effect on creativity and leads to psychosomatic as well as cardiovascular problems (Svenson & Maule, 1993).

Child protection social workers perform in an uncertain environment where it is very difficult to predict what will be the best decision for the child and family. Most people are deeply stressed by uncertainty. They want to gain relief as soon as possible from the process of resolving the painful dilemma of choosing between two equally risky alternatives (Pines & Keinan, 2005). Others may not react to uncertainty the same way but perform differently under time pressure based on their past history, knowledge, and expertise. Whatever the coping mechanism opted by the decision makers, the fact that uncertainty, time pressure, and stress influence the decision-making process remains firmly established in literature (Svenson & Maule, 1993). Janis & Mann (1977) state that uncertainty leads to stress, which in turn accelerates the process of information acquisition.

A hasty process in turn leads to a disorganized search and lack of consideration of the complete range of decision ramifications. As the decision is based on incomplete information, the consequences of that decision can have unforeseen effects. Uncertainty may be internally generated or present externally. For example, a decision maker may be uncertain about the decision made because of limited knowledge or information. External uncertainty may be the lack of surety of the expected outcome actually happening. Regardless, time pressure and uncertainty are potential stress factors.

Complexity of understanding and defining risk is the other main concern within child welfare literature. An understanding of risk and managing it remains central to the profession. However,

there is little or no coherence of risk definitions in child welfare literature. It is all the more challenging because risk is a subjective construct that is influenced by emotions and perceptions of people (Loewenstein, et.al., 2001). In dealing with risk, it has been shown that education has little impact on the judgment expertise of individuals. Both experts and non-experts shared similar basis for their risk perceptions, which leads to the conclusion that risk perception is guided by attitudes to a large extent (Sjöberg, L.; 2002).

Child protection social workers in the UK are faced with an additional element of risk to their well-being. For example, there is the personal risk of making a bad judgment and then there is the risk of being made the scapegoat if procedures are not followed satisfactorily. The paradox here is that if one is to focus on following procedures as the main criteria of good performance, less emphasis will be paid to the evaluation of judgment and decision making processes. Social workers are faced with the dilemma of how to distribute their time best, whether to spend it with the child, the parents, or doing the paper work that has increased due to stricter guidelines and monitoring processes (Munro, 2005).

Psychologically, a single negative message highlighting danger or risk is given much more importance by the public than hundreds of messages of safety (Rundmo & Sjöberg, 1994). Public outrage against social services and child placement officers is driven by the desire to blame someone for the negative outcome, especially in cases of child tragedies. The public needs an immediate scapegoat to end the blame game (Munro, 2005). There is so much emphasis on removing the children from harm's way that the conception of error in judgment is restricted to failure of the decision makers to move fast enough. Because of the severity of the consequences of neglecting to take the child away from abusive caregivers that often results in death, the less severe absolute consequences do not receive due attention.

A perceived threat to one's well-being has an adverse effect on the performance and the effect is enhanced if there is lack of public support. For example, Rundmo and Sjöberg (1994) conducted a study on the risk perceptions of offshore personnel related to platform movements on an oil installation offshore mono-tower. They found that based on the perceptions of risk expressed by the personnel and the reasons behind those perceptions, the process of risk perception could be described using two different models. One model was based on 'worry or anxiety' as the main driver of risk perceptions. When the researchers examined which measures were deemed most useful in reducing the anxiety of the personnel, one of the findings was that the workers who

perceived a lack of social support reported higher levels of anxiety.

The main conclusions of the study suggested that the psychology based interventions were better for reducing risk perceptions of the personnel because it was worry or concern that led to higher risk perceptions rather than the other way around. Social support showed strong correlations with low risk perceptions. However, there is little or no attention given so far to the effect of public censure on performance of child protection social workers in the UK. Instead, much attention has been diverted to promoting risk assessment and decision analysis tools.

Researchers focusing on the risk management aspect of decision-making in child welfare have introduced decision aids and risk management techniques. Various risk assessment and management theories and models are presented within this research group and the emphasis is primarily on reducing the biases or threats to good analysis and decision-making process. The basic principle on which these tools are designed is embedded in the rational choice model, which aims at reducing the biases to judgment and decision making behavior. However, research shows that welfare professional manipulate risk assessment tools to support their clinical judgment, for example, to continue providing support to families in cases where *rationally*, it should not be done (Schwalbe, 2004).

The impotency of these tools is highlighted by evidence of lack of willful acceptance and cooperation of the professionals in using actuarial risk assessment methods (Munro, 2005). Decision makers involved in child placement decisions prefer to rely on their clinical judgment and fail to use the risk assessment tools as desired (Schwalbe, 2004). Other approaches to risk assessment and management have taken the organizational perspective and focus on the weaknesses in the system that may be corrected (Rzepnicki & Johnson, 2005).

This group of scholars considers poor performance of the front line workers to be a manifestation of systemic problems and evaluate the errors in their judgment as part of a multi-level organizational analysis. Others have evaluated the application of neural networks, fuzzy logic, and evolutionary algorithms as computational intelligence techniques for risk assessment and reducing errors in decision making (Schwartz, Kaufman & Schwartz, 2004) - prescriptive measures whose validity remains to be established.

The other strand of research within child welfare literature focuses on the overall child welfare

practices and issues related to securing better services for the children and families. It takes into consideration the policies guiding the current practices, critiques them and suggests changing the philosophical and ideological motivations guiding current literature to achieve 'best practice' (Laird, 1993; Hall, et. al. 2003; Parton, 2006; Parton & O'Byrne, 2005; White et. al., 2006; White & Stancombe 2003; Taylor & White, 2000; 2006; Peckover et. al. forthcoming; Balen & White, 2007; Hall & White 2005; White & Stancombe, 2005; Hearn et. al., 2004; Lindsey, 2004; Lindsey & Schwartz, 2004; Jack 2005; Munro, 2005; Winter, 2006; Kufeldt & McKenzie, 2003; Taylore & White, 2002; White & Stancombe, 2002).

This second strand of literature focuses on the risk to the children and families in need and the persisting evidence that there is little consistency in the decisions made by welfare professionals (Schawlbe, C.; 2004). It builds upon these inconsistencies to give prescriptions of best practice. For example, it is pointed out that potential risks to vulnerable children are often neglected because the children's side of the story is relegated to the periphery (Little, Axford & Morpeth, 2004).

The decision makers do not know as much about the child in question as they should because of the absence of thorough social history that shows all the major events in the child's life preceding the intervention. Gathering comprehensive social history about the child is considered outdated these days and is a major cause of bad judgment on the part of the decision makers (Munro, 1999). Consequently, the most common prescription being emphasized upon by academicians, field workers, and researchers alike is that of listening to the children's Voice, that is, of seeking and paying attention to the opinions of children.

Article 12 of the UNCRC laid the foundation for emphasizing the opinions of children when it stated their right to express their wishes and feelings. In tandem with Article 3 of UNCRC that dealt with the child's best interests, Article 12 radicalised the existing convention by giving children the *right* to influence matters affecting them. This was a major innovation, as noted by Stasiulis (2002): "*Rather than view children as 'pre-citizens', or as silent, invisible, passive objects of parental and/or state control…children are cast as full human beings, invested with the agency, integrity and decision making capacities*" (pp. 508-509)

However, there is much inconsistency in the approaches adopted by the various child welfare professionals and agencies. These inconsistencies arise from whether the actors follow Article 3 or Article 12 of the UNCRC when dealing with child protection cases. The former stresses upon

safeguarding the best interests of the child whereas the latter emphasises on listening to the wishes of the children. The conflict arises when the best interests of the children might be against their wishes. Practice therefore remains subject to a personal preference of which Article should predominate and under which circumstances.

Given the sociological model of childhood that practitioners carry in their minds, Article 3 has been adhered to predominantly in practice. An international review of different models used for representing children in court has shown that it is the combination of the two, a 'tandem model' that supposedly works the best (Balen & White, 2005). It relies on child protection social workers making informed decisions after taking into consideration the views of the child. Such conflicting ideologies and personal interpretations, unclear regulations, and much scope for flexibility create the inconsistencies in child protection and welfare practice. Despite these discrepancies at the ideological level, researchers promote a participatory approach to decision making as a best practice and emphasize the inclusion of children in decision-making (Little, Axford & Morpeth, 2004).

Researchers and practitioners that support the inclusion of children in decision making as key to preventing social exclusion strongly believe in developing the decision-making capabilities of children (Thomas, 2002). An important point to note here is that the underlying sociological assumptions about childhood guide adults in their interactions with the children. For example, children are seen as passive, vulnerable members of the society that need adult supervision. The basic assumption directing prescriptions for *participatory* decision making are based on challenging such absolute notions about vulnerable children as only passive observers and calls for social reconstruction of childhood that encourages their active participation (Winter, 2006).

For example, a research project conducted to make children aware of sexually transmitted diseases focused on discovering how pre-adults combine information to make a decision. It was observed that children did not make strategic choices because *they were not aware* that they could do so. Their natural instinct was to rely on their mothers for help but in cases where external help was not available, they could not make a choice because they did not know how. The impulsive decisions taken by children, therefore, were not because they generally make bad decisions but because they did not know how to make good decisions.

Impact was drastic on the children in the study, who were educated about the risks in an interactive environment using DVDs and written material, which was based on enacting different risky

scenarios followed by enactment of possible choices that they could make. The researchers found that there was a much lower recurrence of risky behaviour in children who had been part of this *interactive intervention* that was based on "*what was really important to them and trained them to act on it*" (Fischoff, 2002, pp. 110). Based on this project and other similar studies conducted on the decision processes adapted by children, the researcher concluded, "*We think about kids making bad decisions because they are impulsive. I think they're often impulsive because they can't make good decisions. They don't know what to do, it feels hopelessly complicated, their mother won't tell them what to do, and they don't know themselves. That confusion encourages impulsive resolution of intolerably indeterminate decisions*". (Fischoff, 2002, pp. 111)

Support for giving adequate attention to child developmental issues when dealing with vulnerable children and families is drawn from child psychology literature. The guiding assumption is that children develop their attachment models in childhood based on their experiences with their care-givers (Bowlby, 1969/ 1982). Research on child development has consistently shown that lack of emotional security is directly related to dysfunctional homes and low self-confidence is the major cause of maladjustment in later life (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). Research has also shown that if a child faces a single traumatic experience, the chances of the child completely recovering from the loss are almost certain. The child is still capable of forming normal, healthy relationships if the trauma or loss has been resolved successfully. On the other hand, if there is a cycle of traumatic events that leads to perpetual stress for the child there may be irreversible damage.

Scholars focusing on the child right's perspective state that it is extremely important to help the child reach a resolution of loss or conflict, to accept it, and move on in order to secure normal relationships for the child in the future (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). Therefore, "*Whatever the circumstances, it makes sense to foster the child's inherent strengths and resilience, and where impairment exists, to bolster their coping strategies*" (Little, Axford & Morpeth, 2004, pp. 114)

A lack of effective strategy to cope with stress increases the stress levels in children that face traumatic circumstances (Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 1999). The same researchers also found that despite the disorganized attachment behavior of children with adjustment problems, they did not have any difficulty in forming normal friendships. This is important because it shows the resilience of the children in adverse situations and highlights their ability to dissociate the interaction with their peers from the troubled interaction with adults in their lives. It emphasizes the need for child protection social workers to play a positive role when they intervene.

This body of research supports the notion of keeping the children involved and informed in child protection cases. It also emphasizes the importance of social networks and healthy relationships with peers that may reduce the impact of mitigating circumstances on the child. In most cases, it is impossible to avoid trauma to the child after social services intervention. The impact of the trauma, if left untreated, later manifests itself as unsuccessful socialization after leaving care. Thus, the argument put forth by this strand of literature is that the neglect of child well-being when delivering child and family welfare services may create long term problems of maladjusted youth later on. Scholars within this tradition advocate therapeutic social work practices and remain critical of current child and family social work practice.

Empirical Agenda

Exploring the complexity of defining risk and making difficult decisions helps appreciate the challenges faced by child protection social workers. The current ambiguity in child protection practice underlines the need for evaluation of subjective realities of those involved in the process. The preceding section presented research evidence that indicates challenges faced by social workers might mitigate their performance. This research argues that it is the actions of these policy actors and their interaction with vulnerable populations that *creates social exclusion in practice*. Schoolteachers, who have maximum contact with children at risk of social exclusion, form the other sub-group of actors that plays an important role in combating social exclusion. It is interactions within these groups of social workers, teachers (in schools catering to most deprived populations in London), and children at risk that creates the everyday reality. It is this *everyday* reality that *is the reality* for these populations. Social exclusion can be mitigated or created at this juncture.

Therefore, the empirical investigation focuses on uncovering the subjective realities of child protection social workers, teachers, and children at risk. Another group that forms the major bulk of socially excluded population in the UK is that of 'Care Leavers'. Their subjective reality is also explored to get an insight into the impact of state intervention on the lives of children and families who undergo state intervention. Just as historical evolution of concepts of childhood and children's rights social value perspectives have impacted the current policy and practice, this everyday practice of current policy is examined as the fountain of future social structure. Future policy and practice will stem from the social situation that is being created today through (a lack of) interactions of these subjective worlds.

Methodology

Information is largely replacing narrative accounts of cultural expressions. This feature of modern society is objectionable to advocates of reflective practice in social work. Qualitative methods, especially narratives, are stressed upon as fruitful research tools in social work research (Reissman & Quinney, 2005). Keeping these demands in view and following Lewin's direction for studying minority groups and their movements in a society riddled with inequality and problem of social exclusion (Lewin, 1951), 'action research' is the predominant research methodology applied in the field. The emphasis was on obtaining narratives from the actors involved in the policy implementation process.

The care leavers' perspective is also captured here, driven by the assumption that feedback from service users is crucial for improving policy. Children 'at risk' are involved in the research process to guard against the most common criticism of neglecting their voices to the periphery in prior and some current research endeavors. Internet forums are researched to etch the communication patterns amongst the service providers and service users. The findings from these studies feed into reflections on facilitating participatory processes of policy and decision-making.

Data Collection

28 open-ended interviews were conducted, covering 17 of child protection social workers and 11 of teachers. Participant observation was carried out for a period of almost nine months on an Internet forum of care leavers and for two months at an Internet forum for social workers. Workshops with children currently on child protection registers were conducted over a period of two months. 45 children participated in these workshops. 22 children were within the category of 'at risk' of significant harm (thus belonging to the socially excluded category) and the remaining 23 children were from a 'normal' family background. In all, fourteen months were spent in the field (London, UK).

Off the action field and on the passive side, the research process involved a systematic reading of texts published by the UK Government. Eco's description of a 'naïve' versus 'critical' reader is kept in mind, where the critical reader reflects on the presentation of the text as well and not just on its content (Eco, 1992). After being aware of how text is generated and for whom (the target audience),

the critical reader can then situate the text within the larger discourse of that field. Text published on the UK Government Web sites, articles related to Social Services and/or Social Workers published in popular tabloids (Daily Mirror and The Sun), and national newspapers such as The Guardian, The Independent and The Times, online news reports on www.bbc.co.uk, www.guardian.co.uk, www.timesonline.co.uk, and www.communitycare.co.uk (a social work online magazine devoted to issues related to social services and social work as a profession) were examined assuming this critical stance.

To summarize, 73 interviews were conducted (17 child protection social workers, 11 teachers, and 45 children). Interviews with children were conducted in an indirect manner instead of creating an interview-like atmosphere for them. They were involved in creativity workshops where they were required to select pictures and narrate stories instead of answering direct questions. These workshops were videotaped and data from these workshops is recorded in an audio-visual format. Appropriate ethical measures were taken to preserve the identity and other personal information of the participants. Ethical clearance was granted by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Organizational Social Psychology at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Workshops sessions with the children were recorded with the purpose of enhancing validity of interpretation of their narratives by observing their body-language during the narration and participation in the workshops.

Participant observation was carried out in two phases during the research. First, an Internet forum for care leavers was joined for a period of seven months. Later, another Internet forum where social workers and service users[17] interacted was joined for a period of one and a half months. In all, approximately ten months of participant observation in virtual communities was carried out. Relevant documents published by the Government and media were critically analyzed throughout.

Challenges of Data Collection – Bureaucratic Barriers

Considerable methodological difficulty was faced during the data collection process. It was extremely hard to gain access to child protection social workers in the UK. Repeated phone calls and emails to social services managers requesting access to their teams for interviews yielded no result. After being unsuccessful for eight months, indirect access was sought through word-of-

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[17] Socially excluded children and families that are using services provided by social workers are referred to as 'Service Users'.

mouth technique. This largely informal, backdoor entry to the world of child protection social workers was the only technique that worked. Access was granted to other, more developed boroughs of London fairly easily in comparison. Gaining access to these most deprived, hard to reach boroughs helped in gathering data from child protection social workers working across a large spectrum of socio-economically divided pockets in London.

Access to children at risk was obtained indirectly as well. Two schools that were located in one of the most deprived parts of London were approached. The population of these schools was predominantly that of children placed on child protection registers by the social services. They were children at risk. Permission was sought from the principal of the two schools. It is important to mention that these were special schools that had been rescued by the recently appointed business manager[18] from being closed down as failed schools. It was part of the business manager's creative and insightful drive to revive the schools that access was granted for research.

In absence of a willingness by head-teacher and staff in these schools to participate, it would have been impossible to involve children at risk. Residential homes and other Governmental social services agencies had denied access to them repeatedly. The process itself entailed filling out lengthy forms and research access applications that required investing a considerable amount of time. It proved impossible to gain access through this formal route. Difficulty in reaching children at risk for research purposes underscores the complexity of doing research on their inclusion.

Ethical clearance was provided from LSE and after following the necessary protocol of obtaining permission from the parents, permission for conducting workshops with the children was granted. The school teachers were asked to help in arranging the workshops and selecting the sample of 45 children who would participate. Instructions (in the form of a script) were given to the teachers made responsible for running the sessions.

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[18] The business manager is also the headmistress/principal of the two schools mentioned in this research.

Challenges of Data Collection – Psychological Barriers

Gaining access to care leavers' communities was the most challenging part of the research process. Unlike the previous cases, initial access was granted fairly quickly. There was an initial period of warm welcome that soon dissipated. Angry and suspicious messages were posted almost immediately afterwards. The process of gaining acceptance at the Web site was very informative about the fragile psychological states of the members. A lack of trust was omnipresent. Some members were more trusting than others but their trust was extremely fragile. A considerable amount of time and energy was spent at constantly clarifying even neutral messages that were sometimes misunderstood.

The process has generated first hand experiences of challenges when reaching out to socially excluded communities. This experience lends additional support to the empirical findings (of Article three and four) regarding difficulty of effectively engaging service users. The process highlights the need for adequate training in communication and negotiation skills. Facing these barriers to communication and interaction has highlighted the scope of further research on reaching out to socially excluded communities by applying principles of negotiation research.

Data Analysis

Data from the open-ended interviews of social workers is extremely rich in content. NVivo was used for thematic content analysis. [19]The emergent themes/categories did not capture the essence of the data fully, and for this, story-telling is used to represent the world of the child protection social workers (Van Maanen, 1988). The guiding principle behind this methodology is the statistically proven fact that people are more influenced by a 'good story' than statistical information (Dawes, 1999). Pennington & Hastie (1991, 1993) have extensively studied decision-making by judges and have shown that when presented with a case, the judges need to see the scenario in the form of a story that is based on their own interpretations of the decision scenario. The qualitative representation of the decision scenario and the interpretation of it by the decision maker is, therefore, of prime importance in situations where there is greater degree of self involvement and moral judgment involved in the decision (Schneider & Shanteau, 2003).

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[19]   NVivo is a software tool developed to manage complex and large qualitative databases. It helps to code and organize data in a systematic fashion.

Life-stories of care leavers were analyzed using Burke's pentad of Act, Actor, Scene, Agency, and Purpose (Burke, 1969). This method was used to understand the subjective worlds of the Care Leavers and understand the influence of their life's experiences on their emotional well-being after leaving care. Teachers' interviews were analyzed using NVivo and narrative analysis (Weick, 1979, 1995; Reissman, 1993).

Narrative Analysis and Burke's Pentad

Burke's Dramatism (Burke, 1969) is used to analyze care leavers' narratives at the micro level (Article 3) and to present an overview of subjective worlds of teachers, social workers, and children at risk at the macro level (Article 1). Burke's pentad is applied to understanding subjective worlds of care leavers by posing the following questions:

1. What was done? –Act
2. Under what circumstances/ environment was it done? – Scene
3. Who did it? – Agent
4. How was it done? – Agency
5. Why was it done? – Purpose

Analyzing the narratives under these categories helped understand the behavior of the agents as well as the effect of the circumstances surrounding their actions. Burke stresses upon the dyadic relationship between each of these five elements of the pentad, referring to them as 'ratios'. Five terms can thus form ten ratios (scene-act, scene-agent, scene-agency, scene-purpose, act-purpose, act-agent, act-agency, agent-purpose, agent-agency, and agency-purpose). Each term in the ratio influences the other, as Burke explains scene-act ratio, "*From the motivational point of view, there is implicit in the quality of a scene the quality of the action that is to take place within it. This would be another way of saying that the act will be consistent with the scene" (Burke, 1969, pp. 7)*

The salient feature of these ratios is the bi-directional, dyadic relationship between two elements in a ratio. For example, in the Act-Agent ratio, the act has the power to influence the agent just as much as the agent controls the act. There is reverse application between the two terms in each ratio. This feature makes it possible to entertain the possibility that a person's actions may not necessarily be driven by one's personality alone. Causes for acts can be attributed to the environment as well, separating the individual (Agent) from the situation (Scene) and the act. This segregation enables a more objective, deeper analysis of the role of each element in the situation being investigated. It

lends the analyst tools for investigating each aspect of the situation in isolation as well as in combination with any of the other five elements that constitute the event.

Burke's philosophy is a useful analytical lens for this research because of its applicability at both micro and macro level of analysis. At the micro-level, applying the Pentad to analyze narratives of care leavers helped identify the influence of the environment on the socialization potential of the sample under study. Actions of the care leaver could be compared relative to their environments. At the macro-level, the underlying principle of Burke's pentad helps maintain the focus on the environmental influences on social actors. Burke's philosophy complements the approach adhered to in this research - that all reality is socially constructed, and lends an analytical lens for evaluating the effects of various influences on its creation.

Moreover, the reverse application of ratios, especially the Scene-Agent ratio, helps to highlight the effect of the political scene on the behavior of the agents and vice-versa. In highlighting the reverse dyadic relationship, it etches out the possibility of influencing the Scene as well as the Agents by changing either of the two. For example, in the present case, it is the effect of the overall Scene (policy reform) on the Agents that is observed and Burke's pentad offers an effective methodological tool to carry out such an analysis. Burke's philosophy might be considered supportive of the notion that social actors possess the capacity to bring about social change. Thus, Burke's pentad is a good fit both philosophically and methodologically in this research.

Burke's analysis of the Paradox of Substance is also relevant to this research. Burke quotes the dictionary meaning of 'substance' (that corresponds with the everyday usage of the word) to denote 'the main part' or the essential component of the thing in question. However, he argues that, literally the word sub-stance denotes something that stands beneath or supports something. In analyzing this paradox, Burke illuminates how the definition of something can denote what that thing is *not*. The picture that emerges from the empirical findings in this research can, from Burke's point of view, be presented as an analogy of paradox of substance. The current 'child welfare practice' could be harming the child instead of ensuring its welfare. This is the paradox that is observed in this research. Child welfare practice in the UK essentially does not ensure welfare of the children. To the contrary, in adhering to the policy procedures, child protection social workers are at risk of creating forces that do more harm than good.

Summary of the Articles

The empirical work started with getting acquainted with the subjective worlds of child protection social workers, care leavers, children at risk, and teachers at the two schools that granted access for this research. Article one presents three simultaneously existing subjective universes in a single snapshot. Article two follows up on article one and presents a deeper analysis of social workers' subjective reality. Article three focuses on care leavers and their experiences of being under State care. As participatory processes across different groups and agencies is emphasized as *the* measure for helping socially excluded communities, the fourth and last article of this research looks at the interaction patterns between socially distanced groups of social workers and service users. Initiating constructive communication amongst them is highlighted as essential to overcoming social exclusion.

Article 1 – Psychological Distance among Proximal Groups: Barriers to Joint Efforts against Social Exclusion

This article presents the life-story of a social worker (constructed using direct quotations from interviews of social workers), along with results from workshops with 45 children in two schools in London and 11 interviews of school teachers. The population of these schools comprised mainly of children at high risk of significant harm. Legislative guidance given to teachers is examined in its realistic context and interaction of teachers with these students is observed. Simultaneously, the psychological states of children placed on child protection registers at the time of this research is observed. The three themes are presented in parallel, the first two representing the subjective realities of social workers and teachers and the last, presenting a fleeting view of the complexities of these children's worlds.

Burke's Dramatist lens is used to present the three world-views simultaneously as three acts within a performance. Burke's representation is used to highlight the fact that the teachers and social workers occupy a much more critical space in the life of a child in care as compared to the space occupied by this child in the life-space of teachers and social workers respectively. This distance between the groups that must be the most intimate as per legislative guidance is presented in this article as a cause for serious concern, and one demanding urgent corrective measures.

The respective worlds of social workers, teachers and children in need of special attention from the first two emerge as existing almost independently of each other. There is considerable overlap amongst legislative and theoretical spheres of these three groups but in terms of everyday reality, they remain psychologically isolated. This psychological distance is highlighted in this study as a major barrier to achieving successful communication across these groups. The differences among subjective worlds of social workers, teachers, and children at risk are highlighted and reinforced instead of being mitigated in practice.

Article 2 – Voices From the Field: A Study of Child Welfare Practice and Prescriptions in the UK

The subjective world of child protection social workers presented in Article one is explored further in Article two. The policy reforms and legislative guidance introduced by New Labour Government are reviewed. Thematic content analysis is used to obtain data relevant to policy literature. The belief-system of the government driving these reforms is examined. Simultaneously, criticisms of the current child protection practice by advocates of constructive social work, consisting of reputed academics and social work consultants are also reviewed. Empirical evidence from the field collected in terms of open-ended interviews of 17 social workers is used to evaluate which belief-system, policy makers' or their own, is better suited to achieve professional excellence.

The efficacy of the policy and legislative reforms introduced by the Government are thus evaluated through examining their practical applicability and contextual relevance in practice. The study concludes with an overview of the differences in belief-systems of policy makers and practitioners and this chasm is suggested to be the cause for failure of current practice. Based on empirical findings, recommendations are made to improve performance measurement indicators, feedback mechanisms between frontline social workers and policy makers, and incorporation of practitioner's knowledge and experience when formulating policy. The findings lend support to adopting principles of constructive social work.

Article 3 – At Risk of Social Exclusion – A Study of Care Leavers in UK

The research site for this article is an Internet forum of adults with experiences of being under state care. The effects of state intervention and contact with social services during childhood are examined. NVivo is used to analyze 627 messages posted during the eight-month period of

participant observation. Three life-stories are selected for narrative analysis using Burke's pentad. Child developmental psychology theory and literature is reviewed as the benchmark against which the emotional states of these individuals are observed.

The empirical findings suggest that the current child protection policy and practice in the UK fails to incorporate the children's perspective successfully. Implementation methods of child protection processes marginalize the children that they seek to socialize, greatly mitigating their chances of successfully integrating into the society after leaving care. Recommendations are made to create and strongly promote reflective, therapeutically inclined interventions by child protection social workers. Social exclusion of marginalized communities emerges as a chronic problem that the social services are ironically propagating instead of combating. Though the literature underpinning legislative reforms and procedural guidelines draws heavily from child developmental psychology literature in theory, children's emotional well-being continues to be neglected in practice. This study addresses the impact of this failing on the lives of the children who grow up in state care.

Article 4 – Equal Participation of Unequal Groups via the Internet: Examining Potential for Constructive Communication

The article begins by introducing the effect of media reporting on creating stereotypes of social services and child protection social workers specifically. These stereotypes are seen to be barriers to participatory processes amongst social service professionals and their clients. Communication between these two groups in a virtual setting (Internet forum) forms the empirical base of this study. Interaction and communication patterns observed between social workers and service users (people with experiences of being in care in the past or engaged with social services at the time of the study) are studied. The patterns of communication observed in the virtual setting are compared with those observed in realistic setting (field observations of child protection conferences where social workers and children and families meet as per legislative guidance to adopt participatory decision processes).

The findings suggest that though the anonymity of virtual interaction may help the socially excluded groups express their opinions more freely than when in face-to-face situations, the interaction patterns mimic those of real life with little constructive communication between the two groups. Social workers remained defensive and in charge of the flow of conversation, and service users remained critical and doubtful of the sincerity of the social workers. This study uses

negotiation literature to suggest methods of overcoming barriers to constructive communication amongst the divided groups.

Recommendations are made to improve communication amongst the conflicting groups by incorporating negotiation skills training in the overall training and education of social workers. This recommendation is based on the assumption that it is easier to create training opportunities for social workers by policy makers than it is for them to reach the socially excluded and succeed in engaging them at the level required for training in communication skills.

Contribution

The strongest criticism of child welfare practice in the UK has been the neglect of children's rights perspective in current practice. This research has explored the social causes behind this neglect. The social psychological enquiry into the subjective worlds of the main policy actors suggested some subjective influences that affect their performance and overall child welfare practice. Children at risk are extremely hard to access in the UK but this research caught at least a fleeting glimpse of their realities and their disturbed psychological states. Similarly, the experiences of care leavers form an invaluable part of this research because they present a first-hand account of the effects of policy directly on the lives of social excluded populations.

The role of the media is also touched upon. Stereotypes generated through irresponsible reporting and sensation-seeking mode of printing have serious ramifications for those trying to combat problems of social exclusion. While researching articles for this research, the dearth of articles on or for care leavers became obvious. This absence may be considered representative of the lack of attention given to this socially marginalized group. So far, the refrain has been to incorporate children's voices and much effort has gone into this movement. Empirical evidence from this research hopes to introduce a new agenda that focuses on hearing the voices of the care leavers.

A culture of silence amongst child protection social workers was observed as well. Even when dissatisfied with policy and legislative procedures, social workers seldom complain. The empirical articles included in this research shed some light on the reasons for this lack of expression and suggest that adequate feedback mechanisms need to be urgently created to give social workers a voice. Secondly, social workers are acutely aware of their precarious situation in society. They view

themselves as "social police" (Article two) and in some ways view themselves just as negatively as the public views them. The profession itself is viewed negatively on the whole and this has a de-motivating effect on those practicing it. Social workers suffer from stigmatization and also fall within the category of socially excluded. The overall observations made in this research create a sufficiently thought-provoking platform to question the present and future role of Social Services in the UK to combat social exclusion.

To summarize, this research suggests that an alternative, piecemeal approach could be set in motion to address the everyday processes of (the lack of) interaction that create social exclusion. Policy reforms are tedious and slow to take effect. In the meantime, a social movement to revise established norms and attitudes, similar to that being encouraged in social work education, could be the catalyst between policy endeavors and positive outcomes.

Concluding Remarks

The argument presented and empirically explored in this research is that the creation and propagation of phenomenon of social exclusion is a dynamic process that is influenced by everyday subjective realities of the masses. Groups of policy makers, policy actors, and service users possess vastly different social realities. Social exclusion is being created in practice because disparate mental representations of reality possessed by policy makers and other groups of social actors are mirrored at the frontline. An account of care leavers' reality reflects the impact of the contradictory world-views of policy makers and policy actors on the lives of those they seek to serve.

There is a fundamental discord between the reality of the policy-makers, the public, and social workers because of the differences in the legitimation processes of their individual universes. The policy makers are concerned about the macro perspective of combating social exclusion whereas social workers are engaged with the everyday management of the manifestation of social exclusion. The disconnection between these worlds reflects the fundamental discord embedded within the institutional legitimation process. Achieving social inclusion through encouraging participatory policy implementation processes remains a distant ideal because of conceptual, subjective barriers between the concerned parties. Social exclusion cannot be combated without exploring the historical creation of these social differences and the psychological distance amongst the parties involved in the process.

Shortcomings

One of the shortcomings of this research is the lack of direct communication with policy makers. Their input would have been invaluable in terms of testing the reality of my claims and recommendations. Another weakness of the research is the limited amount of research done with children at risk due to various issues of access and ethics. Much more attention needs to be paid to discovering the worlds of these youngsters and understanding their needs. Education sector reforms must also be studied in more depth. Both the schools studied in this research are located in deprived neighborhoods with the majority of the population in contact with social services. Although both these schools were ideal research sites for this study, it would be fruitful to observe other schools in different neighborhoods. The effect and the extent of effect of different external variables, such as the environment outside the schools, could then be measured as well.

Overall, policy making is an extremely complex process and studying that process is even more so. There are multiple perspectives to each issue and I have tried to capture the perspectives of those agents who are most responsible for delivering services to children in need. I have tried to present the reality as it is and the policy objectives are then measured for their efficacy against this reality. However, any shift in policy results in resistance and negative reactions in its initial implementation stages. The empirical findings of this research may be influenced by more general external factors, such as resistance to change. Such change management issues have not been explored in this study due to two reasons. First, the study already adopts a complex mix of disciplines, theories, and perspectives. Secondly, time and resource constraints would not permit it.

Future Research Suggestions

Peters & Pierre (2006) comment on the complexity of studying public policy and suggest a triangulation of theoretical perspectives as most desirable in this field. Most research in public policy is conducted by focusing on the "single lonely policy" (Peters & Pierre, 2006, pp. 2). For example, scholars study Health, Defence, or Education policy, each in isolation. This approach fails to take into account the effect of interactions of various co-existing policies on citizens. A combined evaluation of reforms in the Education policy and Social Services could yield useful results. A triangulation of method, theory, and perspective is strongly recommended for future research.

Some of the disciplines that may have a lot to offer to policy studies are Human Resource

Management (to identify and deliver better training and skills to the workforce as well as managers), Leadership research (to nurture and create strong leaders and 'heroes' that can improve morale), Accounting and Finance (to experiment with performance indicators that measure quality adequately), Sociology (to understand issues of socialization, inequality, and poverty), Psychology (to investigate barriers to joint working and constructive social action), Risk Research (for understand risk assessment and management processes) and Conflict Resolution/Negotiation Research (to facilitate joint efforts to social reform).

Potential Future Research Areas

Some areas in need of further research are:

- Which socialization initiatives do socially excluded communities respond to most?
- Which educational techniques are most suitable for nurturing vulnerable children and families?
- How is 'risk' defined and understood by different groups of child welfare professionals? Can or should there be a consensus on risk assessment tools and processes?
- What are the training and supervision needs of workforce? How can they be met?
- What role can Human Resource Management play in Public Sector governance?
- Which measures of performance are most appropriate and contextually relevant and how can they be implemented?
- What is the status of Media in the twenty-first century? What role can it play in social movements?

Reflections and Suggestions

This research has highlighted that first, it is not only the vulnerable children and families that are socially excluded, but that child protection social workers experience exclusion as well. Second, initiating dialogue with socially excluded communities is essential. The findings in this research suggest that it is crucial to understand the subjective reality of each of the groups involved in the process. They can then be effectively engaged in processes that combat social exclusion rather than create it. Negotiation tactics are highlighted as the potential tool to change the game and lift barriers to communication that reinforce social exclusion.

Also, advocates of children's rights' perspective may often be misunderstood. Inclusion of children in decision making process and listening to their wishes does not mean fulfilling those wishes always. Nor does neglect of their wishes constitute violation of their rights. Violation of human rights (including children's rights) occurs when either of the following occurs:

1. Their voices (wishes/opinions) are not heard at all.
2. Their right to information at each stage of the decision process is denied.

So far, much attention has been given to (1). Another contribution (and point of departure from current body of research) of this research lies in introducing (2) as a major failing of current policy and practice. Service users are not kept informed or included in the decision making process. Similarly, social workers are not informed or involved in the policy making process. There are communication gaps between each tier of social actors.

Reflections and suggestions that could be useful are explored below.

Leadership

An excellent example of the potential of leadership training for social reform was observed at one of the schools researched for Article one. This school has been on the list of failing schools for almost two decades. Since the last five yeas, a 'Business Manager' was appointed as part of the reforms being introduced in school management. The role of this manager was as per NPM agendas discussed in the following articles (mainly supervision of reports, financial accounting, and monitoring of adherence to curriculum). However, the initiatives taken by her span way beyond her managerial duties and she has creatively used her title to engage with academics, researchers, and practitioners interested in promoting child-friendly policy and practice within the schools

Giving access to her students who were on child protection registers at the time of the study was part of this initiative taken by her. Other initiatives included visiting the children at home and bringing them to school despite protests from (usually psychologically unfit) parents. She has emerged as a strong leader and has turned the school around within five years of her leadership. The school is no longer on the list of failing schools and the teachers are encouraged to practice more child-friendly methods of teaching than used in other schools in deprived neighborhoods. Lang (2007) reported similar results in US schools where strong leadership and spirit of individual reformers was the most potent tool for improving failing schools.

Similarly, there is evidence to suggest promoting leadership within social services as a potential solution as well. Social workers who were interviewed during this research longed for supervisors who could inspire them. Based on these observations, it is suggested that vast literature on creation of leadership potential within management and organizational studies should be explored and tested empirically for application to professionals involved with social improvement (such as social workers and teachers).

Bottom-up Strategy

Another recommendation is adopting a bottom-up strategy instead of the top-down approach that is currently being followed. The initial reference point could have been information on the life-space of vulnerable populations. Those areas should have been prioritized for reforms that have the maximum impact on wellbeing, such as more time to work with social workers in a therapeutic environment and enabling better interaction with teachers in schools. Such an approach could have helped policymakers make the shift from adult-centered to child-centered practice. At the organizational level, an awareness of the subjective life-space of child protection social workers could help in formulating more realistic and constructive procedures and legislative guidelines.

Appropriate Feedback Mechanisms

Appropriate feedback mechanisms that can channel flow of information from the field to policy-makers are essential pre-requisites for adopting this strategy. These mechanisms could be as simple as introducing an open-ended section on reflections on the job in reports that social workers are supposed to submit to their managers. This could have a cathartic impact on them, give them time and space for reflection and give realistic information to those away from the field. It would provide the policy makers with a pool of information based on empirical evidence in the field. Early signs of burn-out could become easier to address, with a positive impact on the overall well-being and morale of the workforce.

A similar approach is suggested for better informing children involved in child protection cases. Face-to-face communication of negative outcomes where the children's wishes could not be respected would require a great deal of emotional and practical resources. Child protection social workers lack the time and energy required to deliver news in person to each child in the multiple cases they are handling. Writing letters to the children may be an option that can be explored. At

this stage however, this remains a speculation rather than a recommendation. Without a reduction in the workload and an improvement of general working conditions of social workers, all recommendations for improving their relationships with their clients remain rather superfluous. The quality of their interactions with their clients is dependent on the quality of their own job experience and the availability of resources, such as time and funds.

Contextually Relevant Performance Indicators

Setting adequate and contextually relevant Performance Indicators remains another crucial task. Measures of quality of service delivered should be prioritized. There are vast economic and demographic differences in a diverse country like the UK. Social services departments and schools operate within this flux of socio-economic differences. Performance indicators should be set taking into account the initiative taken by professionals working in more deprived areas than others, even if the individual department or school seems performing below the desired level.

Many social workers and teachers commented on how some boroughs in London were easier to work with than others. Teachers in one of the schools studied in this research suffered from similar lack of motivation because they felt they could never "catch up" with the other schools in better neighborhoods no matter how hard they worked. The other schools repeatedly got better rankings in annual performance audits. These two schools were on the list of failing schools despite the fact that the leadership and commitment exhibited by the head teacher in these schools, as mentioned earlier, was exemplary.

Emancipation of Workforce

Taking into consideration the larger context of child protection policy and practice, the main suggestion is that efforts at empowerment of children should be accompanied by efforts for emancipating the professionals who serve them. After these professionals have the power and the flexibility to invest their time, creativity and support into each child in need, the problems associated with lack of adjustment on leaving care can be erased in a much less intrusive and stigmatizing process than the one being encouraged right now. The social workers need a different work environment and guidelines than the ones they are struggling with at the moment. The government can use to its advantage the fact that all social reforms get implemented on a trial-and-error basis. There is much research still to be done on evaluating and understanding the true potency

and extent of the impact of these reforms on the social services sector, social workers themselves, and child protection policy and practice.

There is evidence of technocratic oppression and unrest among the social services and there definitely is the desire and demand for change in child protection policy and practice. The government is willing to invest in these changes and has done so in the recent past. The salient point here is to realize that failure of this effort is not as much a failure as the chance to learn and improve. Alvesson & Willmott (1992) re-conceptualised emancipation as "a group of projects, each limited in terms of space, time, and success" as against one, integrated movement from 'false' to 'true' consciousness. They view emancipation as an endless endeavor that does not make any grandiose claims, but through small and consistent steps, continually creates room for critical reflection and action.

However, the challenge of introducing the concept of emancipation when discussing domination of a certain class of people (whether social workers or socially excluded populations) immediately presents the problem of reinforcing the problem through creation of our own kind of domination (Freire, 1972). This postmodern critique bolstered by Focault's skepticism against all emancipatory endeavors is a crucial element to be considered when suggesting measures for emancipating the workforce (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Alvesson & Willmott, 1992). Keeping this criticism in mind, this research maintained focus on studying the policy process rather than advocating emancipation. The latter, however, is suggested as an element that must guide the policy formulation and implementation process to combat social exclusion. Vulnerable populations cannot be empowered without emancipating the workforce that is responsible for their well-being.

Interventions Supporting Empowerment of Socially Excluded Children/Youth

Social services sometimes have no other option than to put the children under state care. Some children will need the protection offered by the state, even at the cost of separation from their family. The effects of this institutionalisation and multiple placements on the psyche of the children will be hard to avoid. The one thing that is emphasised is the understanding of the psyche of these children when they leave care as young adults. Poor education, unemployment, and the criminal acts committed by these care leavers are symptoms of deeper problems and treating these symptoms alone will not be fruitful to either the state or the care leavers. The psyche of the care leavers needs to be explored and understood to devise means of helping them adjust better in the real world. The

psychological and sociological *causes* behind their social adjustment problems need to be highlighted and focused upon.

Collaborating with Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)

The role of the NGOs in promoting children's rights and other national issues, such as reduction of poverty, gender equality and social justice, has assumed a much more central role within the last decade. In 1996, the Deakin report investigated the voluntary sector organisations in the UK and established the importance of NGOs as agents of social movement and change in the social policy and practice. A follow up study conducted five years later by the Centre for Civil Society (LSE) confirmed the emergence of the Voluntary Organisations as a potent force that has and will continue to have an important role to play in the social development and policy formation.

The invitation to NGOs to participate in UN special sessions on various welfare issues is a clear acknowledgment of the efficacy of the NGOs in shaping future global policies and initiatives. National governments are now entering into partnerships with NGOs to tackle social problems and are supporting NGOs in their efforts (Oudraat & Haufler, 2008). This is an important step for NGOs because the flexibility and contextual relevance of the NGO practices combined with the financial and infra-structural support of the government creates a much stronger force as compared to either working independent of each other. For example, the services being provided by the Children's Funds across England in 2004 were under threat of discontinuation due to budget cuts. The voluntary and community sector entered into a liaison with the government to prevent disruption of services to the vulnerable children that added GBP 20 million to the budget, a contingency fund to make up for the initial disruption, and a reduction of previously planned budget cut of 15% to approx. 5 % for 2004/5 (King, J, 2005).

A biasing factor here is the fact that NGOs and other voluntary agencies are more approachable for the people than the governmental agencies (thus possessing greater potential for initiating dialogue). The bureaucracy involved in state agencies often acts as a deterrent for people not aware of how the system works. On the contrary, due to their political neutrality and lack of commercial motives, the NGOs are trusted more easily. They are viewed as agents of the society, as the independent voice of the people rather than an external, apathetic state agency wrapped up in rules and regulations, often perceived as a threat rather than an ally to the people. The power given to the NGOs has made them emerge as a potent force influencing social policies and welfare decisions.

Recognition of Policy Paradoxes

Policy process is riddled with paradoxes (Hammond, 1996, Stone, 2002). Burke presents the moment of recognition of a paradox as "*an alchemist moment, wherein momentous miracles of transformation can take place*" (Burke, 1969, pp.25). By defining something in terms of what it is not, the intrinsic can be transformed into the extrinsic. If policy makers can acknowledge the paradox currently existing in child welfare practice, a positive sequence of events may be triggered. A reflective routine where policy-makers acknowledge that the practice has come to represent features that are contradictory to its policy objectives may prove to be a beneficial exercise.

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Article 1
Psychological Distance Among Proximal Groups: Barriers to Joint Efforts Against Social Exclusion

Abstract

Reforms within Social Services and the Education sector have been driven strongly by New Labour Government over the last decade to combat social exclusion. A brief overview of policy and legislative initiatives within the two sectors is presented. The impact of these initiatives when implemented in everyday life is reviewed (1) in the form of a 'story' of a typical day in a social worker's life, based on 17 interviews with social workers, and (2) 11 interviews with teachers from two schools located in low income and high crime communities. Five of these interviews are presented as a scene of 'live' dialogue amongst the teachers. Interviews with 45 children at high risk of social exclusion are analysed to explore and highlight the problems of growing up in deprived neighbourhoods with high crime rates, low income and social mobility. 22 of these children are currently placed on child protection registers and living with foster carers. The distance among the agents, despite commonality of purpose, is empirically identified. Children in need remain neglected in the process.

Introduction

The UK is an active, well-established member of the developed global society and has been struggling to improve its services to vulnerable children and families. However, in a recent study of child well-being across 23 rich countries, the UK was placed at the bottom of the UNICEF Child Wellbeing Index. The index measures child wellbeing along six main dimensions: Material well-being, Health and Safety, Educational wellbeing, Peer and Family Relationships, Behaviours and Risk (measured in terms of incidences of risky sexual behaviour, use of addictive substances, experience of violence, and physical health risks) and Subjective well-being (measured under self-perceived health, life satisfaction, and self-perceived social adjustment).

The main factors responsible for this finding were Inequality and relative Poverty endemic to UK's society. Translated into social processes, inequality and relative poverty affects children's well-being directly by limiting the material resources they grow up with and indirectly by influencing their relationships with family and peers. Also, the children are affected negatively by the perception of status differentials in society and make negative social comparisons (Pickett & Wilkinson, 2007). The UK government has introduced a series of public sector reforms to address these problems through state intervention.

The UK government has embraced the standard principles of New Public Management (NPM) in re-structuring its public sector for improved efficiency (House of Lords Public Service – Report, Session 1997 -98). The emphasis is on increasing efficiency through standardization, focusing mainly on achieving set outcomes. In 2002, Tony Blair said in support of NPMish initiatives, "A clear focus on outcomes allows us to give freedoms back to public service workers – if a service can be accountable for *what* it achieves, we need worry far less about *how* it achieves it" (Blair 2002, pp. 15; original italics).

Joint effort across all agencies in public sector, specially education and social services, is emphasised by the government as a prerequisite to achieve policy goals. This paper examines the barriers that are currently in place between these sectors and children in need by observing the everyday reality of social workers, teachers, and children at risk.

Dramatism and Policy Process

The process of reforming the public sector, specifically, the social services and education sector is viewed in this paper from the lens of Burke's 'Dramatism' (Burke, 1969). The two main State-governed actors in the policy formulation and implementation process (social workers and teachers) are identified as 'Agents' who perform specific Acts. The process of policy practice is sketched as a Drama directed by the politicians, requiring these Agents to perform according to the script given to them.

The Script for Policy Initiatives and Reforms

Education Regulations were passed in 2003 (and later revised in 2007) to standardise teaching in Schools (HMSO, 2003). These changes in the Education sector are driven by policy visions of combating social exclusion of children and families through enhanced efficiency of service providers. Education Regulations 2003, derived from section 133 of Education Act 2002, presented the template of 'specified work' to be undertaken by teachers. Specified work is defined as:

- Planning and preparing lessons and courses for pupils
- Delivering lessons to pupils (including distance learning where applied)
- Assessing the development, progress, and attainment of pupils
- Reporting the development, progress, and attainment of pupils

There regulations were amended in 2007 to provide guidance for delegating 'specified work' to unqualified support staff (teachers who do not possess School Teachers' Qualifications certificate) and establishing a system of supervision for them. Regulations 2007 also made it necessary for all QTS certified teacher trainees to clear Numeracy and Literacy skills exams in order to continue teaching.

The head-teacher is given the responsibility of supervising the teachers and ensuring that they carry out the regulations of 'specified work'. The financial management, procurement, and sponsorship responsibility is now given to business or site managers and head teachers are instead required to focus on developing 'a system of supervision' based on the 2007 Regulations (DfES, 2007).

In addition to appointment of business managers in schools as the key management figures, line

managers are given the role of overseeing day-to-day management and support of staff. Several qualified teachers can assist teacher trainees and other support staff but there is only one line manager in charge of deploying staff, performance appraisal of staff, and assessment of their training and development needs. Children's Act 2004 introduced the long term plan for changes for children and emphasised the *overall* wellbeing of children as a prerequisite to improving performance in schools. It formed the spine for reforms in schools and guidance for reforming practice was issued in September 2004.

The guidance broadened scope of intervention by teachers in ensuring the overall wellbeing of the children. The government's vision for teachers was that they will lead changes for children by focusing not just on their educational attainment but also on providing them psychological and physiological safety and health. The vision is summarised into "*creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence*" (DfES, 2007)

Education Act 2005 introduced the template for performance appraisal of Schools in its section 5. The inspections are carried out by The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). The schools are inspected every three years and "*Inspections are short and focused, and dialogue with senior managers in the school plays a central part.*" (Ofsted Web site, www.ofsted.gov.uk). The schools are given a notice period of two working days and prepare a self-evaluation report that forms the initial point of enquiry for the Inspector(s). Parents need to be informed about the inspection and can request to meet the Inspector(s).

Similar reforms have been made in management of Social Services, adhering to the common bureaucratic script. Numerous new legislation and guidance have been passed over the last decade to improve practise and establish better accountability and performance of social services departments. For example, Working Together to Safeguard Children, 1999, Children Act 2004, Care Matters Green Paper 2006, and Common Assessment Framework, 2007, provide guidance for handling child protection cases and working synergistically with other agencies such as health and education in the process (Article two discusses social services reforms in more detail). The emphasis has been on increasing efficiency, ensuring transparency and accountability, and improving processes of actuarial performance measurement in social services. The emphasis is on integration of agencies to develop control and surveillance mechanisms that help monitor populations at high risk (Hall, 2007).

The School as the Stage

The school occupies a crucial place in children's social reality because this is where they develop social skills and multiple relationships. The school environment is seen as a crucial influence on the development of children and stress is being laid on creating a nurturing environment in schools that focuses not only on academic achievements but also fosters healthy social skills. Recent changes in the government policies have initiated child developmental psychology-based interventions in schools.

The immediate family members, social workers, and teachers in school form the overlapping spheres within the children's subjective reality. These are the groups that children at risk have access to and interact with frequently. There is greater involvement expected from teachers and recent research evidence has shown that practices based on these interactive policies have a positive effect on the children, despite other risk factors present in the children's home environment (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007).

Combined with the changing environment in schools is the positive development in the field of children's rights that focuses on building resilience of vulnerable children (e.g. Ungar, 2005; Jackson & Martin, 1998). Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCFS) in the UK has taken the initiative to establish the importance of schools in lives of children and emphasised the role of teachers in securing the wellbeing of children, specially those at risk of social exclusion (www.dcfs.gov.uk). Reforms in Schools (Education Sector) and Social Services are pivotal changes to reach marginalised children and families.

Methodology

17 interviews were conducted of child protection social workers. Direct quotations from these interviews as used as 'thoughts' of 'Sheila', a child protection social worker. Sheila's day at work is a realist/impressionist tale that represents the data collected in the interviews. The location for the story is a Social Services Department office in a deprived borough of London, where Sheila works. This location coincides with the work setting of the 17 interviewees. They are currently working in deprived neighborhoods where most of their clients are socially excluded children and families.

Two schools were selected for participant observation over a period of two months. 11 teachers were interviewed across both schools and observed during breaks in the staff room as well as in class and interacting with children on campus. The selection criteria for neighborhoods selected for the study was based on Index of Deprivation, 2004 (Government Office for London, 2006[20]). The level of deprivation is calculated across measures of health deprivations and disability, employment, income, education, skills and training, living environment, and barriers to housing and services.[21] Based on the Index of Deprivation (ID), 2004, the three top most deprived neighbourhoods, or boroughs[22], in London are Tower Hamlets, Hackney, and Islington. The fieldwork for this study was carried out in two schools, based in Hackney and Islington.

A Social Workers' Day at Work

The data from interviews with social workers is used to formulate a story that represents an ordinary workday in a social worker's life, representative of the issues raised by the social workers themselves during the interviews. The story told is both realist and impressionist in parts (Van Maanen, 1988). It is realist to the extent that direct quotes are used in the story as 'thoughts' of Sheila, the protagonist, representing the views of her 17 colleagues.

Sheila's story is impressionist as well because, "*(In an impressionist tale) ..the audience is asked to relive the tale with the fieldworker, not interpret or analyze it. The intention is not to tell readers what to think of an experience but to show them the experience from beginning to end and thus draw them immediately into the story to work out its problems and puzzles as they unfold.*" (Van Maanen, pp. 103).

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[20]   http://www.gos.gov.uk/gol/

[21]   http://www.swo.org.uk/imd2004/index.asp

[22] Borough is defined as "an administrative division of a large city, responsible for running local services such as housing and education" (Encarta World English Dictionary). It is used synonymously with 'neighborhoods' in this paper.

As the aim is to sketch the culture of social work using social workers' own strokes, the following realist-impressionist tale is told of a day in the life of Sheila, a child protection social worker in UK.

Monday, 9:00 A.M.

It's a bright, sunny day for a change and Sheila stands at her bus stop, lost deep in her thoughts. "*I MUST finish that report today, am behind schedule for almost all the cases I have this week.. damn! I hope they haven't moved my stuff around, I hate it when that happens! Wastes so much time to set up my work station every day at a new spot.. I wish the management would do something about it, instead of just breathing down my neck about the damn reports!..*" Absent-mindedly she got on the bus. Sheila's thoughts are still swirling in her head as she grabs a cup of coffee from the kitchen that Monday morning.

It was a new week and she had lots of reports to complete and forms to fill. Sheila was running behind on the Avril case. Sheila glanced at her organizer as she remembered Avril. *Case Conference meeting set up for 2:00 p.m. Note: Call the GP to remind him about the meeting.* Sheila got slightly annoyed as she read this note she had made in her diary. The GP had missed the previous two conferences and she still had not heard from Avril's teacher despite leaving messages at the School for her. "*And they expect us to deliver everything on time, like it's all my responsibility. It would be nice for a change to have someone else pitch in*"

Sheila said a quick hello to her colleagues as her eyes swiftly scanned the room for a vacant computer. She spotted one by the window and quickly walked across the room and in one quick gesture, dropped her heavy pile of files next to the monitor. As the screen came alive, Sheila pulled out a coaster from her bag, placed it on the table for her coffee mug. She was logged on now and opened her inbox. Still no reply from the Social worker she had contacted at another department on a case Sheila was investigating.

The report was due end of the week and Sheila wanted to double-check some information before she gave her final recommendation. "*Well.. I can't wait forever. If I don't hear from him by tomorrow I am submitting the report anyways.*" thought Sheila as she opened Avril's file and clicked on the folder that had all the forms Sheila had to fill before end of the day. The Assessment form was almost complete but there was some information missing. She needed to hear from the GP and Avril's teacher before she could complete that.

Sheila had visited Avril's home last week. She had finally managed to enter the home this time. She had tried to make a home visit twice previously but no one answered the door. Sheila could swear she saw the curtain twitching the second time as she waited outside in the rain for someone to answer the door. It was pouring that day, miserable weather. And the bastards didn't answer the door, Sheila cursed at the memory of her freezing at the doorstep, convinced Avril's mother was at the window, watching her from the warmth of her house. Finally, Sheila had given up and left. Last week she managed to gain access to the house, after her manager threatened to bring in the police.

Sheila had recommended for Avril to be removed from her home. It was a very difficult decision but eventually Sheila was convinced.. *as much as I can ever be*, she thought to herself, that it was the best thing for Avril. There was no baby food in the house and two-year-old Avril showed signs of severe neglect. The mother had seemed upset and disorganised when Sheila had visited them and the kitchen cabinets were filthy. Sheila grimaced at that memory: deep dark stains of dirt, rotting remnants of food, and cans of processed food piled on top of each other, some expired almost a month ago.

Avril did not show any obvious signs of abuse but she was waiting to hear from the GP on that. An older sister of Avril had been removed from home as well and Sheila was trying to contact the teacher at school who had initially reported the abuse. The teacher had alerted the social workers about Avril as well and Sheila needed to talk to her before finalising her report. It had been three weeks since Sheila had called the teacher and was still waiting to hear from her. "*And then they expect us to jump in and swoop away the child.."* Sheila slightly shook her head at the thought.

Sheila was getting more and more annoyed as she filled out the form and these thoughts raced through her mind. She was nervous about the meeting at 2. More than that, she was hoping that everyone would show up so she could finally close this case. Sheila slumped more at this thought, it reminded her of all the forms that she would have to fill in after the conference. She pushed the lurking fatigue out, straightened her back, and resumed typing.

12:00 P.M.

Time for lunch. The paperwork for Avril's case was almost done. After lunch, she could prepare for the conference and start on the forms for the other two cases on her priority list for today. Sheila chatted with one of her colleagues, Mary, during lunch. Mary had been on a home visit last week

that had not gone that well. Mary was convinced that the parents were hiding something and wanted to know more about the family. Mary was one of the new recruits, fresh out of college and Sheila listened to her with a bemused, wistful expression.

She was like Mary when she had first started. She had learned all these theories of therapeutic intervention, she had learned how to engage children in conversation and get them to divulge disturbing information. Sheila had good communication skills, or at least that is what she had been told during her training. Out of college, she got her first placement as a child protection social worker and had been excited about her first case. But Sheila had soon learned that she would have to choose between saving her job by meeting the management's requirements on one hand and getting satisfied with her investigation on the other.

Sheila never had enough time to spend with her clients. It had bothered her initially but now it had receded somewhere deep in her head and seldom interfered with her thought process. Sheila had enough experience by now how to write reports and frame her recommendations. The final decisions were made by the manager anyway and this suited Sheila just fine. She didn't want to be bothered anymore by questions she didn't have the power to resolve. There never was enough time.

Sheila gulped down her yoghurt drink as Mary went on complaining how she spent all her time at the computer instead of meeting clients, she didn't like computers and had chosen to be a social worker because she was good with people! Sheila sympathetically nodded, planning the rest of the afternoon in her head. The hour passed by quickly. Sheila spent the next hour preparing for the conference, making phone calls and ordering forms that she needed for her other cases.

2:00 P.M.

Sheila sat in the conference room with a five-inch thick pile of paper in front of her. It was all the assessment forms that she had completed and her final recommendation for Avril. Avril's mother had shown up this time (after defaulting the previous time), the teacher was there, and Sheila's manager was in the kitchen with her manager. It was usual practise that at least three managers would be present at the case conference. Initially, Sheila had been surprised, she did not see the reason why managers needed to be present at the case meeting, and that too, three of them. But now she was used to it, it was the norm.

After all, it took a lot of money to remove a child from home. Placement was expensive business

and management must make that call to invest or not to invest in a child. Besides, Sheila knew how much pressure her own manager was under. The other day, he had walked into her office and broken down right in front of her! She felt sorry for the poor bugger, though it did make her wonder how on earth did these people become managers in the first place. He had no idea how to manage the team. Nobody respected him in the team, at least she didn't.

Sheila impatiently tapped her pen at the edge of the desk, uncomfortable to be alone in the room with Avril's mother who was obviously hostile. She refused to make eye contact with Sheila, and when she did, the anger and resentment was too much for Sheila to tackle. They both sat there in silence. The managers shortly entered the room and seated themselves around Sheila. A couple of other social workers were there as well, Sheila had discussed the case with them at different points during the assessment. She had asked one of them to accompany her on a home visit, just to be sure that she was correct in her judgment.

Actually, it was after Sheila's manager disagreed with her initial assessment that Sheila had decided to seek her friend's opinion. Anyway, it didn't matter now. Sheila had her recommendation ready and the case was going to court. That was always a relief for Sheila, it lifted the responsibility off her shoulders; she preferred telling the client's that it was the court's decision to remove the child. The GP was absent and they decided to proceed without him.

Sheila explained the assessment procedure to Avril's mother. The mother sat there with an impassive face. Sheila was used to this expression, she saw it often during conferences where the clients did not understand most of the words social workers used to explain the situation. They just sat and listened, like Avril's mother now. Sheila read on from the assessment forms. The teacher and the other social worker spoke briefly in support of Sheila's assessments. The managers listened in silence. Sheila conveyed that her final recommendation is for the child to be removed from home. The teacher and other social workers gave affirmative comments.

Avril's mother remained silent but glared defiantly at Sheila. Sheila squirmed uncomfortably in her chair. All of a sudden, Avril's mother started swearing at Sheila and shouting at everyone else in the room. Sheila was too shaken up to notice who calmed her down while, *"you fucking bitch.. you'll go to hell!"* echoed in Sheila's ears. The mother left eventually; the recommendation was approved and now Sheila had to write up the final report. Everyone left the room to go back to their jobs. Sheila exchanged niceties with them, thinking to herself how relieved they all looked to get this

behind them, and now, she carried all their burdens. She left the room feeling the weight of the world on her shoulders.

5:00 P.M.

Sheila had started writing up Avril's report but had been called away on another referral. She had a home visit due that day and had left a message for the family. To Sheila's pleasant surprise, the family actually called her back and she managed to arrange a time for that evening. Sheila still had to finish five forms for another family, one for each child. Each form was 25 pages long and Sheila was frustrated at the questions. "*Are they morons? Why do I need to answer the same questions, give the same information five different times??,*" Sheila vented silently as she kept on typing.

She had wanted to go home after the conference but had pushed down the disgust rising in her stomach after the verbal assault and had resumed working on the forms. At least she didn't need to think when she filled these stupid forms! Sheila sighed at the thought and quickly glanced at the watch. If she left in half an hour, she would be at the Cosby house on time.

It wouldn't take more than half an hour to get through the assessment and tick all the relevant boxes. She could be out of there at 7:00 P.M. and make it home in time to cook dinner for the kids. Sheila started typing faster now and managed to finish the Avril report just in time. She would glance through it tomorrow before handing it in. She quickly closed all the browser windows, saved her files, and logged off. She cleared the desk and dropped her coaster back in her bag. "*I hope I find a desk early tomorrow as well... I'll need an early start to revise the report.*", she thought on her way out. She quickly checked if she had the assessment form with her in the Cosby file while she said, "*See you later.*", to her colleagues and walked out the door.

6:30 P.M.

The Cosbys had answered the door bell promptly, to Sheila's delight. They seemed neatly groomed and were polite. They invited Sheila to the kitchen where they all sat down at the small table where tea things were already laid out. Sheila was relaxed already, this would go smoothly for a change. It was always a pleasant surprise to be offered tea and biscuits in a warm kitchen instead of being yelled at and abused, left standing at the doorstep in pouring rain. Sheila quickly went over the standard questions. The health officer had called the social services because she suspected abuse.

Their five year old son had been in a lot of trouble at school for aggressive behaviour and the same health officer had treated him for minor cuts and bruises from fist fights at school.

Now the younger child, a two year old baby, had been taken to the hospital with a skull fracture. Sheila had the assessment questionnaire in front of her and she quickly went through the questions about the parents' income, relationship, etc. Some questions were for the children but the five year old was already in bed. Sheila decided to check on the little one and then ask the older brother the questions. When she came back to the kitchen after seeing the younger sibling, the older brother was seated at the table.

He did not look up when Sheila entered the kitchen. He did not fidget or look around but sat very still with eyes fixed at the tea-pot. Sheila sat down in front of him, took out the assessment form. Did you eat? The boy nodded yes. What did you eat? She read each of the options out aloud and the boy nodded at some of them. Sheila ticked the appropriate boxes based on the boy's responses and she had finished the questionnaire in 30 minutes. She glanced at the ticks and saw they were all within the normal range. Sheila walked around the house then, quickly glancing around for anything that seemed odd. Everything seemed normal and Sheila was satisfied with the couple's explanation of how the accident happened.

The mother's sister had accidently dropped the baby when giving him a bath. She did not live with them and Sheila would have to call her to corroborate the story. That would be tomorrow. For now, Sheila was satisfied. It was 7:30 now and Sheila was thinking about her own kids waiting for dinner at home. She quickly concluded the interview, thanked the Cosbys and left. If she walked fast enough, she could catch the 7:45 to Central Station and be home by 8:30. Hopefully, Jim would have cooked. Sheila was planning what to cook in case Jim hadn't as she took her seat on the train. The day's fatigue hit her and she dozed off a little.

11:00 P.M.

Dinner was over and the dishes done and Sheila was in bed, exhausted. She checked if the alarm was on for 6:00 A.M., took off her glasses, and switched off the bed-side lamp. Jim was softly snoring. She pulled on the covers up to her chin and closed her eyes. Avril's mother's face contorted with anger sprang up, Sheila pushed the thought away and let fatigue lull her into sleep. A couple of hours later, Sheila was up again. She lay on her back staring at the ceiling. Rays of lights were

creeping into the bedroom through the curtains and in that dim, bluish haze, Sheila kept seeing Avril's smiling face in her mother's lap.

Initially, Sheila had been against the recommendation she finally made today. Despite the filth in the house, Sheila had noticed the bond Avril shared with her mother. But the decision had been made by the manager and Sheila had convinced herself that she had become so used to the dirt in the house that she failed to be affected by it. She had accepted the manager's decision.

Sheila will have to visit them tomorrow and take Avril away. The thought sent shivers down her spine. She reached for her sleeping pills. Just as Sheila dozed off again, the little boy she had interviewed today lingered in her consciousness for a moment, with the nagging feeling that Sheila should have talked to him, should have at least looked at him longer. Sheila fell asleep, driving Avril's smiling face and the brooding little boy out of her bedroom. She woke up next morning with the alarm, thinking that it was her turn to drive the kids to school that day. She was busy planning the rest of the day's tasks, with a lingering feeling of unrest. But she was used to this feeling. Soon, her Family Intervention Therapy course would be over and she would finally be able to change jobs. It was two more months until then. Sheila mentally crossed another day off with slight relief and got busy getting ready for another day's work.

Reflections on Sheila's Story

Sheila's story highlights the lack of time for reflective practise. Sheila is a child protection social worker and her time is spent at the computer or with adults. She has minimum interaction with children themselves. The story suggests that lack of time is the main challenge faced by social workers, followed by challenges of working with non-cooperative, hostile clients. Lack of time to *reflect* emerged as the main deterrent to better practise. Working environment of social workers is also a cause of distress.

Burke (1969) stressed upon the motivational aspect of the Scene-Act ratio where the scene influences the act, that is, "*there is implicit in the quality of the scene the quality of the action that is to take place within it… the act will be consistent with the scene*" (pp. 7, Burke, 1969). Some of the social workers interviewed for this study did not have a permanent work station and changed desks every day. Lack of stability in their work environment parallel the uncertainty and anxiety social workers experience when doing their job. A high turnover of staff made it difficult to form

supportive relationships with colleagues, contributing to general feelings of restlessness and anxiety. All interviewees were enrolled in different courses and were eager to quit the job of child protection social worker.

Similar concerns have been raised by social workers in studies following effects of reforms in social services that have led to greater 'managerialism', where greater control over services and power of decision making has been given to the managers instead of front line social workers (Ackroyd et al, 2007). Though the managers have been given more responsibility and power, they lack efficacy in Sheila's eyes. They are looked upon with sympathy or contempt and seldom represent the power given to them by legislative guidance. Instead, their role is mainly restricted to ensuring administrative requirements are fulfilled on time. They fail to provide necessary supervision and training in most cases.

Lack of trained staff, high turnover rates, and a proliferation of paper work has generated severe constraints on time spent by social workers with clients. Instead, most of the time is spent performing administrative tasks (Sanders & Mace, 2006). This study highlighted another aspect of the problem of enhanced bureaucracy. It is not only the load of paperwork per se, but also the unnecessary repetition of information when filling out forms. Most of the information required by the different forms is the same but has to be filled in again each time for every child. Public sector employees would benefit from better structured methods of reporting and assessment that save time and unnecessary repetition of tasks.

Children in care have recently voiced their concerns about disempowerment of social workers. They suggest that managers should not be in control of decisions regarding their welfare. Instead, it should be the front line workers with enough discretionary power and resources to take and implement the decisions independently (Care Matters: Consultation responses; DfES, 2007). Sheila's story highlights the reason why this prescription seems unrealistic under the given circumstances. Even if the social workers are given more discretionary and decision making power, the services would not improve without providing them extra time as well. Reduction of bureaucratic requirements is a prerequisite for Sheila to be able to think about children more. Her day slips by performing administrative duties and logistical work with little time and energy left for taking informed decisions, even if she were given the power to do so.

Sheila's story contributes to the current body of research on policy reforms by presenting the perspective of child protection social workers. It highlights the fact that prescriptions given for

improving practise cannot be implemented successfully under the current working conditions of child protection social workers. Being a child protection social worker, Sheila's usual day at work should be (as prescribed through legislative guidelines and job description) spent thinking about the child's wellbeing. To the contrary, in Sheila's reality, most of her time and thoughts are about administrative/bureaucratic concerns. There is little or no time at all to ponder over what's best for the child. Communication with children is severely restricted as well and children themselves occupy minimal space in her (social workers') day's work.

The Teachers' Discussion

The local Scene is created based on participant observation at one of the school's premises. I join the teachers for lunch and place my tape-recorder at the centre of the table. The teachers are used to seeing me at the school for a few weeks and are friendly. Some of them have been interviewed privately earlier. Today, they have agreed to let me record a general group discussion. The Actors are five teachers and the Act is these teachers engaged in conversation during their break. The names of the actors are fictional but their conversation is direct transcription of interview text. The discussion is taking place in the staff room during lunch. I initiate the discussion (opening act) by asking, "*how do you identify 'troubled' children in your class?*"

Guy: They can let you know! (laughs) Honestly, in this place you know who they are because they are telling you .. they are in your face really with their behaviour… there are so many here.. so many that want.. need extra attention that some of the quiet ones get lost a bit. Every time I've had a really bad problem, management have done something about it.. but they are not here everyday to talk to so.. I mean.. yes.. it depends… the year I teach is year six so the concern is more about when they leave.. how they'll cope when they start secondary schools.. some of them can be leaving and not really sorted out and I can imagine it can be really tough on them.. so that kind of thing you see.

Jane: My wish would be to have administration help.. you could do the teaching and she could do the secretarial work..

(other teachers laughing and agreeing..

Guy: "yes I see.. yeah. Yeah.. someone else to do the paper work. Yes")

Jane (contd.) : you could have all your time to actually teach and get on with it because if you work it down, I think it's going the other way now that you are doing more planning, more preparation, other whatever.. and attending meetings.. other than teaching children and that's what we would like (laughs). I'm teaching in Hackney and you have to think about how much a teacher has to do... there's a girl in my class who missed school for a day and wouldn't say where she was I prodded her and prodded her but she couldn't say.. this is information that the school would like to know.. but I missed that because you don't have the time to have this kind of conversation with the children.. which is a pain.. because you can actually miss things.. because that girl didn't outwardly show anything, the school didn't tell me anything, I wished I had asked her a question that would have really pushed it (laughs) so yeah.. there are cases where you don't know.. children are..

Clara: ..it was surprising that the language that she used to tell me what was going on was the language social worker uses because they are so used to it.. and you actually hearing parents not very good in English using phrases that you actually fall off your chair.. I actually know this woman who said "I buy age appropriate books for my child" and that's NOT in her vocabulary but it is now because she.. (big laugh) .. you can imagine the parent I am talking about

(everybody says "yeah" and "it's really funny", everybody laughing)..

Eve: Smaller classes is what I wish for! Another problem is they (parents and children) don't trust you

John: they're not willing to listen everything they say you might tell social services.. they don't trust you

Guy: and they say Yes Yes Yes without listening.. you tell them and say your child needs this and they say Yes Yes Yes and nothing happens.. so they are not being honest ..and they can't do anything more.. there is this woman who is already doing the maximum for her son but it's not enough so what can you say.. so its.."

Jane: I think it's historical because not now, long time ago they took children away because of that sexual thing..

Guy: Yeah yeah true

Jane: and obviously it was in the papers and people lost their children and people still haven't got their children back and they don't forget it.. there are lot of things I can't remember but I can remember that because you know.. having your child taken away from you for no good reason..

Guy: Shocking

Maxine: I think that was true, it wasn't cooked up

Guy: Cleveland[23], wasn't it?

Eve: yeah .. (now) they don't take children away, they want to keep children at home and do as much as possible .. because they can't afford it.. and also I think that in this borough because we got so much need it's not likely they will be taken away unless it's dire straits.. sometimes they make mistakes

Guy: Parents don't understand what school is all about. I've got one girl on my class who's mother even confronted me and said well I can't help her with her homework because I didn't go to school. I can't really write.. and y'know.. it's this.. where do you start?? Y'know. Everything I was going to say about her reading or whatever – waste of time. I don't know how you get over that really.. if parents don't really know how school works and they can't support their children.. they are not understanding what we are thinking really.. that's really hard (laughs)..

Joan: Same for special needs children… to tell parents their child has particular special needs.. parents are in denial, that's hard to accept isn't it

John: Yeah.. sometimes parents are like the kids, they get aggressive.. instead of saying oh no what can I do? they get defensive.. my child is fine

Eve: You MUST NOT criticise in any situation.. so you can't make progress can you

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[23] In 1987, there was a mass removal of children from their homes based on suspicions of sexual abuse in Cleveland, UK. The event is viewed negatively because of the lack of evidence supporting their removal. The incident was referred to quite frequently during interviews. (See http://www.childrenuk.co.uk/choct2002/choct2002/pragnell%20cleveland%20abuse.html)

Guy: yeah it's very difficult

Celia: I actually used to have the patience for it but now, I don't.. I can't do it.. y'know I've been outside of London where you actually teach, it is real. You DON'T have behavioural issues, it's about education.. you just step up and teach. Here you're just Policing aren't you.. anger control, behaviour management.. y'know .. what about education? I find it.. y'know.. y'know it's just not about education. I have huge respect for teachers who work in this environment because they are dealing with education on top of behaviour management which is just .. y'know (laughs) I am used to.. y'know.. you get respect automatically because you are a teacher and here you have to fight for it every second of every day which is what you do in boroughs like this.. it is so much worse.. Oh well!

Joan: I went to Newell and went to the class. I told the children how I expected them to sit and what I wanted them to do and later on e of the teachers came up to me and said are you from Islington? Yes why?.. It's the way you talk to children, it's the model of behaviour ..you don't have to do that here really (laughs)..no she pinpointed she knew exactly (laughs)

Eve: yeah I know such schools.. you don't actually need a teacher.. there's no adult in the room and they are working away.. so strange (everyone laughs)

Jane: I don't know if I could cope with that! (joke, everyone laughing)

Eve: Actually no it's very enjoyable because you get all the work don't you

Eve: what you are doing instead of education is behaviour management I think.. no I think you are delivering an education of sorts but its hardly.. it's very basic isn't it.. all the issues are so covered up that there is no time and there is no time because you are doing all the behaviour management.. if you are really interested in education and educating, then no, this is not the school for you (laughs).. or perhaps this is not the area for you because so much is behaviour management

Jane: I don't know if it's that black n white..

Eve: No it's not.. never is

Jane: Actually I don't think it's going to get any better unless white English children stop being bussed out of here

Guy: Yeah. I was just gonna say.. yeah

Jane: if .. if you had to go to school in your borough then children in schools like these would have role models.. you can't go to school in china and go to a classroom and not expect to see a Chinese student.. and here it happens every single day.. we've got white English children in our classes?

Guy: Very few

Eve: I haven't got one.. and I've got four groups

Guy: Four or five

Celia: Umm.. and how many children have you got?

Guy: Thirty

Celia: Umm.

Guy: It's not about ethnicity alone.. any parent who understands what schooling is about.. am being blunt.. shouldn't or would not send their children here... You see the only children coming here are those whose parents can not cope, don't understand, have just arrived in Britain.. there's no kind of mix (all agree).. there is no balance.

Maxine: You know.. you see children being bussed out or taxied out and you just feel it's not fair.. there are no role models here.. someone who talks in street lingo, that's what they hear here and that's what some children think is English

Guy: but I read something about private schools.. in London non-white children are one-third of the population, in state schools they are two-third because the white kids are not only not coming to state schools, they are going to private schools.. so schools don't represent an index at all

Maxine: and there are two of those schools in Hackney (laughs).. and it's nicer when you get there.. names are different.. you get blue bells and hyacinths.. (laughs with guy).. and what have we got here? (more laughter)

Maxine: and you never raise your voice there.. you never speak above a whisper (Guy and Joan laugh).. you never ever raise your voice

Joan: and the stresses for the teachers are different because all these children have got tutors.. in the staff room.. when you go to the staff room.. what year six teachers are saying- I am SO annoyed because we will do magnets next term and Christian is already doing magnets (laughs)

Guy: yes.. (all laugh)

Celia: the cream goes to prep school. For most of the country, education is based on where you live. So in most of the poor areas, you get children whose parents can't afford to live anywhere else.

Guy: Its actually even worse because now parents can choose to send their children to another area even if they live in an area like this.. and those who know how to fill the forms etc. are successful about it.. so

Suzanne: I'll be honest. The problem is the parents. They won't admit some of these children are badly behaved. They'll let their own child get away with murder and what chance have we got if we are trying to instil discipline. You discipline a child and the next thing you know the mother's complaining and you are in an office and you are the one getting told off. The mother wasn't there when it happened, no one hears your side of the story.

My parents would tell me off for getting into trouble. If I went home and told my mother what a teacher did to me for getting into trouble, I'd get a clump on my back for getting into trouble in the first place. (another teacher agreed saying my parents would do the same).

Roxy narrates a story about a mother being rude to her in the playground. She doesn't want to talk too much about it in my presence, other teachers silently nod.

Roxy: Somebody's got to keep the kids up to standard and that's our job. Smaller classes and

specialist teachers is what they wish for, we just get under under-achieving groups because we are an underachieving group. No we are not allowed to talk to social workers. We report to senior management if ever concerned about the child. Senior management takes it up because we have a designated child protections officer in the group and she can take it further if she needs to. That's not what we do.

Suzanne: Behaviour is the biggest challenged, being swore at, hit, spit at. Parents support that my child didn't do that. I wasn't believed and that's fine. Am not going to say anymore. I wasn't believed. Maybe maybe …I.. but that's fine.. it's ok.

All the teachers then agreed that the child had severe behaviour problems

John: he will seriously hurt somebody one day… he is very frustrated.. I feel sorry for him really… what I saw today.. the hatred, the evil, the way he looked at me.. I literally had to pin him down.. the way he looked at me.. evil.. evil.. Linda egged me not to get too close to him.. the way he looked in Rosie's eyes.. scary Mary for a young child! I tell you..

Eve: he could be epileptic y'know.. yeah maybe he had a convulsion.. he doesn't realise he is doing it.. but he lost it and he didn't realise he had lost it.. I gave him a choice.. he chose the wall (in slow grinding tone) and he clenched his fists, and he looked at me like that .. even when he was leaning at the wall, I took another kid out of his way

other teachers mumbling "yeah yeah.. leave him alone.. get out of his way"..

Joan (explaining to me): he is in year 2.. we can see it but we spend a lot of time with the child but when you talk to the parents, you just bang your head against the wall.. they are in denial.. we follow that behaviour thing the traffic light system and if that doesn't work we just take them in and take them to senior management. That's what we do. We take them to senior management. Let them deal with it because we are not here to get hurt. That's what we do. But we do give them a chance. Time out yeah.. traffic light system.

Juliette: I want corporal punishment.

Roxanne: no we got traffic light system. Let them deal with it! You can't take the authority, you're

not allowed. Which we normally don't try.

(the teachers talked among themselves about that troubled kid "*he kicked me the other day didn't he*"…"*he is awful*"). The lunch hour is over and one by one the teachers gradually start drifting out of the staff-room.

Reflections on Teachers' Discussion

First, the proliferation of administrative work due to stricter regulations for planning and assessing children's lessons and performance is the main complaint that teachers have against changes introduced in the Education sector. Second, they feel they spend more time 'policing' children rather than teaching them. Teachers expressed frustration at the extent of behavioural problems exhibit by the majority of the children in these schools and felt they were being forced to deal with psychological issues that they were not qualified to handle. Third, teachers face challenges dealing with parents who are uneducated and ill equipped to participate in ensuring their child's welfare.

Most of the teachers (90%) felt that parents of children who are on child protection registers were not honest with them and only pretended to cooperate with the teachers. Fourth, all teachers wished for smaller class sizes, better resources, and more funding from the Government to improve facilities at the school. Prejudices against social workers as 'baby-snatchers' are touched upon briefly.

Regarding social exclusion, the teachers make the salient observation that the Education system is entrenched within class-consciousness and status differentials. The lack of role models for vulnerable children is a serious concern. Research on anti-social behaviour in children and adolescents has shown that relationship with peers from 'normal' families has a strong mediating influence on adolescents prone to anti-social behaviour. Children and adolescents at risk of delinquency refrained from engaging in anti-social behaviour where they had friends who did not fall within the at risk category (Salzinger, et.al., 2007).

The teachers are not trained or willing to take on the responsibility placed on them for ensuring the overall well-being of children. They lack adequate support, training, and time to invest in children and ensure their safety and welfare outside of the class curriculum. Common constraints have been highlighted by both teachers and social workers in terms of lack of time and resources required to

perform at the level expected of them. Participant observation and interviews conducted at schools reveals that teachers are ill equipped to help children with behavioural problems.

Interviews with Children at Risk

45 children were interviewed, between the ages of six to thirteen years. 22 children were on child protection registers, undergoing risk assessment by social workers or already in foster placements at the time of the interviews. The remaining 23 children had not been referred to social services and were from 'normal' households. Both groups were homogenous in terms of low income of parents, low social mobility, and the overall deprivation characteristic of all inhabitants in that borough. 11 teachers at the two schools were interviewed individually at first, concluding the process with a group interview at one of the schools.

Given the sensitivity of the research topic and ethical considerations, children were not asked direct questions about their life's circumstances. Instead, 30 pictures selected randomly from the Internet were used as props for the children. They were asked to select any three pictures that they 'liked' from the pile of pictures and tell stories using those pictures. They could construct one narrative using three pictures or three different stories, one for each picture. The younger children in the groups (six to nine years old) preferred to tell three different stories and the older children constructed more complex plots using three pictures in one story.

Coding Scheme

The content of the pictures was coded as Positive, Negative, and Neutral by three independent coders. 70% consistency was achieved in the initial coding. Eight pictures were coded differently amongst the coders, with higher consistency between two coders but different coding by the third coder. Two pictures were coded positive by two coders but as neutral by the third. The variation could be based on gender differences. Both pictures show a woman with a child (representing a mother and son).They were rated positive by the female coders but neutral by the male coder. The differences could be because of higher valence for females due to association with positive feeling of motherhood.

One picture that showed two boys in an aggressive stance was rated negative by two female coders

and neutral by the male. The explanation given was that slight aggression in childhood among boys is normal. The female coders rated the picture as negative, representing aggression. These eight pictures were shown to two more coders, one male and one female, and 90% consistency was achieved for the gender bias. Thirteen pictures were coded negative with 100% consistency. Seven pictures were coded positive in content with 100 % consistency. Out of the remaining three, one was coded neutral and no consensus was achieved for the other two. All thirty pictures were used during the interviews but only the ones rated negative and positive unanimously by the coders are used in analysis.

Interviews with children were structured along their selecting three pictures that they 'liked' from this pile of 30 pictures of mixed positive, negative, and neutral valence. Only those pictures coded 'Positive' and 'Negative' with 100% consistency among coders were selected to form the 'coding key' for analysing interviews with children.

Children not categorised as 'at risk' consistently chose more positive pictures than their counterparts. 'At risk' children consistently picked out violent and disturbing images (negative valence) as pictures they 'liked'. The stories narrated by children with an abusive history placed violence inside the home, between people shown in the pictures. Tales of stabbing, punching, and beating family members were common narratives in this group. Children who did not have abusive family background narrated violent stories as well, but the violence and aggression was placed outside the home. For example, children who picked out negatively rated pictures narrated stories of mugging on the street or witnessing arrests or crime in the neighbourhood. Given the homogeneity of high crime and poverty in the immediate environments of all of these children, these stories were not surprising.

Children at risk failed to make associations between adults and children in pictures, whereas other children referred to the same pictures as 'the mother and the child' or 'the father', pointing to the male figure in the picture. Some children in the previous category did make family association but narrated stories of family members torturing and killing each other. Most of these stories entailed violent episodes of stabbing (the mother stabbing the child or father and son stabbing the mother). A lack of expression (and identification) of affectionate ties existing between oneself and others (mainly adults) is an important diagnostic factor in detecting Attachment disorders in abused children (Bowlby, 2005).

Children with untreated attachment disorders exhibit mood fluctuations, aggressive behaviour, and problematic social relationships, usually throughout their lifespan (Ainsworth, et al, 1978). In adults, negative affective states have been shown to influence the preferences of an individual when selecting between high and low risk options (Ragunathan & Pham, 1999). An analysis of children's interviews in this study brings forth a tentative evidence of disturbed patterns of thought and feelings, expressed through the childrens' '*liking*' for negative pictures and events. The findings from the interviews highlight the need for a deeper psychological evaluation and therapy-based intervention for socially excluded children. None of the children at risk interviewed for this study had received therapeutic help.

General Discussion

New policy initiatives introduced in the UK Education sector are based on the following vision of government presented in the white paper, Excellence in Schools, (DfEE, 1997), that has been the blueprint for drafting governmental policies towards education of children, 'Schools, along with families, have a responsibility to ensure that children and young people learn respect for others and for themselves. They need to appreciate and understand the moral code on which civilised society is based and to appreciate the culture and background of others. They need to develop the strength of character and attitudes to life and work, such as responsibility, determination, care and generosity, which will enable them to become citizens of a successful democratic society.'

The emphasis is on appreciating and understanding the 'moral code on which civilised society is based,' rather than ensuring development of each child in its own right. The stated goal for the schools is to mould children into suitable citizens of the government's vision of a successful society. Though excellence in schools is a desirable outcome for children, stressing this outcome at the cost of neglecting psychological and emotional wellbeing of children could be a serious impediment in achieving the goals that the government wants to achieve. The neglect of children's rights in policy is reflected in practice when teachers (and social workers) do not have sufficient time to give children in need the level of attention that they require.

The schools selected for this study have shown remarkable improvement in their Ofstead assessments under the leadership of the business manager/headmistress (who gave the permission for this research). The school environment was healthy and at a sharp contrast from the dingy

neighbourhood surrounding it. The schools have benefitted from the appointment of this creative and committed manager as per the NPMish emphasis on managerialism in public sector. The manager has saved the schools from being shut down by improving its ratings in the Ofsted assessments because before her appointment, the schools had been marked as 'failing schools' and faced the threat of being closed down. This eventuality would have been highly detrimental to the socially excluded children and youth populations living in that area. The positive effect of the policy reforms has been to secure the future of the schools in deprived neighbourhoods. Capable and committed managers have been given the opportunity to make a difference.

On the other hand, despite this remarkable progress, the teachers' dialogue highlights that barriers to inclusion are very much in place. Due to increased paperwork, an emphasis on following the rules, and mostly because of inevitable stresses of mitigating circumstances, the teachers are over-worked and exhausted. They lack the training and expertise required for dealing with socially excluded children and families effectively. The policy reforms gave a motivated business manager the opportunity and power to improve the schools dramatically since her appointment and yet simultaneously, created more work and pressure for the teachers.

It is the teachers who engage with the children in need everyday. While the reforms seem to improve the school's efficiency, their effectiveness might be lost on the children in need because of barriers to constructive engagement with the teachers. The teacher's dialogue reflects the effect of inequality and poverty endemic to deprived boroughs on the lives of the inhabitants. It may be a while before these socio-economic conditions change for the children in need or for the teachers working in such boroughs. In the meantime, it is the quality of interaction with teachers and other adults in the life of vulnerable children that can mitigate or create further exclusion for them. The reforms have ensured that the children are in school and being monitored successfully. However, there is little evidence that could confirm they are being nurtured as well.

Hendrick (2003) has referred to the current policy guiding education sector reforms in his critique of New Labour's policies towards children in need as an example of "*revealing .. how the Government thinks about children and what can be seen as the implicit lack of respect it has for their self-worth*" (pp.219-220). The policy beliefs are centred on notions of accountability and acting *on* children rather than *with* them, by creating rigid bureaucratic control and surveillance structures that can monitor their development rather than nurture it. Reflection of this policy can be seen in the practice implications of reforms for social workers and teachers. Neither have time to

invest in establishing communication with children because of lack of time due to bureaucratic constraints. The focus of the government's policy reforms on 'what' is achieved regardless of 'how' it is achieved is reflected in practice.

Efficiency versus Effectiveness

The performance measures introduced within social services and the education sector generate actuarial tables that represent efficiency of the system. However, previous research has shown that rule explosion within public services hampers their accountability and performance (Anechiarico & Jacobs, 1996; Behn 2001; Dicke & Ott 1999; Kelman, 1990; Osborne & Gaebler 1992). Kelman (1990) stated that the performance of the public officials suffers under a rules-based regime because in a complex, dynamic environment, flexible decision-making is required which can not be achieved under a rules regime. Though NPM may initially have emerged as a solution by giving managers greater discretion, the practice itself is seen as devolving "*into a tool for micro management and compliance with bureaucratic requirements*" (Kassel, 2008; pp. 242).

Efficiency itself is not a neutral, objective concept. It is a political one (Bohte, 2007). It is the political bodies/actors that decide how to define and measure efficiency and the assumption is that the actuarial tables generated are again used to inform policy decision-making. However, contradictory finding have been reported that claim decisions of funding are not dependent on these tables of data but instead, are influenced by who got the funding the previous years (Kelly & Riverbark, 2002). Also, adoption of performance measures by organizations does not guarantee that the performance measurement systems will actually be implemented in practise (De Lancer Julnes & Holzer 2001).

Ofsted inspections of schools and annual assessment of social services departments by DfES generate actuarial tables of statistics depicting the performance of both annually. Legislative guidance emphasizes child well-being but "*Inspections are short and focused, and dialogue with senior managers in the school plays a central part.*" (Ofsted Web site, www.ofsted.gov.uk). Simon (1988) viewed actuarial assessment as a means of social control. In tracing the power politics within Institutions, Lawrence (2007) quotes Simon,

"*Through the lens of representations thrown off by these practices, individuals, once understood as moral or rational actors, are increasingly understood as locations in actuarial tables of variations.*

This shift from moral agent to actuarial subjects marks a change in the way power is exercised on individuals by the State and large organisations. Where power once sought to manipulate the choice of rational actors, it now seeks to predict behaviour and situate subjects according to the risks they pose". (Simon, 1988; 772; Lawrence, 2007; 18).

Both social workers and teachers complained about the proliferation of paper work and the increased emphasis on submitting reports on time. Performance measures used in social services and education sector has shifted the focus on much needed efficiency but unfortunately, at the cost of reducing effectiveness of reforms. The need for qualitative performance indicators that are contextually sensitive is expressed by social workers and teachers.

Concluding Remarks

This paper finds that enhanced efficiency measured in quantitative assessments may not be the most suitable indicator of improvement in practice. Measurement of effectiveness of policy initiatives through qualitative indicators of performance is needed. Insights into subjective worlds of policy actors may help in establishing contextual relevance of policy reforms and performance indicators. Similarly, the children and families at risk of exclusion cannot be reached successfully without discovering their unique subjective realities. Disparate subjective realities form barriers to joint effort and inclusion.

The Scripts given to Social Services and Education sector are similar, but there are vast differences in local Scene, Purpose and Agency for each Agent (group). The purpose for each agent and the scene guiding the acts of each agent (representing groups of social workers and teachers) are markedly estranged from the overall Scene and Purpose of making joint efforts to ensure children's wellbeing. The disconnection among the Actors leads to an incoherent performance that is influenced heavily by the local Scene rather than the given Script. The benefits of policy reforms seem to be solely dependent on the initiative and value perspectives of local policy-makers and leaders. They can choose to use their power to encourage positive changes for socially excluded children by initiating inclusion processes or instead focus on fulfilling managerial tasks of monitoring and ensuring performance on paper.

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Article 2
Voices from the Field:
A Study of Child Welfare Practice and Prescriptions in the UK

Abstract

This paper examines two approaches to child protection policy and practise in the UK. Governmental policy is examined first, followed by an overview of alternative approach suggested by its critics. Efficacy of policy reforms is examined from the perspective of the front liners, i.e., the child protection social workers who are the main agents responsible for translating policy into practise. The subjective reality of the social workers is reviewed through empirical analysis and used as a measure to indicate which ideology, one currently adopted by the State, or the one being advocated by its critics, is better suited to the field. The findings suggest that it is important to take the contextual reality of policy actors into account when formulating policy, as it may be crucial to determining the quality of practice. The findings are strongly in favour of the critics and highlight severe shortcomings in current State ideology of child and family welfare.

Keywords: Social Policy; Child Welfare; New Public Management; Ideology; Constructive Social Work

Introduction

The toughest challenge when formulating public policy is to establish an acceptable trade-off between efficiency and re-distributional equity. Welfare goals are primarily concerned with re-distributional equity, that is, provision of services to poorer population, who may not be able to contribute to generation of resources. These goals essentially are in conflict with goals of efficiency, which dictate allocation of resources to those areas that yield maximum return on investment (Sabatier, 2007). The challenge for policy makers lies in establishing guidelines for a welfare policy and practice that yields an optimum balance between the two.

The welfare policy adapted by the state is guided by the persuasions of the polity elites that participate in the policy formulation process and the national socio-economic and political environment within which these processes are embedded. Lijphart's (1999) typology of Democracies has provided a framework for categorizing them based on concentration of power. Drawing from that, the UK has a majoritarian-unitarian democracy, where power is concentrated in the hands of a few political institutions and actors. It is possible for major policy shifts to occur fairly easily in such a democracy, based on the ontological and epistemological persuasions of the party in power.

The Labour Government has shown much interest and enthusiasm for Social Service provision for child protection. Billions of pounds were spent on provision of services to 'looked after children' (Blair, 2006), to form what is commonly referred to as the 'preventive state' that encourages early intervention rather than crisis management as the main goal (Hall, 2007). Increasingly, the emphasis has been on integrating the services across child protection and child welfare service delivery systems so that there is easy access to information for all parties concerned, and consequently, no child slips through the net. Within the last 10 years (1997-2007), there has been a gradual shift in policy towards greater control and scrutiny of procedures, emphasis on accountability, and transparency. These policy initiatives have been embedded in heavy borrowing of management strategies from the private sector over the last two decades, namely, New Public Management agendas.

In the UK context, "*The doctrines of NPM involve a focus on management, performance appraisal and efficiency; the use of agencies which deal with each other on a user-pay basis; the use of quasi-*

markets and contracting out to foster competition; cost-cutting; and a style of management which emphasises, among other things, output targets, limited term contracts, monetary incentives and freedom to manage." (House of Lords Public Service – Report, Session 1997 -98). Reviews of public sector reforms conducted recently have revealed that these initiatives have failed in the Social Services sector (Ackroyd, Kirkpatrick & Walker, 2007).

Advocates of Constructive Social Work and Therapeutic Practice

Much criticism has been directed at the UK's social services reforms. The strongest coalition against current social work policy and practice in the UK is that formed by researchers and practitioners in favour of creating a new social work ethos that is based on principles of psychotherapy integrated within practise of social work (Bower, 2005; Cooper & Lousada, 2005). The emphasis is on *reflective* ideology that supports a narrative, qualitative approach to improving practise (White, Fook & Gardiner, 2006). Current practise is seen by this coalition as an essentially bureaucratic process of information collection that force-fits 'human misery into categories of risk and vulnerability' (Parton & O'Byrne, 2000).

The prescriptions of best practise given by these critics are centred on the notion of resurrecting the subjective, qualitative element of social work. Such a practise would essentially be narrative focused, rather than quantitatively inclined in its process of information collection during the initial and core assessments of cases. Advocates of this practise draw upon the constructionist and narrative approaches to creating theories for social work. They encourage therapy-based interventions that focus on engaging with the clients in a meaningful way and help the clients make sense of their situation, thus creating an experience of communication that is empowering and healing (Parton & O'Byrne, 2000; Seligman, 1995; Howe, 1993)

The aim of this article is to explore the action arena of the social workers. They are the main agents (or Actors) in the policy process responsible for implementing the policy objectives at the frontline. It is important to understand their subjective worlds for gauging which prescription of best practise (State-led or the ones given by critics of state policy) is more effective in the field. This aim is fuelled by the theoretical foundation of Advocacy Coalition Framework, which emphasizes the importance of simultaneously mapping personal beliefs and policy beliefs as a prerequisite to predicting the fate of the policy (Sabatier and Jenkins, 1993; Herron, Jenkin-Smiths and Silva,

2005; Weible, Sabatier and Lubell, 2004; Liften, 2000; Elliott and Schlaepfer, 2001a, b, and Green and Houlihan, 2004). A comparison is drawn between objectives of the government's policy and the belief-systems of policy actors. It is evaluated whether the belief systems of child protection social workers are aligned with the objectives of current policy or instead, with the objectives of the critics of the current policy.

Current Policy and Procedures

The social worker's job is to assess the situation from the first point of contact, that is, when the referral is initially made. S/he investigates the case and during this process, many decisions and judgments are made by the social worker prior to the final recommendation made by him/her. These decisions are:

- Identifying sources of information, that is, whom to contact for information
- Judging the reliability of the source
- Deciding when enough information has been gathered to form an opinion

Depending on the gravity of the situation, decision making can be either relatively simple or a painfully complex task. Cases where there is clear evidence of physical or sexual abuse are relatively simpler because the evidence is strong and undeniable. Physical examination by the doctor and a report confirming the same is enough to get a court order. In this case, the main source of information is the health professional. Supporting evidence is gathered from the child's environment during the course of investigation but there is clarity regarding the future course of action and the reliability of the evidence provides confidence to the social worker.

One broad category of abuse is the 'severe neglect' that encompasses emotional or physical neglect. The majority of the cases referred to social services fall within this category. There is cause for concern, but not sufficient enough to remove the child from the family. Moreover, the evidence of abuse is not clear regarding the perpetrator of abuse as well as its impact on the child. There may be multiple stories that the social worker hears during the course of investigation, depending on the individual perception of the storyteller.

There are usually multiple perspectives depending on the narrator's:

- Location (proximity versus distance from the child, depending on the level and frequency of contact with the child)
- Background (health professional, police, teacher, or member of the public)
- Motive (child protection or custody battle)

The social worker[24] has to decide whom to interview and then weigh the information gathered in view of each of the above factors. The next step is to terminate the investigation when enough information has been collected to support the recommendation that the social worker can now make based on the evidence collected.

There is guidance provided to the social workers at each step (the Assessment Framework for Children in Need, 1989; Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2006). The initial and core assessments need to be finished in 7 and 35 working days, respectively. A questionnaire about 25 pages long (Assessment Form) must be filled out for home visits. A final report is then prepared based on the information gathered through interviews and shared with other participants at the case conference. The idea behind the legislation is to create an information sharing system across multiple agencies to ensure "*no child slips through the net*" (Blair, 2003, introducing Every Child Matters Green Paper).

The performance of the Social Services departments in actual terms is measured on the basis of Assessment Framework introduced in 2000 by DfES that emphasizes on the *time* aspect of delivery of service. There are no indicators for measuring the *quality* of the service delivered, though the government does address the issue of securing 'quality' placements for children in care as stated in Care Matters Green Paper (2006).

Methodology

The data collected for this study was 17 open-ended interviews (of approximately 1.5 hours duration each). The selection criterion was the uniqueness of each of the narratives, where the interviewees presented critical reflections on their professional and personal beliefs.

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[24] The terms 'social worker' and 'child protection social worker' are used synonymously throughout the thesis.

The main aims of interviews were to explore:

- The 'Subjective Universe' (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) of the Social Workers where they are required to make important decisions
- How much responsibility is given to them for these decisions and how much of multi-agency joint responsibility initiatives are actually observed in practise
- How they cope with frequent changes in legislation and organisation and the affect of these changes on their performance

The interviewees were asked to talk freely about anything that they wanted to share. The narratives were described as "*cathartic*" by most of the interviewees. As the aim was to map the subjective reality of the social workers and get their uninterrupted perspective, these unstructured narratives proved to be extremely rich sources of data for 'taking a walk in their shoes'. After a preliminary thematic content analysis, an in-depth text analysis was done using NVivo.

The questions were limited to obtaining demographic and background information such as age, country where they qualified/trained to be a social worker, amount of experience in the child protection field, reasons for becoming a social worker, and deliberately generalised questions on 'highs' and 'lows' of the job. The sample included social workers aged between 28-55 yrs and experience in child protection work ranged between two months-five years (this was independent of their overall experience as a qualified social worker, which ranged between a minimum of two years to a maximum of 30 years). The sample was further divided into the following categories based on Employer and Ethnicity.

- Employer-based categories
  - Statutory Social Workers: employed by the Local Government
  - Independent Social Workers: working as Consultants independent of the Government
- Ethnicity-based categories
  - Statutory Foreign Social Workers
  - Statutory British Social Workers
  - Independent Foreign Social Workers
  - Independent British Social Workers

These sub-groups were created based on the assumption that the nature of employment affects the extent to which the social workers feel bound by organisational procedures.

Statutory social workers necessarily have more procedural and managerial constraints than their independent counterparts. The nature of work, and therefore, the experience of work for these groups would be different despite the similarity of an overall legislative framework. Independent social workers essentially have more freedom than statutory social workers and considerably lesser amounts of organisational responsibility. Similarly, the individual context for foreign and British social workers differs due to the lack of familiarity of the former with the implicit 'way of life' in contemporary UK. Foreign social workers have to re-learn the legislation for Child Protection work in the UK and adjust themselves to the cultural differences. This creates additional sources of stress for them, which might affect performance. An additional factor taken into consideration is the reasons stated by the Social workers for choosing the profession. An interesting observation here is that none of the members in the sample had voluntarily chosen to specialize in Child Protection.

They all were qualified as generic social workers. The chosen areas of specialization were family therapy or mental health and all of them felt they "*accidentally*" became Child Protection Social workers, either due to re-organisation at work that placed individuals in new roles, changes in the field itself (for example, "*Child protection moved in to us really.. working with families has become child protection work today*"), or being given that job after returning from a long leave of absence, usually maternity leave for women social workers. Although the desire to work with vulnerable children and families was expressed unanimously by the sample, they did not view this role as a life-long choice.

Data Analysis

The empirical findings are analysed and discussed with consideration for the sub-group differentials. The interviewees gave varied reasons for becoming a generic social worker. Three became social workers because someone in their family had been a social worker, while the rest had idealistic persuasions for "*helping*" those in need.

Some interviewees chose to reflect more deeply than others on the reasons why they chose this profession but all the responses fell into the following categories:

1. Cynical/self-derogatory: *"there must be something wrong with me, I knew this was a shitty job and I still chose it."*/*"If all social workers could get therapy, there would be no one left to do the job (laughs)."*

2. Idealistic/Altruistic: *"I just thought there must be something that can be done to change things.. to have a better life."*/*"You see these people and you think do they fail because everybody looks at them as failures.. everybody knows what needs to be changed in their life to make it better.. they just need someone to believe in them too.. that's the kind of work I want to do.. to help people change."*

3. Easy Option: *"I guess (became a social worker) because I couldn't be a Doctor (laughs)."*/*"I didn't know anyone who had ever failed to qualify."*

These background variables lend additional flavour to the analysis because it helped to place the reactions/beliefs/perceptions of these individuals in a more realistic context and gave an idea of the individual's 'life space' (Lewin, 1951). For example, social workers who had idealistic goals and beliefs were more emotive in their narratives and expressed feelings of *"helplessness"*/*"frustration"*/disillusionment in their jobs. To the contrary, the ones who were cynical were more critical of the social services system and political agendas and held more pragmatic views on status quo of the social workers. Those who chose the profession as an easy career were less critical of the system and focused more on *"just getting the job done"* and *"surviving once you are in it"*.

The job of the social workers entails working directly with clients (children and families), collaborating with other agencies when formulating child protection or child in need plans (health, education, police, Independent Children's Guardians, case psychiatrists), and their managers in the Social Services Departments. The modus operandi is guided by the set of procedures that must be adhered to in terms of time taken for assessments, formulation, and implementation of plans of action. Therefore, all the interview text was analysed and coded under the following themes:

- Experiences of working with clients
- Experiences of working with other agencies
- Views on Management
- Views on Procedures

Each of these categories is further analysed and grouped under 'positive' or 'negative' experiences.

The unit of coding is the number of *direct* references made to the themes defined above. Each 'reference' is defined as *each time the interviewee touched upon the theme under study*. For example, the narration of a meeting with a family is coded as the 1st reference under the theme of 'Experiences of working with clients'. If the interviewee changed the topic and then resumed talking about the clients later on in the narrative, it is counted as the 2nd reference to the same theme. The references, and consequently, the themes were evenly spread across the sample, suggesting that these themes/issues were of most concern to the interviewees. The maximum references in each interview were made to the procedures, followed by management, clients, and other agencies. Each reference is then attributed a negative or positive value depending on the description of the event.

Experiences of Working with Clients

This category includes direct quotations from the interview data where the interviewees narrated instances of working with children and/or families. 42 references were made in all. The references were further categorised into sub-headings of 'Challenges' and 'Rewards'. The references made to the problems faced by the social workers when working with parents and children are grouped under Challenges.

There are differences within this category as well, depending on whether the interviewee was a statutory British social worker or a foreign national working in the UK. The latter experienced more problems dealing with teenagers and parents who were "*chronic cases*" (that is, who were in the system since a long time) due to lack of knowledge and proficiency in the street lingo. They felt "*frustrated*" because they could not explain themselves to the clients or understand the clients as well as their British counterparts. For example, "*he called me a cunt and I had to ask him what it meant.. because I had never heard the word before!*".

British statutory social workers felt the lack of resources, such as time spent on cases and shortage of money, was a major hurdle for them. Verbal abuse and threats from clients was another source of anxiety and feeling "*helpless*" and "*drained*" after meeting with clients was a common narrative. Resistance from parents, especially those who have experienced intervention from Social Services in their own childhoods, is also a major barrier identified by all social workers. The lack of trust

exhibited by clients and the lack of psychological safety when dealing with them is another common phenomenon mentioned by most interviewees. Most social workers felt uncomfortable going on home visits to client's homes and felt threatened by the hostile environment that they frequently encountered. For example, "*Verbal abuse.. threats.. this can't be everyday life!*".

Foreign social workers felt more threatened than their British counterparts - firstly, because of their insecurity about their own understanding of UK legislation that they have to follow, and secondly, because of their limitations in the English language, especially the "*street lingo*". The unique personal circumstances of the social workers also affected their feeling of safety. For example, social workers who themselves had or were in the process of having their own children felt especially vulnerable to hostile clients and took their threats more seriously. For example, "*I had just become a dad myself.. and y'know.. hearing him say that I know where you live.. it's.. it's just a very difficult experience.. and that's when I decided to call the Police*".

Social workers who had left the field of child protection to have their own families and then returned to the job said that their perceptions of children changed "*a great deal.. you just look at them differently I guess.. it's something about having life's experiences that you can not get when you are young and just out of college…*". In cases where the social workers did succeed in gaining the trust of their clients, they felt frustrated because they could not deliver the services as they would have liked to because of the lack of resources and heavy case-loads. The references made to positive experiences are grouped under 'Rewards'. This category includes all references made to feeling "*worthwhile*" about the job, remembering instances when they felt they had "*made a difference for a family who might have done worse if I hadn't intervened*" and experiencing satisfaction from the job. All the interviewees mentioned specific cases where they felt they had caused some improvement in the lives of the family as instances of 'Reward' or 'positive experience'.

Experiences of Working with Other Agencies

All direct references to working with members of other agencies are grouped under this category. 29 references were made in all. These direct quotations were then analysed further and two sub-themes of 'Respect' and 'Responsibility' emerged. These themes are supported by word frequency analysis on the content that showed these two words to be the ones repeated most often during the interview. Social workers unanimously voiced concern over the "*unfair*" division of responsibility of child

protection cases across agencies, despite following the prescribed participatory procedures. For instance, one social worker said "*It feels like I always walk out with the lion's share of the responsibility after each child protection conference while others walk out heaving a sigh of relief.*" Another one said, "*we are supposed to take it all.. they don't like it when they worry about a child and they need to dump it all on us and go home and get some sleep (laughs)*". Similar comments were made about joint responsibility by all interviewees in relation to other agencies.

A lack of respect for social workers and the social work profession in general was also a major cause for concern. They felt that their opinions are undervalued in comparison to opinions of other professionals. A lack of respect was noted most frequently when working with health professionals, especially GPs/doctors who were involved in child protection cases. The relationships with teachers were the second most strained relationships. All social workers expressed neutral or positive views on working with the Police. Overall, three positive references were made to multi-agency work experiences and these were made for health visitors who had good relationships with the clients and helped to facilitate communication between the client and the social workers and for teachers who had played similar roles in helping social workers gain information from the child in question.

An interesting finding here is that Independent social workers who previously had been Statutory social workers now viewed Statutory social workers in a negative light as well, saying, "*now being on the other side of the fence, I can understand why it's so frustrating to work with them! (statutory social workers)*". Also, "*they are incompetent.. it's SO frustrating trying to talk to them.. they just can't think outside the box*". The main reasons thought responsible for statutory social workers' lack of competence were lack of time and overloading of cases.

An additional bone of contention between Statutory social workers and other agencies is the different understanding of the levels of threat/risk to the child. According to social workers, teachers feel that, "*we should just swoop in and rescue the child.. they have no clue how complex it is.. and then they feel what will be serious enough for us to take action? Does the child have to be dead?*" and "*they just want to go home and not worry about the child anymore but if we don't take action they can't do that... so of course they are sore at us (laughs)*". The problems with teachers were attributed to the nature of their profession. For example, "*they are used to telling people what to do.. and they get pissed off when they can't tell us what to do*". Conflicts with GPs are based on difficulty of access to information. They seldom attend child protection case conferences, are hard to contact, and when they do participate, they "*have no respect for our (social workers) opinions*".

The social workers feel more confident about *individual* inter-personal relationships with professionals working in other agencies and view it as "*a matter of chance*" whom you get to work with. The perception of respect and responsibility differentials lie at the macro level where the social workers feel their profession is not given as much respect in society as professions of other agents involved in the process. Other agents are viewed as more specialised in their fields, better educated, better trained, and qualified, with greater respect given to them by the society by virtue of their professions. For example one of the interviewees synthesized the feelings of being "*unappreciated*" and "*unwanted*" in the following words:

"teachers take care of their children, doctors make them feel better when they are sick and .. nurses are just angels.. and we.. we look into people's cupboards and we tell the society what they don't want to hear.. that all of us are capable of abusing our children.. nobody will ever stand up and say help me I am going to hurt my child! So nobody will thank us.. children who get abused just want to forget about it too.. they certainly won't thank us, they want to forget everything!.. so we are the ones who do the dirty job, we remind people of what they don't want to see and so they hate us too".

The social workers feel de-valued and "*dumpsters*" for those who have "*other better jobs to do while we do the dirty work*". The interviewees suggested a general trend towards perception of other agencies as being "*revered*" at the cost of "*vilifying*" the social workers.

Views on Management

The reorganization of the public sector since the last two decades has resulted in frequent changes in legislation, with new procedures being put into place and replaced frequently. Strengthening the role of the management has been one of the linchpins of New Labour's policies and this infiltration of 'managerialism' is reflected in this study. Management emerged as the second most prominent concern, preceded only by reflections on procedures. 29 references to management were made by the interviewees.

Given the ambiguity of the responses regarding the perception of managers, the emergent themes have been categorised under 'efficacy of management' instead of specific positive or negative views on management. The ambiguity in the responses arose from mixed feelings of the interviewees about their managers. On one hand, they expressed deep sympathy for their managers because of the extreme pressure that they are perceived to be under. For example, *"I have seen my manager in tears many times… he just can't cope.. once he almost collapsed in my room.. so I know they are*

under pressure too..". On the other hand, they suffer from the lack of support provided to them by the management.

There were predominantly negative views about how managers manage their teams. For example, *"I really don't know how they can become managers.. they know nothing about it and still jump at the chance.. I would at least get an MBA or something!".* However, such views were also accompanied by support of managers, stressing upon the environmental pressures and organizational procedures as the culprits rather than the managers themselves. Some positive views were expressed about managers through instances where some managers showed concern for the interviewee. For example, *"he would always wait for us to come back from home visits.. he was always there".* Overall, the role of managers was viewed negatively and they are seen as rather helpless agents of the government who ensure all forms are filled and boxes are checked rather than contributing in real terms to improving the quality of performance.

An interesting finding in this study was that managers were referred to most often in relation to decision making. Despite the low efficacy ranking of managers, they were relied on for making decisions in cases where recommendations should be made to the court for the removal of children from their homes. There were variations in this finding across the sub-groups of social workers. Foreign statutory social workers showed a 100% reliance on managers on making decisions for them in cases where children had to be removed from home. For example, *"I never make that decision.. my managers always decides what needs to be done".*

British statutory social workers also depended on managers for the final decision but also acknowledged their role in the process more than the foreign social workers did. For example, *"It was the local authority's decision.. it is always in discussion with my manager.. I made the recommendation but eventually it was my manager's decision."* The foreign social workers were unanimous in declining ownership of the decisions and the recommendations for removal of children from home. For example, *"it was the best thing to do under the circumstances and my manager saw that."* Statutory social workers acknowledged their recommendations played a role in the final decision but declined ownership of the decision.

Managers are seen as the main decision making authority that control the entire process and the role of the social worker is defined by the manager. For example, one of the interviewees commented: *"I guess it depends on how much the manager is to include the social worker in the decision*

making process.. or whether it's just about the social worker reporting and the managers take decisions"

The ownership of decisions to remove children from home was explicitly accepted by one Independent social worker who also commented on the fact that in her experience, she never relied on managers for making decisions for her when she was working as a statutory social worker thirty years ago. The variation across sub-groups was based on the willingness of the social workers to accept responsibility for decisions to remove children from home when deemed necessary.

Legislative guidance specifies that all final decisions about recommendations to the court cannot be made independently by the social worker without approval of the managers. The decision-making authority is the manager, even in cases where s/he has negligible contact with the clients. Social workers fill the assessment reports based on which the managers (and subsequently, the court) make the final decisions. Two main themes emerged: that managers are ineffective and that they control the decision making process.

Though the social workers expressed dissatisfaction with management and exhibited a lack of trust in their abilities, they showed willingness to lean on them for making decisions. They recognised that managers monopolised the decision-making authority and felt in some cases it went against their clinical judgment. But none of the social workers (except one independent foreign social worker) expressed any desire to change the status quo. Instead, they felt safe within the structure. Relying on managers for decision-making is one of the procedures prescribed to the social workers and despite recognizing the inefficacy of managers, social workers prefer lack of ownership of decisions.

They feel "*its too much responsibility*" to follow one's own judgment and feel more secure and safe letting the local authority decide make the final decision for them. Social workers feel comfortable making small choices inherent in information gathering process (such as whom to contact for information, how much information to gather, when to set up child protection conference, etc.) but prefer to stay detached from the most important recommendation for decision regarding removal of children from home. In these cases, social workers prefer to adhere to procedures, even if they might be in conflict to their own judgment, for example, *"I wasn't sure.. but my manager thought it was the right thing to do and I went along with it..", "I prefer court cases.. then the decision is made by the court and you don't feel the pressure", "Sure, I state my opinion clearly.. even if it is in*

conflict with my manager.. but the ultimate decision is not mine.. and in most cases I am not sure".

Social workers prefer court cases and less decision making responsibility in general because they feel a lack of psychological safety. Heuristics provide them with a safety net and they feel, *"..the only way you can protect yourself is to stay within the procedural guidelines you stay within those guidelines you know that you will be protected".*

View on Procedures

The proliferation of paper work in social work has been on the rise with the constant re-organization of the services (Munro, 2005). The current procedures/rules that the social workers must follow have not been viewed positively. The highest number of references (n=77) were to the procedures and their affect on workers' performance and morale. Four references were positive and 73 were negative. The negative views of the procedures centered around the impact of these procedures on the amount of time left for social workers to engage with clients. Since most of the time is now spent filling forms, writing reports, and meeting objectives of finishing assessments within stipulated time periods, the social workers feel there is a constant trade-off between efficiency and effectiveness. They have no time to reflect or deal effectively with their clients.

The pressure to fill reports, "*tick all the appropriate boxes*" and "*meet the required number of cases closed*" leaves the social workers with very little time to *"do my job.. to actually get out there and meet clients instead of sitting at the computer all day and fill out really stupid forms that is just repeating information you have already filled in 10 times".* The government's rationale for introducing these procedures is that they enhance accountability and enable performance measurement in real, rational terms. The majority of the sample recognized the need for this accountability but held strongly negative views about the procedures. Some views were strongly cynical, *"My biggest challenge oh well (laughs) the cynical part of me would be trying to do a good job in spite of the government rather than because of it,"* and resentful, *"I am a social worker and yet I feel like a system administrator/coordinator because I rarely get chance to sit with a family and observe a child.. observe the family, observe the dynamics.. go to their house sit for an hour as I should and watch the dynamics".*

All social workers feel that due to proliferation of paper work, "*that's where the skill is going out of social work*" because they now spend most of their time in front of computers and are desk-bound,

filling "*endless*" forms and requisitions. All complained about not being able to work with clients as much as they would like to, for example, "*I found myself spending the whole day in front of the computer basically inputting data doing recording paperwork form after form procedure and procedure you are dealing you are facing a computer all the time and perhaps you deal with people 5 % or 10 % of your time*".

The lack of opportunity and time to do therapeutic work with children and families is another constraint that the social workers struggle with. For example, "*If I have a deadline for my assessment, an assessment that needs to be done in 15 days my time with parents and children is very limited considering I have more than one assessment at a time. So I haven't got only one assessment I've got 4 families 5 families 6 families and I am conducting an assessment at the same time now when dealing with children you have to be very sensitive you can not be task oriented and their questions can sometimes be very harmful. But I have no time as I said to be therapeutic*". Another social worker commented, "*I think we are doing therapy with computers right now not with people*". Similar comments were made by *all* the social workers about the lack of time and the disappointment at being unable to work therapeutically when that is what is required.

Another cause for concern was that the practise has become focused on numbers and statistics rather than on people. For instance, one of the social workers narrated an instance where she had a conflict with her manager regarding the number of interviews that she felt she needed to do before concluding her assessment, "*So she (the manager) said to me there is no need to do a lot of interviews there was no need to do a number of home visits just gain the information sort out the information and put it in your report. Basically that's what I thought about that we are just interested in finalizing a report so statistically by the end of the year we can say yes this core assessment was ready on time.*"

The social workers feel the procedural guidelines hamper rather than aid the quality of work. The focus has shifted to "*it's all about recording these days*" and gathering information. *How* that information is used is not considered relevant and the social workers feel not only exhausted from adherence to procedures but also resentful because these procedures are seen as ill-fitting and redundant. For example, "*Oh I think getting circulars from DoH about new policies and new procedures this is how things have to be and feeling that they were just so completely unrealistic compared to the families that we were meeting (worst challenges)*" and "*a lot of cases realistically you can not do a core assessment in 7 weeks. Yeah you can close a core assessment in 7 weeks how*

much you can use it to get information that's another question..". Social workers strongly feel that these ill-fitting procedures hamper their performance and severely thwart the possibility of real intervention that can help these children and families.

The lack of time for *reflecting* on their jobs - "*no time for reflection only time for what you've done no why you've done this do you think you should have done that none of that I think you need to do this plan plan plan and yeah its just disappointing*" - was the most common regret, followed by the desire to be given the opportunity to be creative in finding solutions and having the resources for engaging with clients in a therapeutic style. Social workers "*feel they (Government) are killing the people who are doing the work by putting just too much unrealistic work load pressures on to them and they are killing what could be creative caring effective...*"

Overall Effect on Performance

All the social workers feel that the current procedures adversely affects their performance because it denies them the time needed to engage in a reflective, therapeutic style of working that is crucial to improving performance. It also seriously undermines their capability to formulate long-term service provision plans for children and families in need. For example,

"In terms of future actions and in terms of what you want to do with this family you can not do any how because you don't have time you simply don't have the time you have to fill out all the forms (pause). I think you get used to rationalise you can only do so much and if you are dictated by rules and procedures to do just so much and if you do more than required you are gonna pay the price because there are other families in your case load that you need to attend to and if you can't fulfil the guidelines for each case that is required by the govt then you have not done your job well... what I find most difficult is organisational stuff "

They feel that *"what it (the procedures) doesn't give us is the chance to do more preventive work"*. Most social workers voiced concern for their clients and acknowledged that they are unable to provide the kind and quality of service that their clients need. They lamented the fact that they are unable to perform in a constructive fashion. For instance, one of the interviewees said, "*I think the more we highlight this desk oriented practice the more we keep giving importance to statistics and numbers we are just losing these people and we are just making their life more miserable than it already is.*"

All social workers felt that procedures cause more harm than good because they emphasize recording statistics and gathering information more than actual *quality* of service delivered. For example, *"the framework for assessment of children in need and families is not very helpful ICS is not very helpful it just makes people sit more and more in their office even the govt is admitting that people are spending 80% of their time in the offices.. and that isn't helping anybody it is just this quest for information for its own sake"*. The social workers feel like "*clerks or system administrators*" rather than agents of change.

Four positive references were made about the procedures by two Statutory social workers. Three references were by a foreign statutory social worker who felt that following procedures made her feel "*safe*", that she knew she would be protected "*if things went wrong*". She also said, *"that's a scary thing as well that you can't think outside the box the only way you can protect yourself is to stay within the procedural guidelines you stay within those guidelines you know that you will be protected"*. A British social worker, who viewed the procedures positively, had been in the field for thirty years and had been in senior managerial positions mostly throughout his career. He felt these procedures make the system more centralised and enable performance measurement indicators to be used more efficiently. The overall results in this study show that performance seems to be adversely affected by dissonance between Actors' objectives and the policy objectives.

Discussion

Based on the empirical results, the social workers are most affected by the following set of variables in their subjective reality:

1. Challenges of working with current procedural guidelines
2. Challenges of working with hostile clients
3. Most responsibility for child protection given to the social workers
4. Lack of management support and supervision
5. Disrespect faced from society and other members of other agencies

The maximum direct references were made to the challenges of working with the current procedural guidelines. The second biggest challenge for social workers is that of working with hostile clients. They experience abuse and much resistance from their clients due to a lack of trust. Social workers feel that they shoulder the major burden of responsibility and accountability when engaged in inter-

agency procedures. They feel a lack of respect towards them and their profession (compared with doctors and/or teachers) and that management is not very supportive and rather imposes rules that mitigate their performance. They also feel that they are given negative stereotypes by society, based on unpleasant tasks that they are sometimes forced to perform as part of their jobs (as opposed to teachers and doctors who are looked upon as 'saviours').

Impact of Following Procedures on Performance

Evidently, a great challenge for the social workers is the time constraint imposed upon them by the current procedures. The social workers believe that procedures that emphasize statistical measurement of performance alone might increase efficiency 'for the record', but greatly reduce the opportunity for social workers to be effective in their jobs. Under time pressure in high risk situations, decision makers adhere to heuristics, are prone to biases, and are less confident about their decision making capabilities (Simon 1947, 1985; Kahneman & Tversky 1979; Tversky & Kahneman, 1986, 1992; Quattrone & Tversky, 1988). Munro (2005) and Sanders & Mace (2006) found that the lack of time to spend meeting clients due to proliferation of paper work was the main concern for social workers and was viewed by them as a major impediment to better performance.

Current procedures make therapeutic interventions almost impossible. Social workers feel they have been "*dumbed down*" into "*Social Police*", where their job is to monitor children and families in need. Social workers seem to suffer from a painful disconnect between their job ethos and what they "*must do to be valued by the organisation*". All the social workers interviewed in this study had either left the child protection role or were currently undergoing training in another discipline (usually Family therapy or Adolescent Mental Health) before quitting. All of them strongly stated that this was a job they could not sustain for a long time, as one of them explained:

"it just kills you in the end.. especially because you don't know if you are doing more good than harm.. the worst decision for me is when I see the child should be removed from home but I know if I do that, he will never get the kind of therapeutic attention that he needs.. instead he will probably be in multiple placements and at the end of the day, it boils down to the choice whether you let him be abused by hi natural family or let the Government do it.. the abuse does not stop with intervention.. it's just the System that does it then.. and often the choice is between the lesser evil.. so I never really know what to do.. since I know I don't have the money or resources for therapeutic

intervention.. you never know.. and I just couldn't take it any more.."

A similar trend is observed in the Education sector, with an increased emphasis on the teachers to adhere to the strictly prescribed curriculum. The practise resulting from this stance on importance of following procedures is defensive, focused on reducing personal risk, as summarised by one of the social workers, "*practice is about watching your back not about what can I do for this child.*"

On the other hand, the social workers believe in giving people the opportunity to develop, independent of external agendas. Their ethos of the profession is embedded in the Human Rights paradigm. These social workers are educated and trained within this paradigm and then given a set of procedures that are developed from the NPM paradigm, based on the rational choice assumptions of a self-serving, profit-maximizing behaviour that explicitly discounts altruism and expects opportunistic behaviour.

Operating from the latter paradigm, procedures are crucial to ensure accountability and efficiency. However, for actors operating from a paradigm that not only takes into account "*softer*" human tendencies of empathy and compassion, but also stresses upon developing them to be effective agents of social change, these procedures seem "*outrageous*". The dissonance between the governmental policy objectives and the social workers' objectives is summarised in Table A below.

Governmental Policy Objectives/Beliefs	Social Workers' Objectives/Beliefs
Control by giving standardised tasks	Cultivate by giving freedom for reflection
Monitor through strict surveillance	Guide through contextually relevant procedures
Manage (retain power, no trust)	Supervise (share power, build trust)
Discipline through generating external pressures for accountability	Empower by developing internal capabilities to take responsibility
Be efficient	Be effective
Quantitative Performance Indicators	Qualitative Performance Indicators
Children as Social Capital Tomorrow (objects)	Children as Individuals Today (subjects)
Create economically/ socially viable citizens	Help economically/socially dysfunctional citizens
Short-term, cost-efficient solutions	Long term investment in sustainable solutions

Table A: Comparison of Governmental and Social Workers' Objectives/Beliefs

Concluding Remarks

Social services have benefited from an increased accountability and introduction of performance indicators, but the negative affects have overshadowed the positive changes. The data analysis in this study shows that the objectives of social workers are aligned more closely with the critics of current policy. However, despite this allegiance and much effort by the proponents of alternative, creative practise, the subjective reality of the child protection social workers remains embedded within bureaucratic control. There is little evidence to suggest that the desired changes in social work can be implemented without a revision of social policy to guide social work practice.

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Article 3
At Risk of Social Exclusion:
A Study of the Socialisation Potential
of Care Leavers in the UK

Abstract

This paper examines the experiences of socially marginalized/excluded individuals in society when they re-enter the society after a period of being 'looked after'[25] by the State (by placement in either foster care or residential care homes). These individuals are referred to as 'care leavers' in the UK. This group was selected for the study because the 'socialisation' of care leavers is a major problem for the UK government. The aim of this study is to explore their psychological states, and, in turn examine the possible link between their psychological states and socialisation process after leaving care. Successful socialisation is defined here as resulting in a capacity to make personally and socially beneficial decisions and judgments. The findings suggest that being in care may have a negative impact on identity development, with care leavers exhibiting low self-esteem, stigmatisation, low trust, and low self-confidence. Negative psychological states impede socialisation and enhance the risks of care leavers becoming socially excluded.

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[25] The UK government refers to children in care as "looked after" children.

Introduction

There are approximately 60, 000 children placed in care every year. The cost of placing one child in residential care is around GBP 100,000 to 110,000 per year (Blair, 2006). Despite this considerable investment in ensuring a better future for vulnerable children and families, statistics show that the probability of care leavers choosing a life of crime and indulging in other anti-social behaviour is quite high due to their psychological states and abnormal attachment history (Newton, Litrownik & Lansverk, 2000; Fisher, Burraston & Pears, 2005; Grogan-Kaylor & Otis, 2003; Johnson-Reid & Barth, 2000; see Widom 1989a, 1989b for review of this literature). In fact, it is only a fraction of care leavers who succeed in building a life for themselves after leaving care:

"*There are approximately 61,000 children in care at any one time. They run very high risks of being unemployed, having mental health problems, becoming teen age parents. And we need to be frank, we are not really succeeding. One in ten children in care follow through GCSEs compared to 6 out of 10 for other children. Only 6% make it to higher education compared to over 30% of all children.. at any one time children in care make up about half a percent of all children but one quarter of the adult population in prison has been in children's care system at some point.*" (Blair, 2006).

The care leavers' lack of adjustment or integration into society after leaving care results in a substantial financial loss for the government. Three-quarters of the approximately 60,000 children in care are not in education, employment, or training by the age of 16-18 years. This group has been identified by agencies combating social exclusion as one of the most difficult to reach. This group is also over-represented amongst the homeless, teenage parents, and those in young offender's institution and prisons (Coles et. al., 2002). In 2002, total additional lifetime costs of this group were estimated as GBP 7 billion in resource costs and GBP 8.1 billion in public finance costs (Godfrey et.al. 2002). The situation has worsened in recent years, with the UK facing the highest inequality and child poverty levels in 40 years (Ward, 2007).

The process of social exclusion is embedded not only within the socio-economic conditions of care leavers but is also influenced by their psychological and emotional states. External situations generate emotional states that are known to influence one's social judgment and decision-making process. In fact, research has shown that emotions not only affect the decision making process, they

actually guide the process as well (Bechara, 2004; Damasio, 2000). For example, research on the relationship between affect and decision making has shown that positive affect enhances decision making capability (Isen et. al. 1998; Isen, 1993; Carnivale & Isen, 1986).

Similarly, negative affective states, such as sadness and anxiety in particular, are linked to differences in risk taking behaviour, such that sad individuals favoured high risk/high reward tasks whereas anxious individuals preferred low risk/low reward options (Raghunathan & Pham, 1999). The research evidence, therefore, suggests a link between emotional/psychological states and social behaviour. A tendency to engage in anti-social behaviour would be enhanced in individuals driven by negative affective states, increasing their risk of being socially excluded.

Out-of-Home Placement and Social Exclusion

Institutionalisation presents an alternative social order that does not provide the natural social fabric or the opportunity to construct one's identity through social interaction. The experience of being institutionalised impacts the personality of the individuals and their cognitive processes (Goffman, 1961). Though residential care and foster care placements can not be considered "total institutions" (Goffman, 1961), they do retain the control and power over the children's lives to a much larger extent than experienced by children developing in their natural environments.

Social Institutions play a role in reinforcing social exclusion as well. The Department for International Development (DfID) in the UK recognizes that, "*people are excluded by institutions and behaviour that reflect, enforce and reproduce prevailing social attitudes and values, particularly those of powerful groups in society… institutions perpetuate exclusion unofficially. Public Sector workers who reflect the prejudices of their society may institutionalise some kinds of discrimination*" (pp. 3). Recent studies on social exclusion in the UK have highlighted that the current society shows deep class divisions and highest levels of inequality over the last 40 years. The poll results showed that 89% feel they are judged by class and social mobility has remained static after ten years of Labour Government (Glover, 2007; Ward, 2007)

The salient feature of being placed under care is the invisibility of the *individual* child, similar to lack of identity of institutional inmates. The affect of institutionalisation in absence of therapeutic intervention results in a passive state of mind that has also been referred to as 'learned helplessness'

by other scholars (Freire, 1970; Dweck, 1977; Dweck & Goetz, 1978). As these individuals lack experiences of decision making early on in their lives, they are uncomfortable with the role of a decision maker in society (March, 1994). Simultaneously, DfID (2005) states that when people perceive they are being judged based on their identity, the stigmatization by society hampers their performance in achievement-oriented tasks such as education. Moreover, "*the resulting sense of powerlessness can rob people of their self-confidence and aspirations and their ability to challenge exclusion*" (pp. 4), thus reducing the productive capacity of the society on the whole and increasing poverty among affected groups.

Childhood Neglect and Anti-social Behaviour

The risk of engagement in anti-social behaviour for both samples, children in care and children growing up at home under abusive conditions, is almost the same (Fisher et. al. 2005; Johnson-Reid & Barth; 2000; see Davidson-Arad et. al., 2003 for review of this literature; Leslie et. al., 2000). Neglect in childhood has been found to be the strongest link to anti-social behaviour in adult life (Grogan-Kaylor & Otis, 2003) and neglect can occur after being removed from home as well. Children who did not show any behavioural abnormality at the time of placement in residential care developed attachment disorders and consequently other behavioural problems after being moved multiple times in care (Newton et. al., 2000).

Attachment disorders are documented as the most common reason for breakdown of placements (Chaffin et. al. 2006) and research has shown that the risk for developing attachment disorder is more or less the same at home and in residential care. Research on children raised in abusive homes shows that they suffer from impairments in their basic trust, have low self esteem, have difficulty forming and maintaining relationships and are at high risk of developing personality disorders and other psycho-pathology as adults. They are also at high risk of engaging in anti-social and criminal behaviour (Salzinger et. al., 2007; Davidson-Arad et. al., 2003).

Research on child development has consistently shown that the lack of emotional security is directly related to dysfunctional homes and that low self-confidence is the major cause of maladjustment in later childhood (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). If a child faces a single traumatic experience, the chances of the child completely recovering from the loss are almost certain. The child is still capable of forming normal, healthy relationships if the trauma or loss has been resolved

successfully. However, if there is a chain of traumatic events in the child's life with no resolution, the chances of long-term personality damage and psychosis are quite high.

The reason behind this is the fact that children develop their attachment models in childhood based on their experiences with their care-givers. If the healthy emotional development of the child is interrupted by a traumatic event, such as loss of a parent due to death or divorce, the impact of the trauma is intense for the child. However, given the right environment, the damage is not permanent. On the other hand, if there is a cycle of traumatic events that leads to perpetual stress for the child, such as a series of placements in foster homes, the damage may be irreversible. It is extremely important to help the child reach a resolution of loss or conflict, to accept it, and move on in order to secure normal relationships for the child in the future (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). Interventions that fail to take into account the attachment patterns of children and child developmental psychology ultimately fail to contribute to the well-being of children at risk (Fisher at. al., 2005).

When children are coping with stress, the chances of them becoming self-destructive are high unless they are given proper support. The diagnosis and treatment of behavioural and attachment disorders through therapeutic intervention has shown positive results (Becker-Weidman, 2008). Therefore, "*Whatever the circumstances, it makes sense to foster the child's inherent strengths and resilience, and where impairment exists, to bolster their coping strategies*" (Little, Axford & Morpeth, 2004, pp. 114). An excellent example of adaptation of this approach in real life situations is the project carried out in the underdeveloped communities of Peru, which involved enabling young people to become innovative decision makers by using creative means of multi-media based communication networks (Humphreys, Lorac & Ramella, 2001).

In this project, the young people in 15 Peruvian communities overcame their social exclusion and successfully implemented new pathways that overcame the constraints of traditional decision making by gaining control over their futures through interactive decision making. The minimum guidance provided to these networks of young people consisted of basic instructions on how to use the multi-media tools. After being given the opportunity and the arena to facilitate their communication and decision making networks, these young people managed to not only to improve their quality of life and future options but also succeeded in establishing community welfare initiatives which soon spread to other regions (Humphreys, Lorac & Ramella, 2001).

The main aim of this paper is to examine the impact of being in care on the psychological states of

care leavers who participated in this study. The premise is that the emotional/psychological state of care leavers influences their socialization process. The data obtained through participant observation in an Internet community of care leavers is analysed to explore the emotional/psychological state of care leavers shortly after leaving care (two-ten years) and to examine the impact of being looked after by the State (UK) on their well being.

Data Collection

Data was collected through participant observation in an Internet based community of care leavers for a period of 8 months. The members of this community are people who were separated from their families at a young age (between five-eleven years) and placed in state-run residential homes or foster care. They grew up under the care of the state until the age of 18 (recently increased to 21). Each member had been placed in multiple foster/residential homes due to the inability of social service in the UK to provide stable placements for children placed under their care. This failure is attributed to a lack of resources in terms of money required to secure a foster placement in the first place (prior to which the child is placed in a residential care unit), and secondly, due to the placements breaking down often (usually due to maladjustment).

The issue of multiple placements is of grave concern to the government and attempts are being made to remedy the problem (DCSF, 2007). After leaving care, the government provides some support to these young individuals. In addition, independent NGOs, sometimes run by former care leavers themselves, also step in to help (for example, A National Voice in the UK). Eventually, the care leavers are expected to find a job, a place of residence, and be able to adjust in the 'real world' after leaving care.

The research site was an Internet forum for care leavers. The forum served as a support group for care leavers and all the permanent members had some experience of being in care. There were some 'visitors' who joined the group for a short while - these were relatives of the care leavers and wanted to help them by taking the initiative first of joining the site. Membership to the group was obtained through the site manager. The researcher's research interest and contact details were provided to all participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Department of Organizational Social Psychology at LSE.

The members discussed matters related to job hunt, relationship issues, and other social processes that they were engaged in and this provided a snap shot of the world fabric through their eyes. 627 messages constitute the data for this study. The 'chat' remained fairly light and informal generally, with intermittent episodes of crisis when one of the members would share grievance about being "*bullied*" at work, relationship break-up, loss or change of job, and/or non-specific episodes of depression. Positive events were also shared and were mostly about 'a good day' at work or at home. For example, one member shared his enthusiasm at finding a job that he really appreciated.

Data Analysis

Given the highly rich and complex database, the analysis was divided into two stages. First, the entire body of text was subjected to thematic content analysis. Second, the messages in which the group members shared their life stories were selected for Narrative analysis.

Thematic Content Analysis

Random, innocuous messages were deleted (for example messages pertaining to the weather that day, cooking tips, mutual advise on activities related to housework, gardening, and pets). The remaining 152 messages were subjected to thematic content analysis. The text was coded under four categories of Stigma, Affective State, Self-Esteem, and Trust. Entire passages were dissected into 'Units of Meaning' where each unit consisted of two-three lines. All coded units are distributed among the four categories, based on *what* the person was conveying in that unit.

The operational definitions for each code are:
- Stigma: References to feeling ashamed or disrespected and/or perceptions of being made to feel different.
- Affective State: References to emotions, such as feeling sad, lonely, angry, resentful, anxious, afraid, etc.
- Self-Esteem: References to feeling inadequate, useless, self-depreciating remarks, self-blame, inability to defend oneself when needed, feeling unable, stupid, ugly, helpless, unlovable, and/or all demeaning remarks when referring to self.
- Trust: All references to trust.

As the analysis progressed, each of the categories was saturated and seemed adequate. No new themes or categories emerged during the process. The text that could not be classified under any of these categories was examined again and led to the emergence of two additional sub-categories of Decision Making and Aggression. These sub-categories comprised of off-hand remarks made while chatting on the forum and were sporadically strewn across the message threads. They were not consistent and frequent enough to be categorised into independent, additional themes.

Narrative Analysis

There was another layer to the data that could only be exposed by maintaining the totality of the narratives. Breaking down the texts and coding it in content analysis seemed inadequate and impotent in capturing the true depth of the stories, although it did help to see which themes were the most dominant ones. Narrative analysis seemed an appropriate lens to catch a glimpse of the sense-making processes and the struggles experienced by care leavers.

Burke's (1969) dramatistic pentad of Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose is adopted for analyzing the narratives. The main questions borne in mind are what was done (act), the situational aspect of the act, that is, when or where it was done (Scene), by whom it was done (Agent), which medium was used, that is, how it was done (Agency), and why it was done (Purpose) (Burke, 1969). The 'Scene' for this is analysed at two levels. Being in care is considered to be the overarching Scene similar for all Agents and at the micro-level and the environment in which each narration is currently framed is considered to be the immediate Scene. The Agents are the members whose stories are analysed here. The act is that of sharing their experiences of being in care. The virtual platform for communication provided by the Internet site gives agency to them through which their individual purpose for sharing is served. An individual analysis of purpose for each agent is conducted.

Burke addresses the relationship among the pentad in form of ratios between them. For instance, the Scene-Act ratio can be studied from the motivational perspective, that is, "*there is implicit in the quality of a scene the quality of the action that is to take place within it. This would be another way of saying that the act will be consistent with the scene*" (Burke, pp.7). Similarly, the Scene-Agent ratio helps to understand the character (dramatic, in terms of 'acts') of the Agent as influenced by the Scene. In popular poetry and prose, the scene is set before the agent is introduced and in successful writings, there is consistency between the two (for example, the character of a young girl

likened to description of spring in the same poem, or, characteristics of natives explained in terms reflecting the geographical conditions of their natural environment).

A similar consistency can be observed in real-world situations. Nation states and cultures provide a Scene to which their citizens align their acts, and consequently, the evolution of their agent-hood is similarly aligned. Where there is inconsistency between the two in real-life situations, either the agent changes the scene (depending on the perception of self-power) or the act is modified until it is consistent with the scene (Burke, 1969).

The Scene-Agent ratio is examined for each narrative, guided by the assumption that the specific scene containing the act plays a crucial role in understanding the act and the implicit purpose for each narrator (agent). This assumption is based on the field observation that the invisibility provided by the Internet forum seemed to be the key factor behind their decision to share. Several attempts had been made to contact care leavers prior to and during the membership of this community in face-to-face situations but access was not given, with exception of one care leaver who agreed to meet in person (she was not a member of this Internet forum , thus in Burke's terms, influenced by a different 'Scene').

This analysis also takes into consideration the additional aspect that these narratives are not just life-stories, but attempts by people who experienced various kinds of serious abuse to make sense of their lives (Weick, 1979, 1995). Each story is deeply disturbing and intense. It is not easy to talk about life's experiences and tell a story about oneself (Reissman, 1993). It is especially hard for victims of abuse to talk about their experiences. Guilt is the most common feeling expressed by victims of sexual abuse even when they are made aware it was not their fault. In other cases, the child tries to protect the family and believes that maintaining silence is the only way to do so (Staller, K.M. & Nelson-Gardell, D.; 2005).

In instances where social networks exist in form of help-lines or call centres, victims of abuse are reluctant to call in due to reasons such as guilt, shame, fear, and ignorance about the existence of protective agencies. When they do manage to overcome their barriers and call, they are given little support (Crisma, M. et al, 2004). All the narratives studied in this study are stories that the authors have never shared before. Such first-person narratives serve the additional purpose of empowering the authors and help them form a coherent account of their experiences (Adame & Hornstein, 2006).

Results - Thematic Content Analysis

The following themes emerged in accordance with the operational codes mentioned above:

- Stigma
- Affective State
- Self-Esteem
- Trust

Stigma

Approximately 85% of the care leavers narrated incidents where they were made to feel "*inferior*", felt a "*sense of shame*", and felt "*looked down upon*" by "*teachers*", other adults, and peers. One member in the sample posted a message addressing explicitly the sense of shame that is attached to being a care leaver. The post started a thread of conversation where the rest of the group members narrated incidents of when they felt ashamed of their status of a "*child in care*" or living in foster care.

An interesting additional sub-theme that emerged was that some of the members denied feeling ashamed of their status and vehemently stressed upon the fact that "*there is nothing to be ashamed about!*", but then proceeded to narrate events centered around how the teachers and other care givers could have treated them with more respect and understanding rather than "*being judgmental*" and "*nasty*". One member wrote, "*Just dropped by to see if any of my fellow "inmates" were here..*". Feelings of being incarcerated were expressed off and on by the group members. Being placed in care was viewed as a "*punishment*" for either their parents' acts or their own "*inability*" to "*settle down*". For example, another member wrote, "*I could never settle down.. it wasn't their fault really.. *"

Affective State

Three negative emotions were expressed by the group members: anger, resentment, and fear. All of the care leavers expressed extreme anger and resentment. For some, it was directed against their birth parents, mostly at their mothers for "*abandoning*" them, and for others it was targeted against the social services in general and/or their foster care-givers. The most intense emotions were expressed when the anger was against their birth mother. "*I will never forgive her,*" said one of the members and another one wrote a hate-poem for the mother. Some care leavers had re-established

contact with their mothers after leaving care but felt a lack of connection with them, as expressed by one member, "*I don't trust my mother.. there is too much emotional blackmail still involved*".

The anger against social services was mainly due to "*lack of heart*" shown by the social workers who had worked on their cases. They felt the social workers were "*cold and apathetic*" and "*it is just another job for them.. they don't care about us really*". There was general resentment against the system for putting them through multiple placements and separating siblings.

A member wrote, "*we had siblings separated, plonked in HOMES, convents, foster care etc etc. what choice what sense of self worth.. told lies never consulted about anything always THEY made the decisions and we were the creatures of circumstance.. when we see our records it often reveals that different people who did not know us made the decisions that affected our lives*".

Each care leaver had experienced at least 10 different foster placements between the time they were placed under the state care and until they left care (18 years for this sample). The maximum number of placements was "*36 foster homes in 7 years*". One of the members wrote "*I wonder how I would have been if I haven't been in care all those years.. I feel like I have lost 10 years of my life*" and another one said "*it's not surprising that I find it hard to trust people.. trust becomes a redundant concept.. why get to know these people when you know you will be moving again in 6 months.. you withdraw and don't really care*".

Except five group members, no one recalled any stable relationship with adults or peers. These five care leavers narrated stories about being "*lucky enough to find my foster mom*" and *"I remember that social worker, she was really nice.. we kept in touch for a while*" or "*I realised later on how hard it was for my Dad to never let us go and visit us every weekend.. he kept us together even when we were placed in different homes*". There was an omnipresent fear, expressed by all the members, of losing their loved ones, being abandoned and/or being hated/bullied or otherwise made to feel unwanted and "*discarded*".

Self-esteem

All the care leavers expressed feeling "*unwanted*" and "*unloved*". A word frequency count revealed that "*unwanted*" and "*lonely*" were the two words mentioned most frequently (n=145), followed by "*empathize*" (n=130). "*Satisfaction*" was the least frequent, used only once. Some of the care leavers had jobs that they liked and had partners and families. They expressed feeling "*stable*" and

"*just moving on.. getting on with their lives*". They referred to themselves as "*survivors*" of abuse and "*strong*" people who had "*broken the cycle of abuse*", as expressed by one of the care leavers, "*My mother was abused and she abused me but I broken the cycle. My children will never know that kind of misery*". However, their narratives bore a sharp contrast between expressing strength and pride as a survivor and feeling "*worthless*" at the same time.

The narrators reminisced about their time in care and said "*No one liked me enough I guess (to adopt).. and I don't blame them .. LOL*". Another member posted *"my memories of this time (in care) are of feeling lonely, unloved and unwanted"*. Some of the care leavers who had relatively better experiences of foster care blamed themselves for not "*fitting in*" and expressed guilt, as one of the members wrote, "*they were not bad really.. but didn't understand how badly damaged I was.. they wanted to turn me into them.. I rebelled, did not do anything terrible as such but left home when I turned 18.. I don't talk to them anymore.. I guess I am a bitch*".

Five members shared memories of positive experiences in foster care with their caregivers. These members showed greater sympathy for foster carers and a tendency for self-blame when foster placements broke down. They viewed themselves as "*difficult*" or "*rebellious*". Sad statements about lack of education and feelings of inadequacy were disclosed in a jovial fashion. For example, "*I was never much at adding up or spelling.. was always too thick in the head I guess.. lol[26]!*" and "*I enjoy classical music and many other things.. and can't add up or do anything smart .. LOL!*"

One care leaver who wrote about having moved on in life and having found "*peace*" in her partner and children added a post later saying, "*I found that after living in homes I wasn't able to live on my own.. although I had kids I found it very difficult to cope with just my own company after they went to bed*". Women who had married or were in long term relationships expressed surprise at "*being wanted*". One of them said, "*I could not believe for the longest time he actually wanted to be with me!*". Another one expressed, "*For the longest time I was afraid he would see the real ugly me.. what I truly am and leave*". Men expressed feelings of inadequacy in their careers and did not comment on relationships at all. All care leavers agreed that they had low self-esteem and self-confidence. One of the care leavers said, "*I wonder if I would have made the mistakes that I did if I liked me more.. I could never stand up for myself back then! Even now I get so angry when I let my boss bully me.. I still can not speak up for myself*".

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[26] Abbreviation for "laughing out loud" in Internet lingo.

Trust

"*You learn early on that there is no one you can trust*" wrote one of the group members. This post initiated a thread of conversation on trust. Some members (n=6) disagreed and said that they had managed to form trusting relationships in their lives, despite their wariness. For example, one of the members wrote, "*I did not trust men.. I expected my man to beat me, bully me.. as I had been used to.. but I struck gold*". The expectation to be abused confirms awareness of trust issues even when the narrator is emphasizing how she has changed. Another message from the same member read "*sometimes I still get afraid but I just have to hold on..*". Most of the members had been moved multiple times and one of them said, "*whom can you trust? And what's the point anyways when everything would change in a few months*".

Another one wrote, "*moving many times can make us feel unstable and anxious.. I never really formed any relationships with any of my foster parents*". Following the thread of the conversation, all the members agreed that they felt like "*outsiders*" when placed in a foster home. One of them explained, "*it's like when you have a real family, you mess up and you get punished.. it all stays in the family. But if you are in foster care, no matter how much you may like your foster parents, you mess up you know there is somebody from outside (social worker) who'll come in and ask you questions.. it would be someone you have never seen before and they will decide how you should be punished. So how do you feel like a family when you know you'll never belong.. or stay long enough*"

As mentioned earlier, there was some text that could not be coded under any of the themes mentioned above. This text could be categorised under the following additional sub-themes:

- Decision making: References were made to decisions made by the group members, mostly regarding their choice of partner. Personal decisions were viewed as most important and challenging by the group members and short discussions arose sporadically. One of the members wrote in conclusion to a discussion, "*I wish I had made better decisions.. wiser ones.. but I don't know how.. I get so confused and there is nobody telling you what to do anymore*". Another member wrote, "*I think if I was less emotional, I could make better decisions*"

- Aggression: "*the bastards (social workers) won't win*" wrote one of the group members in conclusion to her message that day about having moved after leaving care and managing to live a successful life. Similar strong comments were sometimes posted by some members, for example, "*social workers are parasites.. sick perverts who derive pleasure out of making people weaker than them suffer*". Most of the group members made statements like "*I will never let this*

happen to my kid" and "*No more bullying, I can stand up for myself now!*". They unanimously referred to themselves and to each other as "*survivors*" and explicitly complimented each other on their (and own) strength and resilience. These references were in sharp contrast to feelings of inadequacy and low self esteem categorised under the previous themes.

Narrative Analysis

Ellen

Ellen began her narrative by establishing her identity as ,"*I am 26 years old, mother to my 4 year old daughter and live with my partner*" (line 1, opening remark). She then proceeded to narrate that she had been placed in 35 different foster placements during her seven years in care (line 2, 3; Stanza 1). She does not state the reasons why she was placed in care but abruptly starts talking about her son by saying, "*he will never know what it's like to be abused.. I have broken the cycle of abuse*" (line 4, 5; Stanza 1). Then comes the revelation that, "*my mother was abused and she then abused me*" (line 6; Stanza 1). Ellen repeats her earlier assertion, "*my son will never know that kind of misery*"(line 7; Stanza 1). She then talks about her foster parents and wishes that, "*things could be different*" (line 8,9 and 10; Stanza 1).

She says she is sad because she does not keep in touch with them after leaving as soon as she was 18 (Line 11, 12; Stanza 1). The reasons for leaving were that they "*tried to turn me into them.. they thought love would make everything alright.. they did not realize how badly damaged I was*"(Line 13, Stanza 1). After expressing guilt for not keeping in touch with her foster parents (line 14, 15; stanza 1), Ellen says "*but I feel I have the right to move on with my life*" (Line 16, end of stanza). The narrative abruptly ends with a question "*Is this too much information?*" (line 1, Stanza 2) and immediately the statement, "*I don't think so. I could have said a lot more*" (Line 2; stanza 2; end of message).

Ellen does not talk about how she felt during her time in care, except for the disclosure about being abused by her mother in her childhood. The impact of this abuse on her is not stated explicitly. Instead, her determination to never let her child suffer comes across as the strongest part of the narrative. She indirectly refers to herself as being "*badly damaged*" but does not explain or elaborate how it actually *felt*. She expresses anger at her foster parents for not understanding her needs, for thinking that "*love would make everything alright*". She is angry that they tried to make

her turn into them. She leaves home as soon as she is legally allowed to do so and has distanced herself from her foster parents. Ellen expresses guilt for being "*ungrateful*" for their love. But she feels that she has a right to live her own life. What she doesn't say explicitly is that she is unhappy about the fact that she had to distance herself from them in order to live *her* life, to feel free to be herself and not confirm to their idea of how she ought to be.

Ellen blames herself that she could not bond with her foster parents, despite their love for her. She says they didn't realize how badly damaged she was, taking the blame on herself, on her being "*damaged*" for the lack of understanding from them. At the same time, she acknowledges that they could not understand her needs and give her the help she needed. Either ways, Ellen is "*damaged*" and she is determined never to let it happen to her child. It's interesting that Ellen begins her story by establishing her identity *now* – as an independent young woman, a mother, and a partner. The rest of the story is a concise narration of her life's experiences, presented almost without emotions. The only emotions expressed are those directed at other people - that of guilt, anger and grudging love for her foster parents and fierce protectiveness for her child.

The bone of contention between Ellen and her foster parents seems to be their inability to make her feel loved *for who she was*. It seems Ellen is still tormented by her inability to bond with her foster parents and she tries to make sense of it here in this narrative. She ends her story by posing a question whether this was too much information. It seems she is still judging herself by an externally set criterion of what would be the "*right*" amount of information. But the narrative does not end there as she answers the question herself, implicitly asserting her opinion on the matter, that she could have said a lot more. The question is not directed at anyone in general and is more like an internal mechanism, a self-imposed check. The fact that she negates it, and ends with an assertive note stressing the contrary, seems to be representative of her struggle to overcome constraints externally imposed on her and eventually establishing her Identity as an independent young woman, a mother, and a partner.

Applying Burke's pentad to Ellen's narrative, the emergent structure is:

Act

Writing her experiences of being in care on an Internet message-board

Scene

Interaction among members of the virtual community

Agent

An assertive young woman who grew up in state care (multiple foster homes)

Agency

Internet forum for care leavers (security through anonymity and invisibility)

Purpose

Conveying survivor status, emphasizing normalcy and independence of current life

Bill

Bill's message starts with, "*umm.. is this for your studies*" (line 1, Stanza 1), followed by, "*I never really got an education, always felt so thick and stupid*" (line 2, Stanza 1). These were the first two opening lines of Bill's story. The next stanza begins with "*I know I was neither but because of the stigma believed it*" (Line 1, Stanza 2). And "*so I gave up trying (for education), it was hard enough to survive without a family*" (line 2, stanza 2). There is a break in the narrative here and Bill starts another stanza, "*Decisions were made for us, we were tossed here and there like a worthless piece of scum*" (line 1, stanza 3).

The next stanza refers to an earlier message posted that day by me, stating the desire to get to know the group members better. Bill responds to that message in the following lines of Stanza 4, "*I could go on for hours.. you say you know how people feel what happened to them but it seems you don't want us to talk about it because you KNOW.. come on ..you wanted us to talk about our feelings but I don't think you really want to know how we as human beings feel.*" There is a break in narrative here and a new stanza begins:

"*I have much anger and bitterness over what happened to me. I cannot change it-- I think I turned into a fairly decent person but if you are researching us surely you need to try to have a sense of*

understanding. (Lines 1,2; Stanza 5)

If our feelings or reactions offend you or you are not interested because you think you already KNOW. (line 1)

How do you know? (line 2)

How can you possibly know what is inside each of us. (line 3)

Is it too much for you to cope with when the reality of it is glimpsed. (line 4)

I think it probably is. nothing is black or white at all is it? (line 5)

circumstances often hinder what we would have liked to do. same for many of us not just careleavers. (line 6)

every member here is a real person." (line 7)

Bill expresses his lack of education and the reasons for it in Stanzas 1 and 2. He is angry about being made to feel "*thick and stupid*" at the time and sees that as the main reason why he gave up on education. In retrospect, he believes that it was the stigmatization that made him give up. He does not talk explicitly about the impact of that stigmatization, but goes on to say "*it was hard enough to survive without a family*". This utterance indicates that the impact was strong enough for Bill to succumb and "*give up*" on attempts to get educated because in essence, he gave up on his intelligence and his ability to achieve. Bill's anger seems rooted in this sense of injustice done to him by making him lose faith in his abilities at a time when he was most vulnerable and alone. Stanza 3 reflects this anger at being made to feel like a "*worthless piece of scum*".

Stanza 4 reflects anger towards the researcher. The researcher had written in a previous message that, "*I can only imagine how difficult it is to open-up and share the experiences*" and Bill responds to that statement in this message. He says, "*you say you know how people feel what happened to them but it seems you don't want us to talk about it*". The anger verbalised here seems to be directed against the claim of "*outsiders*" to *know* what care leavers actually go through. Bill reacts to this claim, emphasizing that it is actually impossible to know what it feels like unless you have lived

through the experience yourself. It seems that this claim of 'knowing' by outsiders (in attempts to convey understanding and sympathy) is interpreted as 'we don't need to hear your version, we already know', and hence implicitly dismissive. It seems Bill is reacting strongly against this implicit *dismissal* of his (and other care leavers') construction of their lives and experiences. Bill's anger vented in stanza 4 ties in with the preceding stanza where he explicitly verbalizes feelings of being dismissed and excluded from having a say in his own life's decisions.

In stanza 4, assumption is made that "*I don't think you really want to know how we as human beings feel*". On one hand, this statement could be construed as suspicion of the researcher's motives as well as reflecting a lack of faith in the researcher's intentions to try and empathize with the group members. On the other hand, given Bill's willingness to share his beliefs and experiences in his threads of communication independent of this monologue, it seems to be a further reaction against exclusion and neglect of taking *his* perspective into account instead of an attack on the researcher. Bill had been one of the most trusting and involved members of the group and had expressed much interest in the current research in prior messages.

However, he did exhibit distrust initially and fluctuated between intense messages of disclosure (this one being the longest and most expressive), and complete withdrawal from group discussions. Therefore, it seems that "*you*" in this Stanza is not specifically meant for the researcher but is a general "*you*", representative of all people claiming to understand the plight of care leavers but not actually "*listening*" to them. Bill seems to be reacting against the exclusion and dismissal that he has experienced throughout his life in care, where assumptions are made on one's behalf and individual autonomy is denied.

The next stanza begins with expression of anger and bitterness. Bill explicitly acknowledges it: "*I have much anger and bitterness over what happened to me*", but defends it with, "*I can not change it - I think I turned into a fairly decent person*". Bill seems to be asserting his identity here as a "*fairly decent person*". He has managed to step away from believing himself to be "*thick and stupid*" and with the new identity has come the painful realisation of the injustices done to him, resulting in this anger and bitterness.

There is a disconnection between stanza 5 and the lines that follow. Line 1 starts abruptly, with the assumption that either the researcher (explicitly) and the society at large (implicit, generalised "you") is "*offended*" by "*our*" (care leavers) "*feelings or reaction*" or is not interested in them.

The first part of line 1 starts with "*if*" but ends abruptly with no consequence explicitly stated, *"If our feelings or reactions offend you or you are not interested because you think you already KNOW."* The tone of the message is threatening, but consequences are not verbalised, reflecting the powerlessness that Bill has experienced in care. He is angry and reacting against the apathy that he has experienced but withholds direct expressions of hostility or aggression. Instead, the statement abruptly ends in mid-syntax and is followed by three questions:

"*How do you know?* (line 2)

how can you possibly know what is inside each of us. (line 3)

is it too much for you to cope with when the reality of it is glimpsed. (line 4)"

The first question (line 2) ends with an appropriate question mark at the end, unlike lines 3 and 4, which follow the syntax of a question but end with a full-stop instead of a question mark. The first question is the only direct aggressive remark made by Bill and is an explicit expression of his anger against assumptions made about experiences of being in care. Lines 3 and 4 are rhetorical questions, the answers to which Bill already seems to have, as expressed in Line 5, "*I think it probably is*".

It seems as if Bill is again expressing his opinion of a more general "*you*", of people who have not been in care and venting his frustration at their lack of understanding and even the desire to understand the subjective reality of the care leavers because "*is it too much for you to cope with when the reality of it is glimpsed*". Though the sentence is posed as a question, it comes across as a statement of what Bill already believes and a statement that requires no external validation. Even though it is supposedly a question, giving the implicit impression that an answer is being sought and could be an input for the person asking the question, it comes across as a declaration, a statement that needs no conformation from the outside world. Bill seems to believe that outsiders, even researchers claiming to be interested in knowing the reality of the group, are grossly ill-equipped to do so because of their ignorance, apathy, and arrogance ("*you think you already KNOW*").

Bill indirectly expresses the extent of his pain and suffering in his statement/question, "*is it too much for you to cope with when the reality of it is glimpsed*". The absence of the question mark emphasizes the resignation, the sadness of believing that people might choose to ignore his pain because it is too much to cope with.

Line 4, "*is it too much for you to cope with when the reality of it is glimpsed*", is posed as a

question, but again of a rhetorical nature. It almost mocks the researcher and the general "*you*" for their discomfort when faced with "*real*" knowledge of suffering. At the same time, it is an assertion that things are more complex than usually assumed, "*nothing is black or white at all is it?*" This question is followed by the statement, "*circumstances often hinder what we would have liked to do*". Bill seems to be justifying not having done "*what we (he) would have liked to do*". Bill had initiated this message with reflections on why he could not educate himself.

It seems he is making peace with the fact that tormented him, his lack of education, as he is nearing the end of his story. The following statement continues in the same line (6), "*same for many of us not just care-leavers*". Bill mentioned the stigma of being in care at the beginning of this message. It seems that he is concluding his message with an explicit verbalization and assertion that care leavers are not the only ones prone to succumbing to mitigating circumstances. Essentially, Bill is stepping away from the stigma that he has felt in the past, asserting that care-leavers are not lesser human beings, an assertion that is verbalised in the concluding line of his message, "*every member here is a real person*".

Bill's message began with implicit anger and bitterness that he makes explicit as the narrative proceeds. After venting, Bill makes peace with his pain and ends his message emphasizing that every member of the group is a "*real person*". This last statement summarizes Bill's experience of being in care, where he felt like a "*worthless piece of scum*", and his struggle to establish his identity and become a real person. The dehumanizing experience is over for him and through this narrative, it seems Bill asserted his new found identity and vented his anger against the care system as well as the society at large, for their apathy, ignorance, and dismissal of Bill's individuality.

Applying Burke's pentad to Bill's narrative, the emergent structure is:

Act

Writing about his experiences of growing up in care

Scene

Interaction among members of a virtual community

Agent

An angry, bitter man who grew up in multiple foster homes

Agency

Internet forum for care leavers (security through anonymity and invisibility)

Purpose

Expressing (venting) anger and bitterness over the neglect and apparent lack of concern for the psychological well-being of care leavers

Anna

The analysis of Anna's story is slightly different from Ellen and Bill's because instead of writing her life story, Anna narrated it to me. She is the only care-leaver whom I could meet in person. She does not belong to the community I was participating in. Anna is 23 years old and recently left care. The meeting took place at a small café in a remote part of London. Anna had been waiting for me when I reached, but not for a long time she assured me. As we sat down to talk, I noticed Anna quickly sweep a glance over me. She was silent after we introduced ourselves and just sat their silently watching me. I waited in silence, too, maintaining eye contact all the time while I arranged my notebook.

Anna's face froze when I placed my tape-recorder at the table. I asked her it made her uncomfortable. "*well.. no.. well.. I guess you need it.. well, if you really can't do without it..*" I promised that her identity would not be revealed and she did not have to say anything that she did not feel comfortable with. She visibly relaxed and I asked her to talk about anything she would like to share.

Anna maintained her silence, I prompted her with a question, "*how was it like to be in care?*" She

said "*I was moved 60 times at least.. I think that is the worst thing about being in care.. the multiple placements.. you never really get to feel like a real family*". Anna then told me about her last foster placement that was finally permanent until she left care. She referred to her foster mother fondly and said, "*I was lucky I eventually landed with her*". As we chatted, Anna gradually became more relaxed and now sat more comfortably in her chair. She thought carefully before speaking and held my gaze longer than she did initially.

At one point, I made a joke that made her laugh. She stopped abruptly in mid-laughter, looked straight at me and said, "*so now you think you have broken the ice.. won my trust..*". She did not laugh after that. Instead, she started talking seriously about what it feels like to be in a foster placement that you know is not going to last. "*When you are at home with your birth parents, you might mess up real bad.. but you know it's your parents who'll be pissed off at you .. punish you for what you've done.. when you are in a foster home and the 10th or the 11th that you've been put in, you mess up you know there will be a stranger walking in the door the next day making threats and your side of the story won't be heard.. it will be the people looking after you who will be heard by the social worker because they need them to be ok with the placement.. otherwise it is the social worker's headache to find another placement.. so they threaten you..*"

At this point, Anna started drawing a picture on her notebook that she had brought with her (See Figure 1 on the next page). She drew a little box with a small figure in it and another little figure outside the box, at the corner of the page. She looked up and said, "*this is the Care System (the box) and you are placed here..*". Anna wrote 'SS' (social services) and 'Police' outside the box with a line stretched between the Police and SS, and the figure inside the box, "*this is how you feel when they call a social worker to punish you.. you have to stay in the box, you can't go outside. It is a stranger who will decide what happens to you.. sometimes, the police is called in*". She drew another figure at the corner of the page, behind a shield and explained, "*this is you with your family. Even if you have a bad episode, it will all stay in the family.. there is trust and a feeling of belongingness.. not fear of threats and strangers walking in the door...you are free..*". As she said these words aloud, I saw Anna's face get tense again and she leaned forward in her chair.
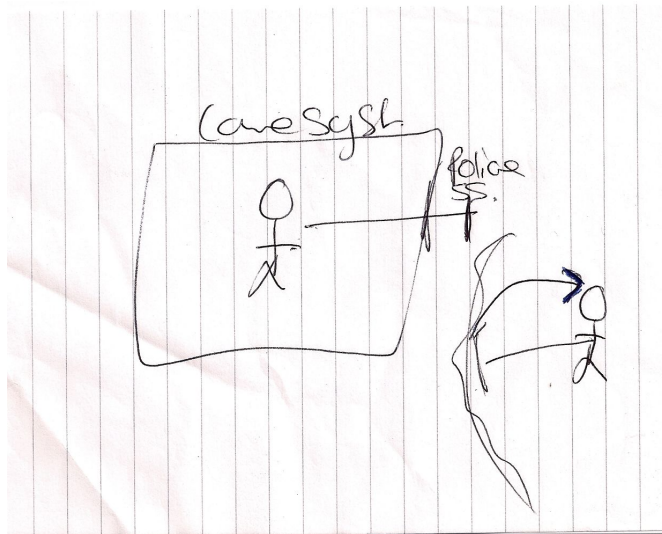
Figure 1: Anna's sketch

Anna sat in silence. She did not say she wanted to leave but she would not look at me any more. She withdrew completely and did not respond to any of my attempts to engage her again. I thanked Anna, that's when she realised I did not intend to push her into talking. She immediately smiled, with a puzzled look in her eyes, as if she half expected me to try questioning her again. When we shook hands, she looked at me straight and said, "*it was nice meeting you.. good luck with your research*". She said she would mail me, keep in touch. I never heard from her again and she did not reply to any of my mails subsequent to the meeting.

Anna's behaviour pattern was similar to the pattern of engagement that I experienced at the Internet forum. The members of the forum had initially welcomed me warmly into the community. My identity as a researcher was known to them but it did not seem to be a threat. After initial months of 'small talk', I started posting messages encouraging discussions of experiences of being in care. This is when the atmosphere changed. Some members welcomed the idea and narrated their life-stories in detail. Others went silent and a couple of members posted very negative, aggressive messages, calling me "*insensitive, selfish, and ignorant*". I responded to each message with calm, neutral replies, addressing the main cause of the attacks, which was the lack of trust. I provided them with complete information about my research, affiliations, and contact details. It did not matter. Except for two members who continued to post messages for me, all the other members boycotted me. I had been ostracised and everything I said was interpreted negatively.

During the period of eight months as a member of the group, I experienced being completely trusted, then suspected, and eventually rejected. This process was almost independent of my messages. After the suspicion started, everything I said was negatively interpreted or ignored. Anna exhibited similar behaviour. She trusted me initially but as soon as she realised she had let her guards down, she reinforced them immediately and permanently.

Applying Burke's pentad to Anna's narrative, the emergent structure is:

Act

Verbalization of experiences of being in care

Scene

Interview at a local café in London

Agent

A cautious, ambivalent young woman who grew up in multiple foster homes

Agency

Engaging in face-to-face interaction with a researcher (visible medium)

Purpose

Help the researcher understand the psychological processes that ensue placement in care

Attempt to overcome distrust of strangers

Discussion - Scene-Agent Ratio

The Scene-Agent ratio is selected for deeper investigation of the narratives because the aim of this study is to examine the influence of being in care on the psychological states of care leavers, that is, the overarching Scene of being in care and its relationship with the Agent. The Scene is the same for Ellen, Bill, and Anna when considered holistically, in terms of being in care and experiencing multiple foster placements. At the micro level, Ellen and Bill share the Internet forum as the common Scene within which they commit their Act. Anna's Scene is different in terms of the nature of medium chosen by her to narrate her story. The overall purpose can be considered similar as well, in terms of its cathartic nature and the desire of the narrators to help the researcher understand the

'reality' of being in care. However, individual purpose emerges to be different for each of them.

Burke stressed that it's not just the Scene that influences the character of the Agents, but Agents sometimes choose the Scene with which they feel most consistent (Burke, 1969). Both Ellen and Bill chose the Internet forum as their Agency. Ellen seems motivated by the desire to establish her victory over an abusive history. She comes forward with the identity of a survivor, still troubled by some memories, but emphatically asserting, "*I have broken the cycle of abuse*". However, there seems to an inherent paradox wherein Ellen is emphasizing her new identity while still concealing it.

The Scene is an Internet forum where members are invisible. The contradictory forces of trying to establish one's Self explicitly (visibly), while choosing a medium that guarantees invisibility, seem delicately balanced in the Scene-Agent ratio of Ellen's narrative. Viewing the identity itself as a narrative that we formulate through our own and other's statements about us, Ellen's identity can be drawn from her autobiographical narrative (Czarniawska, 1997). Reflections of the paradox that is embedded within the Scene-Agent ratio can be seen in Ellen's personality in the form of conflicting emotions. Her narrative represents a picture of a woman still struggling to overcome her traumatic past, despite strong claims of already having overcome it.

Bill's purpose was to vent and to stress the neglect of acknowledging identity and individuality of children/young people in care and giving them the opportunity to be involved in decisions about their lives. His anger and resentment against the state (and all the "others") for destroying his self-confidence is explicitly expressed throughout his narrative. However, there is a paradox similar to that embedded in Ellen's Act. Despite Bill's strength of conviction in his beliefs and strong protest against not being considered a "real person", he chooses a medium (Agency) that guarantees lack of identity and individuality. His narrative paints a picture of a man deeply tormented by his experiences of being in care and struggling to establish his self-respect and confidence.

The present Scene for Anna is different from Bill and Ellen. Anna chose to meet me in person. Her multiple foster home placements and their impact on the psyche of children in care came across as the main concern that Anna wanted to convey. She expressed her own difficulties in trusting people and views it as the aftermath of multiple placements. There is a greater consistency in Scene-Agent ratio in Anna's narrative. She verbalizes that she has had difficulty trusting strangers but also recounts her last and final foster placement fondly. Both elements of that 'Scene' are reflected in the

Agent, when she displays both elements in her act. She agrees to meet me in person, is willing to share her experiences openly, and then retreats during the process. Anna's Act represents movement between positions of trust and distrust with a stranger (me), actions that are coherent with the story she narrates about herself.

All three felt excluded from decisions regarding their lives and general wellbeing. Ellen was not included by her foster parents when trying to help her. Bill experienced stigmatization from teachers and foster carers. Anna shared a close bond with her last foster mother but had experienced constant exclusion in her earlier placements. She did not feel included in the 'family circle' and felt judged by external authorities. All the care leavers expressed anger and resentment at not being consulted about and included in the decisions made for them by others.

Assumptions about what was in their best interest and about how to help them best seem to be the guidance followed by external agents responsible for their welfare. These assumptions are challenged by the care leavers and they express much trauma because of the neglect of taking *their* perspectives into account, rather than relying on objective information about them. The process of intervention is experienced as another form of oppression, where the individuality of the care leavers is compromised. Each of them painfully recounts feelings of isolation but expresses them differently (with anger, resentment or bitterness, or an assertion of strength and pride at being a *"survivor"*). However, isolation remains the common, constant feature in their life-stories.

Concluding remarks

The results of content analysis, experience of the participant observation, and narrative analysis indicate that care leavers have low self-esteem, exhibit negative emotional states (such as anger, bitterness, frustration, resentment, regret, and suspicion), have low inter-personal trust, and exhibit symptoms of negative psychological/emotional states. As these children were already in the socially excluded category at the time of placement in care due to their mitigating circumstance, the link between their current psychological states and placement cannot be drawn firmly. However, the fact that their experience of being in care failed to address these problems (if they existed at the time of placement), suggests that the practice of state intervention (that is, the way in which it is carried out) has an additional adverse effect on vulnerable children.

The existing paradox between the options of removing children from their homes versus leaving them at home is reinforced. That is, the usefulness of intervention remains doubtful and leaving the children at home does not appear to provide a better solution either, unless practice improves radically. If these children are already traumatized at the time of state intervention, instead of resolution of those traumas, this study suggests that being in residential care does not guarantee that the wellbeing of these children will be prioritized. To the contrary, the time spent being 'looked after' by the state held its own series of traumas. As mentioned earlier, children can recover from a single trauma and be socially adept but a series or unresolved traumas is correlated to psychosis and behavioural problems in later life (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999).

An additional observation is that the experience of a positive and stable relationship with an adult care giver seems to influence the *degree* of exclusion and self-isolation in life after care. Anna had positive experiences in her last foster placement, whereas Bill and Ellen did not narrate any positive interaction with their foster carers. Though all three of them have the same Act and shared the overarching Purpose, their choice of Agency seemed to recreate the Scene that they individually feel most comfortable within. For example, where Ellen and Bill prefer staying invisible even when campaigning for greater visibility of care leavers, Anna steps into the spotlight, albeit sporadically, reflecting the pattern of engagement that she experienced in foster placements. She was "*seen*" by her last foster mother, with whom she shared a deep, healing bond. This experience seems to be the one that makes Anna more comfortable being seen than Ellen and Bill.

These findings underline the fact that it is through the channels of social communication and interactions that the sense of Self develops. Mead (1982) theorised that, "*the individual mind can exist only in relation to other minds with shared meanings*" (pp. 5). As we enact different roles, we become aware of "*the generalised other*" (Mead, 1934) and learn the norms of acceptable behaviour, or "*appropriateness*" of acting out certain roles, supporting the claim that we learn by imitation and comparison (Vygotsky, 1978 March, 1994).

A reflection of this process is found in the research evidence that relationship with peers from 'normal' families has a strong mediating influence on adolescents prone to anti-social behaviour. Children and adolescents at risk of delinquency refrained from engaging in anti-social behaviour where they had friends who did not fall within the 'at risk' category (Salzinger, et.al., 2007). Evidence suggests that the isolation of care leavers impedes their socialization process and this isolation cannot be overcome in absence of positive, stable relationships with at least one care giver

and/or with peers.

Healthy social relationships with care givers and peers help in the resolution of identity and self-development issues. Unresolved identity issues adversely affect social judgment and decision making capacity. Unless these issues are resolved and a strong sense of self emerges to dissipate the consequent role confusion, the individual is unable to view him/herself as a productive member of society. The resultant impact of development in isolation is a high risk of social exclusion (Engler, 2006).

Freire (1973) refers to the process of social interaction and engagement as integrating into the society and views it as the essence of being human and being a Subject rather than a passive Object. Integration is dependent upon the subject's capability to make choices and intervene in the given reality, with the power to change it. It is the capacity to make decisions that makes us human and to deny people the right to make decisions is to 'dehumanise' them (Freire, 1970). Thus, along with healthy social interaction, experiencing the process of making decisions, either 'good' or 'bad', is also crucial for development. Where such experiences are lacking, the individuals fail to develop the cognitive and social skills required for successful integration into society.

Treatment of disorganised attachment patterns and unresolved traumas of childhood is a prerequisite to enabling socially excluded minorities to engage in socialization processes and develop socially functional judgment and decision making skills. However, this study suggests that despite state intervention and investment, the traumatic experiences of feeling socially excluded are left unaddressed and unresolved within the psychological states of care leavers. In some cases, the trauma may even be increased due to multiple placements and a lifetime of neglect, which can generate further stigmatization. In absence of therapeutic inclination in practice, state interventions to combat social exclusion can lead to the creation of social exclusion, rather than its mitigation.

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Article 4
Equal Participation of Unequal Groups via the Internet: Communication Pattern of Social Workers and Service Users

Abstract

This study examines the communication pattern between social workers and service users in a virtual setting. These groups are socially excluded and psychologically distant from each other. The role of the media in generating stereotypes that mitigate communication is examined. This study uses the Internet as the medium of communication to observe effects of lean medium of communication on interaction patterns of socially excluded groups. This study reveals to what extent participation can be achieved between two groups of unequal power in the UK (social workers and the people they provide these services to, that is., service users) when interacting in a virtual setting. Findings show that the Internet provides greater freedom of speech to socially excluded groups but power differentials observed in real-life setting remain unaltered. The potential of negotiation strategies to overcome barriers to communication and initiating processes for social change are discussed.

Introduction

Child protection social work is a challenging task, especially in countries like the UK that have an endemic problem of social inequality and child poverty (Pickett & Wilkinson, 2008). Research on decision making in child protection cases has shown that after direct risk of harm to the child, non-cooperative parents are the main factor influencing social workers' decisions to remove the child from home (Dalgleish & Drew, 1989). The inability of service users[27] to engage effectively with the social workers is, therefore, a major problem for both, the service users as well as the social workers.

For service users, the consequences may be as severe as losing one's child to the state. For social workers, the difficulty to engage service users effectively adversely affects their performance (see Article two in this research). Social workers find the hostility of service users to be one of the major challenges of their job (paper under review) and lack of implementation of participatory processes (Sanders & Mace, 2006; Hall, 2007).

Media and Creation of Social Distance

Media coverage of issues related to child protection in the UK is extensive and has led to major policy changes in the past. For example, in 2003, the case of a young girl who died while under state care was widely discussed in the media. Pictures of the severely abused girl were printed in newspapers and the details of her gruesome death were recounted for many days. The summary of the case and the changes in child protection legislation in the UK after the media's sensational and relentless reporting of the case are summarised on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victoria_Climbi%C3%A9. The timeline for the case and legislative changes can be found online as well (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/2062590.stm).

However, among some child protection social workers, the media is not seen as the main driver for legislative changes. Instead, some social workers interviewed as part of this research claimed that the media acted as a governmental agent rather than as its critic. These professionals suspect that the government was planning to introduce controversial legislation (based on stricter surveillance

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[27] The majority of service users who refuse to cooperate with social workers have been in care themselves. Care leavers form the majority of service users.

and control of public sector, aligned with NPM agendas). The media created the sense of panic and moral outrage that gave the policy makers a policy 'window' to introduce changes that otherwise may have led to stronger public reaction.

The techniques of propaganda and agenda setting, as well as the empirical validity of media's influence in shaping public opinion are well documented (Lippman, 1922; Lasswell, 1927; Dewey, 1927; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs & Shaw, 1993; Severin & Tankard, 1997; Kiousis, 2004; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006; Mortensen & Serritzlew, 2006; Slater, 2007). Media, therefore, remains powerful and its role in influencing public policy is a much debated topic in the UK (field observation). Another field observation was that social workers openly blamed the media for creating negative stereotypes about them. This claim was empirically verifiable, with almost all of the newspaper articles in the UK newspapers mostly reported cases where the social workers had made mistakes in assessing child protection cases.

Communication Process and Creation of Stereotypes

Literature on interactionist identity construction claims that we create our identities through our communication (Howard, 2000). Stigmatised groups in society have been shown to cope, or combat against, social inequality by relying on language usage (Goffman, 1963; Anderson et. al., 1994). Social movements against oppression or injustice in society rely on language and identity performances to instigate collective action (Cherry, 1995). Propaganda techniques used by mass media use language to promote their agendas (Herman & Chomsky, 1994). Metaphorically speaking, distanced groups in society can be viewed as speaking different languages. Participation and integration across such groups requires inter-group channels of communication to be established.

Group affiliation can act as a barrier to a participatory approach to inter-group communication, thus reinforcing the creation of as well as adherence to stereotypes. Understanding how stereotypes are created is crucial to devising means of overcoming them. The dictionary definition of 'stereotype' is: *a simplified and standardised conception or image invested with special meaning and held in common by members of a group.*[28]. Membership to a group is a defining part of stereotype creation. Stereotypes can also be defined as 'collectively shared reality', which is created through dyadic

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[28] http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/stereotype

conversations amongst group members (Karasawa et. al., 2007). Such communications lead to the formation of a collective social identity through amalgamation of individual and group identity. A reciprocal relationship exists where membership to the group affects the behaviour of the members, and simultaneously, discussions among these members create a sense of group identity (Postmes et. al., 2005).

Social Communication and Identity Creation

In real life situations, the subjective identity of the individual and belonging to a group affects their representations of themselves and their 'performance' in everyday life (Goffman, 1959). The Social Identity theory states that the relationship of individuals influences their performance when interacting with members of other groups and individuals identify themselves in terms of specific group memberships. Identity, therefore, is embedded within the socio-political context (Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

Members of a group tend to associate more positive traits with their own group (in-group) and more negative attributes are given to the members of other groups (out-group). Further research on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) found that members of a group experience negative psychological consequences when they behave in a manner not representative of their group, even if the behaviour itself is positive. For example, African-American students in the US develop a 'raceless' persona, experiencing interpersonal conflict and ambivalence if they are high achievers in academics (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Arroyo & Zigler, 1995).

On the other hand, the Realistic Conflict theory (LeVine & Campbell, 1972) differs from the Social Identity theory in recognizing in-group and out-group perceptions. Unlike the Social Identity theory, the former states that instead of an in-group bias leading to hostility towards out-group members, it is the out-group threat that leads to in-group identification. The members of a group may feel hostile towards other groups in their vicinity due to a perceived threat from them, but may not feel that hostility for the same groups situated elsewhere, far removed from their immediate vicinity. This claim has received empirical validity through longitudinal analyses of attitudes and group identifications (Howard, 2000). An assumption drawn from this is that group affiliation can become a barrier to inter-group communications.

Lifting Barriers to Participation - Negotiation Research

Negotiation scholars suggest distancing one's Self from the stated position that one supports in a negotiation as a potential breakthrough in difficult situations (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1991). Contemporary negotiation scholars state the ability of participants to identify their *interests* in a given situation and make optimal trade-offs as the key to successful negotiation (Raiffa, 1982; Hammond, Keeney & Raiffa, 1999; Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991). However, problems arise when negotiating over issues that are deemed 'sacred' by any of the negotiations, implying that no value is good enough to consider a trade-off (Tetlock et al, 2000; Bazerman et al 2008).

A sacred value is defined as "*any value that a moral community implicitly or explicitly treats as possessing infinite or transcendental significance that precludes comparisons, trade-offs, or indeed any other mingling with bounder or secular values*" (Tetlock et.al, pp. 853). A sacred value is, therefore, assigned infinite weight. One way forward under these circumstances suggested by negotiation researchers is to distinguish between the truly sacred and the 'pseudo-sacred' issues and highlight the latter as 'Important' rather than 'sacred' (Bazerman et al, 2008). In situations where this distinction cannot be made, that is, non-negotiable issues such as one's own or one's children's safety and health, trade-offs remain taboo.

Negotiations involving such sacred values become extremely difficult because any attempt at discussion is viewed as an assault on values that cannot be distanced from the moral, private self. Public identities of individuals get involved and the golden rule of negotiation that dictates separating the self from the stated position in a negotiation fails under these circumstances. The consequences of assaults on sacred values results in expression of moral outrage, negative affective reactions, and aggressive overt behaviour, which is followed by attempts to engage in a moral cleansing that reinstates the sanctity of these values (Tetlock et al, 2000). Rigidity and irrational resistance to change that is otherwise condemned in other scientific and rational endeavours is not only acceptable but applauded, under conditions of 'righteous indignation', at being subjected to morally outrageous suggestions or invitations to engage in thought processes deemed essentially immoral.

Mere contemplation of such proposals is equated to the corrosion of one's moral identity and consequently, anger, distrust, and even disgust towards perpetrators are common reactions (Tetlock et al, 2000). An economic, cost-benefit driven analysis seems inappropriate and even morally

outrageous in this context (Tetlock et al, 2000). Sacred values therefore are viewed as a barrier to some negotiation scholars to achieving optimal solutions because of their high emotionality (Wade-Benzoni et al, 2002). This conclusion is supported by research on decision-making processes under conditions of high stress that shows reduced efficiency and reduced quality of decision when made under duress (Janis & Mann, 1977).

Combined with the effects of perception of threat from other groups that lead to stronger in-group identification (LeVine & Campbell, 1972), conflicts involving 'sacred' issues can be exceptionally difficult to resolve. Additionally, unless these conflicts are resolved, the public sphere of participation and engagement amongst concerned parties remains a distant ideal, as recently reported by researchers studying the failure of implementing participatory processes in child protection work in UK (Sanders & Mace, 2006; Hall, 2007). The following section examines the barriers to communication between social workers and service users. The majority of service users have been in care themselves and service users are the most hostile of all service users (interview notes from Article two).

Socially Distanced Groups

Social workers and service users are two groups in UK that rarely engage in participatory processes. These socially distanced groups often express hostility towards each other. A study of service users showed the negative impact of being under state care on their identity formation (see Article three). Identity and sense of 'Self' are sacred issues that carry infinite, absolute weight. Though service users and social workers need to collaborate with each other often and can achieve much mutual benefit from participatory communications, they remain hostile and distanced by resentment and conflict. Group affiliation may also act as a barrier when communication with outer group members may be condemned by the in-group, creating a social dilemma for members of these groups.

Research has shown that merely communicating with each other creates a rapport that facilitates negotiations (Morris et al 2002; Valley et al, 2002). Communication also fosters cooperative patterns of interacting when faced with social dilemmas (Dawes et al, 1977; Kerr & Kaufman-Gililand, 1994). The medium of communication plays an important role as well. Research on Internet communities has shown that engaging in virtual communications gives people the freedom to engage more creatively, enabling them to express opinions they would otherwise withhold due to

fear of public sanction. People have the freedom to enact 'performance' that they otherwise would suppress (Turkle, 1997).

From the perspective of negotiation and facilitation of open communication, the Internet is a powerful medium where 'real-life' power differentials that could be barriers to 'honest' communication can be overcome more easily. Internet forums could be the platforms where free speech situation could be established to a greater extent than in face-to-face situations where the designation and authority of the speakers may act as constraints on the freedom of speech. It could also be a tool that appeals to excluded groups in society experiencing social inequality and status differentials. This assumption is fuelled by the previous study on the socially excluded group of service users in the UK that showed that the Internet was their preferred means of communication, where they felt safer in expressing their views about the State and other relevant issues.

Methodology

Interaction among child protection social workers and service users was observed to study the communication pattern of their engagement. The aim was to learn whether interactions via the Internet could be more conducive to overcoming conflicts amongst ideologically opposed groups of social workers and service users. There is much hostility between the two groups in the UK and social workers report hostility from their clients as one of the major challenges implicit in the job (previous study, under review). The question underpinning this endeavour is, whether or not the Internet can provide an alternative medium of communication that is better suited to facilitating mutual understanding and communication among social workers and service users.

The research site is an Internet forum where social workers and service users have the chance to interact. The Web site is established primarily by a group of social workers, who also print a magazine for social workers and service users. The mission of the founding members of the magazine and the Web site is to provide support to both the professionals and the public who use social services. The Internet forum is selected for this study because previous study of service users (specifically care leavers) revealed that service users prefer the safety and anonymity of the Internet when expressing their views. Moreover, another face-to-face study of social workers has already been conducted in which 17 social workers were interviewed. Observing the online behaviour of these social workers could lead to additional information about social workers' attitudes and beliefs,

exhibited in a 'safer' environment (due to anonymity) as compared to an interview situation.

The members of the Internet forum selected for this study were informed of my identity and purpose of joining the site. Analysis of the messages posted by the members and general observation of activities on the Web site was then carried out, after obtaining permission from the site managers as well as the individual members whose posts are included in this study. The communication patterns were observed along with analysis of the message content. The period of 'active' participation lasted for two weeks. The messages posted over the last six months by members willing to participate in the study are analysed.

Data Analysis

Different threads were started at different times at the forum. Two threads that had the maximum number of responses from the members are selected. The first (with 69 responses) was based on the theme of 'Risk Assessment and Child Protection', and the second, (with 48 responses) was on 'Media and Social Workers'. The first thread was initiated by a service user and had 11 participants. Four were service users, six were social workers, and one member did not reveal his/her status as a social worker or a service user. Interestingly, this was the only member who always maintained a neutral position in all discussions and 'spoke' for both social workers and service users during (sometimes) heated debates over issues related to service provision. The second thread was initiated by a social worker and had 14 participants that included 12 social workers and 2 service users.

'Risk Assessment and Child Protection'

Risk assessment in cases of child protection was evidently of much more concern to the service users. Passionate discussions on past cases were initiated and social workers were asked for their opinions. The service users were unanimous in their agreement that the social worker on the case being discussed had "*messed up*". They also posted some messages initially where all social workers were accused of being callous and ill-informed about children's rights. Two social workers vociferously objected to these comments and told the service users that it was "*unfair to label all social workers bad just because one happened to mess up*". Other social workers agreed that they should not be penalised for one person's mistake "*but sadly that has always been the norm*". The discussion continued primarily between service users only, interrupted sporadically by a social

worker defending social workers in general. For a period of two days, the discussants were only service users and child protection social workers and social services were criticised.

The service user who had initiated the thread agreed later on during the discussion that she had experienced "*good social work*" as well and shared an incident where the social services had been "*very helpful*". She went on to say that it was "*CHILD protection social work*" she was not happy with and especially "*with their loose definition of what falls under 'significant harm' and how they assess it*". Gender biases in risk assessment were also discussed and social workers were severely criticised for their assumption that "*no man is zero risk... that we (social workers) start with assuming high risk and then eliminate*". Service users cited examples from their own or experiences of someone they knew to illustrate their criticisms. Social workers denied the accusation strongly and one of them said "*I have never heard of such rubbish in my life!*" The discussion then progressed among service users only and became quite negative in content, narrating instances where the service users had been "*unfairly*" treated.

The member with undisclosed identity posted a message suggesting "*A group hug?... LOL...*". Another social worker commented then that the discussion was "*pointless and getting aggressive*". A couple of service users posted in response "*I find this discussion very interesting, in a positive way*" and another one wrote "*I don't think it is aggressive at all. I think it is very healthy to have such discussions where you can get to see both sides of the coin*".

The unidentified member then posted, "*I agree it is important to know service users opinions and their experiences make them no less than experts. Everyone should be able to participate and give their views but in a constructive way*". The service user who had started the thread then thanked and directly addressed the unidentified member, stating, "*I am not trying to be aggressive but I feel I have received some aggressive responses*". The discussion resumed and a couple of other service members continued talking between themselves, addressing the person they were engaged with specifically rather than posting general messages. The content of the messages were quite negative and critical of social services generally.

At this point, a message appeared from a new social worker who had not been participating so far. The message was addressed to the service user who had initiated the thread and said "*this site is for social work professionals ONLY*". The service users responded saying it was not said anywhere on the site explicitly that service users could not use it. Another social worker supported this assertion

and the site manager (a social worker) posted a general message stating that "*the site is meant only for social work professionals but service users are also welcome, only if they have constructive comments*". Service users reacted against this statement strongly and one of them posted "*where does the site say this??.. what are you afraid of? Afraid that the truth will come out?*" Nobody responded to this post and the discussion ended here.

The language used in the discussions was dominated by terms common to social workers (for example, BVIs – best value indicators) but it was the service users who introduced these terms in the discussion. Literature and theories related to child welfare and development were mentioned often by service users. For example, one of the service users posted "*she (social worker) quoted Piaget but I caught her spelling mistakes and other ways in which she wrongly quoted him because I have knowledge of child development issues myself..*". Social workers did not use professional 'lingo' but service users used it often. The language used by service users at this forum was more professional and formal than the informal mode of communication adopted at the forum where only service users participated.

Previously studied service users were an extremely excluded group in society struggling to adjust back into the social fabric after leaving care. Service users in this forum appeared to have successful jobs and families (they referred to them often with much pride) but had had some negative experience (that they or their relative/friends had) with social workers. At this site, it seemed as if the service users were eager to show their knowledge about the lingo of social work. It seemed as if they were combating perceived inequality through using the 'insider' language used by the 'powerful' and dominant group (social workers) by showing off their familiarity with professionally sophisticated phrases and apparent ease of usage (Goffman, 1963).

Though the initial post by the service user asked for social workers to help her find some research documents/reports etc. on the issue of gender bias in risk assessment, the discussion became (at times, heated) debate about how "*bad*" the social workers are in general. Two social workers responded saying that there is no such documentation of such "*absurd issue*" and one posted "*I think you know there are no such documents existing. If you have had a bad experience, you should contact that specific social worker. I wish negative experiences are far less and rare in between in your future*". The service user replied, "*No, I do not know there is no such document*", and went on the list the literature s/he had already read as well as listed the organisations involved in child protection work whose publications she had accessed. Until this juncture, the service users

repeatedly used professional phrases, quoted empirical data, and referred to organisations involved in research on child welfare issues in the UK.

The pattern of communication of the eleven participants is represented below (in Figure 1.). A, B, C, and D are service users, F, G, H, I, J, and K are social workers, and E is the unidentified member. The thickness of the arrows denotes frequency of communication. The direction of the arrows represents whether the communication was one-sided or dyadic. The spatial arrangement of members in the diagram below is in alphabetical order, presenting a situation where these members could be visualised as seated in a conference room around a table (as usually done during child protection case conferences where service users and social workers interact in a 'real' world setting). In these meeting, the service users tend to sit together and the social work professionals present at the meetings (social workers, managers, and professionals from other agencies involved in the case) tend to cluster together as well (as informed by social workers during interviews).
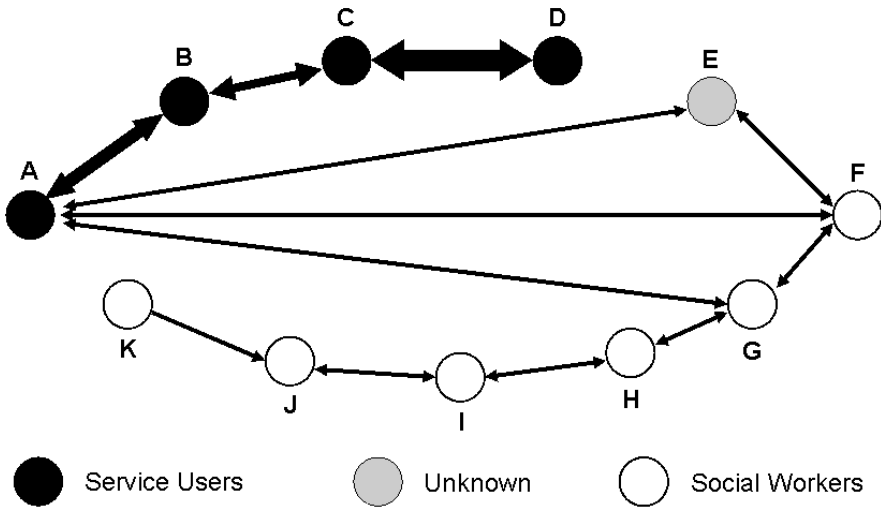

Figure 1: Communication Pattern on 'Risk Assessment and Child Protection'

Media and Social Workers

The second thread of discussion was on the role of the media in damaging the image of the social workers time and again. The discussion was initiated by a social worker who posted a recent article in the UK press, which reported a recent court case that cleared a social worker from charges of wrongfully 'snatching babies'. The court had found the social worker not guilty of charges made against him/her and the newspaper had reported the story with an article from an academic expert on social work issues. The article was supportive of social workers in general, highlighting the difficulties implicit in doing social work. It was critical of the prejudices against child protection social workers that make their job even more difficult. [29]

The social worker who initiated the discussion posted the article headline ('Social Workers are Not Baby Snatchers') on the forum and added the message, "*finally, some balanced views about us!*". This message was received with expressions of pleasant surprise from other social workers. One of them said, "*at least we have this one newspaper on our side*". The case mentioned in the article was actively discussed and the final decision of the judge to exonerate the social worker was applauded. The discussion then drifted to concerns on how the employers of that social worker would handle the matter.

One of the social workers wrote, "*the judge said it's not his/her fault, that's something new for a change. Otherwise, one way or the other, s/he would pay the price*". Another message in response to this one read, "*it's usual not to attack the problem but the social worker. We are the scapegoats for everyone. Everyone makes mistakes but if you survive the public, the management will hang you*". Other social workers started talking about incidents of being bullied at work and about the lack of supervision and support from managers. Management was severely criticised, in contrast to data from interviews where social workers did criticize management but also expressed sympathy for the managers.

Only two social workers posted messages saying managers should not be blamed for "*everything that is wrong in the system*". Other social workers brought attention back to media coverage of social work in the UK by posting, "*what would be a good way to break the stereotype?*". Many social workers responded to the question, suggesting how popular faces should be made to play

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[29] The article can be accessed at http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/feb/07/childprotection.socialcare

social workers on commercial TV. One post read, "*what we need is Jude Law and Kate Winslet playing social workers*".

Another one suggested giving more proactive and positive roles to social workers in serials on TV. A lively discussion ensued about which popular actors they would like to see represent social workers. No reference was made to newspapers, except for The Guardian, one of UK's leading national newspapers. The Guardian was looked upon favorably by the social workers for its "*unbiased*" coverage of social workers. Except for this one newspaper, no other newspaper was mentioned in the discussion. Media was generally blamed for giving social workers a bad reputation.

An interesting feature is that media was mentioned by social workers during face-to-face interviews (in the previous study) and during discussions with service users at this site under different threads. The reaction of social workers toward the media was much stronger in those instances as compared to this discussion specifically on media. The media was whole-heartedly blamed for making social workers' jobs harder, whereas within this particular thread, the discussion was more moderate and even light-hearted. The media was not seen as the main culprit but rather as a tool that could be put to better use by the journalists. One of the social workers mentioned a popular radio show that is about a social worker. The show makes fun of social workers and their exaggerated failings but is very popular among some social workers. The mention of this show did not elicit any response and the discussion remained centered around popular soaps, TV serials, or movies that could be made to improve the image of social workers.

Two service users joined the discussion. One of them challenged the article initially discussed by the social workers and said that s/he did not agree with the judge. A social worker responded, saying, "*would you have agreed with the judge if the social worker was found guilty?*". The service user answered, "*yes, to be honest, I would have. But I am not saying all social workers are bad but there are some pretty awful ones out there*". Other social workers responded to this post, referring to their stereotyping by the media and the public as "*baby snatchers*" as the "*sad truth*" that they must live with. The service user posted messages narrating incidents of bad practice where the media did not report the case and the social worker was at fault. The other service user responded to this message while the social workers resumed their discussion on how media, mostly TV serials, can be made differently to present a more attractive image of social workers.

The discussion got divided into two themes. The service users exchanged comments on bad practice while the social workers discussed media representations of themselves. Another social worker posted, "*I am sick of just listening to talk. If you really want to do something, why not try writing a script and sending it out?*". A social worker responded saying, "*I have experimented with script writing... how can I work on it seriously?*". The discussion then shifted to exchanging information about a media event where it would be possible to meet journalists interested in making documentaries about social workers. The service users ended their thread of communication after exchanging a few messages (between themselves mostly) with the message, "*I don't think it's just the media giving social workers a bad name. I think social workers need to out those in the profession who give it a bad name.*". One social worker responded to this with, "*I hope this is not a serious thought*". No further communication occurred between service users and social workers.

Figure 2 represents the communication pattern observed in this thread. A and B are service users and the rest are social workers.
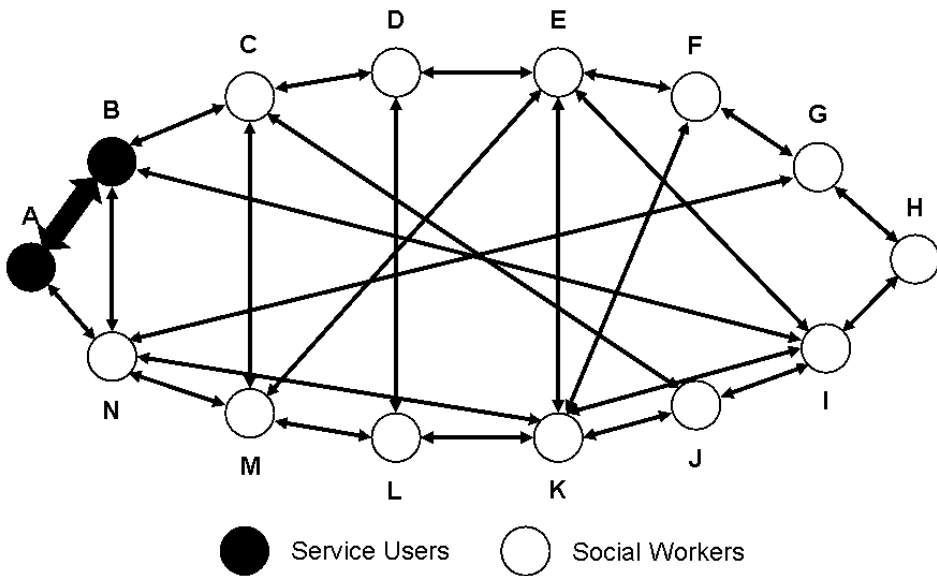

Figure 2: Communication Pattern in 'Media and Social Workers'

The difference in spread of communication pattern for the two threads (figures 1 and 2) highlights that:

- Service users and social workers have different *Interests*.
- The power differentials are replicated in the virtual world.

Service users showed the maximum interest in issues related to risk assessment in child abuse cases in this discussion. However, social workers were keener to discuss issues of self-representation and the images transmitted of them by the media. Their stance was more defensive in the former thread and more relaxed in the latter. When discussing issues related to media representations of social workers, they occupied the position of the victim. In discussion of risk assessment and placement decisions, service users claimed the victim status and social workers were the dominant class. Media references were made by social workers in this discussion as well, where they blamed extensive negative media coverage as responsible for producing stereotypes that made it "*very easy for everyone to scapegoat us*". This sentiment of resentment against the media and resignation to persecution based on media representations was drastically less in the thread on media specifically.

It seemed that when not under attack, social workers viewed media less negatively. They recounted and appreciated The Guardian newspaper as being impartial and an exception to the rule in not seeking mostly scandalous incidents to report in its coverage of issues related to social workers. The media was not discussed as the main cause of strife for social workers and the discussion remained fairly light-hearted, creative, and reflective. Some messages were posted about the concerns social workers have about bad practice and these concerns were similar to those raised by service users in the other thread (where the response was to defend, not address. This particular thread was initiated by a social worker and service users did not join the discussion until later.) Social workers were more relaxed and accepting of the failings of social services, especially in child protection cases and shared serious reflections on how lack of time adversely affects their performance. They expressed feelings of guilt, helplessness, and grave concern for their clients. The discussion was re-routed to the main notion of media and the seriousness dissipated slightly.

The ambience changed to humorous suggestions on creating TV shows and documentaries that would realistically portray the reality of being child protection social workers. Some self-mocking messages were posted by a few members that included the comment, "*who would like to watch a depressed zombie either sitting at a computer or falling apart when not?!*" The "*mood*" changed from reflective to almost jovial.

The service users joined the discussion at this point and posted messages contradictory to the general mood, reiterating the concerns discussed earlier. They were largely ignored. The two service users conversed mainly with each other and social workers responded only to messages posted by other social workers. Two almost independent strands of communication existed simultaneously. In a face-to-face setting (Figure 2), this pattern of communication would equate to two camps being formed around the table with camp members engaging only with members belonging to their camp.

When discussing matters related to risk assessment and child placement cases, the service users engaged the social workers directly by posting messages addressing the social worker(s) specifically by name. The social worker thus targeted had to response to the query posted by the service user and other social workers joined it. Service users had conversations among themselves as well. In contrast to the other thread, the communication among service users dominated the discussion, with social workers either posting messages in self-defense or not responding at all. After a period of silence, the social workers got back with the message saying the forum was only for social workers. In other words, they exercised their authority. The power difference played out in the virtual world was similar to real world situations, where social workers hold the power to terminate communication at will.

The responses of social workers were defensive and sympathetic to the emotive content in the service users' messages, wishing, "*you don't have many negative experiences in the future I hope*". The service users responded to this implicit sympathy with an added emphasis on keeping the discussion academic and formal, making explicit their knowledge of social work legislative rules and social work lingo. They made attempts to engage the social workers at the professional level only, resenting attempts by social workers to placate them.

The implicit message seemed to be, "*don't patronize me, I know as much as you do about the law. Treat me as a professional, as an equal, not as a charity case*". The power imbalance could be felt strongly, despite the change in the medium of communication (the Internet instead of face-to-face). Thus another empirical observation that emerges from this study is that the Internet may provide the service users with a greater freedom to express their opinions but the power imbalance was replicated as well. The history of real life experiences of service users and social workers overshadow the effects that changes in the medium of communication may have over the communication process.

There was no communication between A (service user) and K (one of the social workers). There was heavier traffic among service users in general. Social workers were communicating less generally. They were communication less with service users as well as amongst themselves. Social workers' communication with service users was mainly response-driven rather than by an initiative to engage with the service users. When the discussion got more emotive, social workers closed the channel of communication altogether. The discussion ended on a hostile note with the message from a service user asking, "*are you afraid the truth with come out?*". This pattern of communication in a real life situation would equate to mainly one-sided communication with the service users in an active, accusatory mode and the social workers in a passive, defensive mode.

Discussion

Both service users and social workers seem to share the overall concern about bad practice in child protection social work. Despite this common ground and discontent, the service users and social workers seem be engaged in a destructive pattern of communication where they are addressing only the *symptoms* of discontent rather than the root cause. The root cause of discontent is the same for both the parties but due to differences in power and the level of stakes in the situation, the communication between both parties is deadlocked. The service users exhibit a righteous indignation typical of negotiations involving sacred issues and the social workers react to the hostility of service users with defensiveness and refusal to engage.

Although the situation seems hopeless at first glance, as long as there are common interests and concerns, negotiation research suggests there is hope of negotiating differences to reach a mutually beneficial situation. The main barrier to negotiation is the implicit assumption made by negotiating parties that there is no win-win situation. It seems taken for granted that if the concerns of one party are remedied, it will be at a cost to the other party. If the issue is equally important to both parties, the resulting situation is that of a deadlock, where both refuse to give up their respective positions. This is why it is important to 'separate the people from the problem' and help all parties realize that there are options that could make everyone better off (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1991).

In this case, the conflict is more severe than in an organizational context because:

- The issue is sacred (child protection).
- There is a history of power imbalance.

Although the primary concern to improve child protection services remains the same, there is a tremendous perceived difference between the repercussions of bad practice. Losing one's reputation as a good professional, or one's job, compares poorly (if at all), with losing parental rights. This difference is so large that combined with complexities of dealing with sacred issues, the resultant differential in consequences of bad practice is severely unbalanced, convincing the service users that the issue is of concern only to them. The severity of negative consequences is so acute for them that the concerns of the social workers are over-shadowed into oblivion.

Watkins (2002) addresses the problem arising from power imbalances in negotiation situations by giving an analogy of negotiation between a mouse and an elephant. Among the strategies suggested by him, one suggests adopting a piece-meal approach. By engaging with parts of the metaphorical elephant that are more open to listening to the agendas of the mouse, the power of the giant is reduced. This approach can be adopted if there are indeed such parts that are willing to negotiate and are more in tune with the concerns of the mouse.

Within social services in the UK, social workers influenced and trained by professionals advocating 'constructive social work' and therapeutic element in social work (Cooper & Lousada, 2005; Parton & O'Byrne, 2000a; 2000b; White, Fook & Gardiner, 2006), for example, might seem more open to engaging service users at the professional, equal level that they demanded in this study[30]. Some care leavers start organizations to help socialization after care. These organizations work in collaboration with social workers and care leavers work with them to provide services to those leaving care (for example, A National Voice in the UK). These care leavers have less hostility towards social workers and may form the initial contact point between social workers and service users.

A salient point here is that the social workers are assumed to be powerful and representative of the metaphorical elephant. However, they could be in the powerless position attributed generally to service users when faced with collective hostility of service users, negative media coverage, and negative stereotypes of them prevalent in society. Communication between service users and social

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[30]   Tavistock Clinic in London offers courses and training to social workers under the aegis of psychologists and therapists.

workers is hampered by assumptions of power distribution. Social workers may possess little power in reality, as shown in the previous study on affect of policy and procedures on their performance. They lack psychological safety and constantly feel disliked and disrespected by other professionals as well as society in general. These emotional states can result in a sense of loss of power and feelings of persecution, not dissimilar to those experienced by service users.

After a channel of communication is established between the service users and social work professionals who are more inclined toward constructive and therapeutic social work (Parton & O'Byrne, 2000; Bower, 2005; Cooper & Lousada, 2005), techniques of 'shadow negotiation' may be resorted to. Kolb & Williams (2001) highlight the pitfalls that freeze the negotiation process between parties of unequal power and stakes. The authors present three strategies: power moves, process moves, and appreciative moves. Power moves are based on having a good Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA) that can be used as leverage (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991; Kolb & Williams, 2001). The assumption is that after the other party becomes aware that our BATNA is strong and lucrative for us, it strengthens our bargaining position (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1991). The power moves strategy suggests that if the powerful party perceives some loss in not negotiating, they will be more inclined to negotiate (Kolb & Williams, 2001).

The process moves strategy involves structural changes. Instead of adopting a direct, aggressive approach, this strategy suggests indirectly implanting the ideas that one wants to sell before the actual negotiation begins. This may save the negotiator from reactions to aggression that s/he may have needed to resort to. The location may be changed as well because negotiators are not equally effective under all settings. Appreciative moves instill trust and openness of communication by showing understanding and appreciation of the other parties' concerns (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991; Kolb & Williams, 2001).

Unfortunately, service users are not people with many options. They lack BATNAs and even if they do have an option, they seldom have the knowledge or prowess to use it. In fact, they might not even want to engage with social workers at all. The negotiation element is introduced after the service users are faced with drastic consequences. The option to engage and effectively participate becomes crucial at this stage. However, research shows that despite strong emphasis of current legislative guidance on carrying out child protection work, there is little or no participation achieved in case conferences among social workers and service users (Sanders & Mace, 2006; Hall, 2007). Service users cannot make power moves and nor can they influence the location of the negotiation.

One possible path to a solution could be if the social workers adopted the strategy of Appreciative moves.

Service users repeatedly made comments like, "*where is the humanity in all of this?*" and "*It's very simple, you just decide to think about the child and not about yourself – but that is very hard to do for social workers*". Service users seem convinced of the callousness of social workers and fail to see the constraints under with most child protection professionals are forced to perform. The moral outrage of the service users seems to be a barrier to open communication with the social workers.

One possibility that emerges is to rely on the permeability of sacred-secular boundary (Lewin, 1997; Tetlock et al, 2000). Sacred issues can be 'secularised' if participants are reassured enough about their choices. For example, people endorsed buying and selling of human organs after they were convinced that there is no other option, that it will save lives, and that the poor will be assisted in such deals to avoid their exploitation (Tetclock, 1999; Tetlock et al 2000). After the boundary between sacred-secular is blurred, previously enraged individuals could be more open to negotiation involving sacred issues.

Appreciative moves made by social workers could help blur this boundary. However, in this study it was observed that when service users attempted to engage the social workers in discussion of taboo topics, such as mistakes made by social workers in child placement cases and failure of social services to help vulnerable children and families, social workers shut down the communication channel. Although the discussion on risk assessment started with the service users seemingly open to social workers' comments, the implicit assumptions of both parties about each other seemed to shadow the discussion throughout, eventually leading to the termination of the communication process on a hostile note. The change in the medium of communication did affect the communication process to the extent of fulfilling the condition of freedom of speech required of a critical public sphere (Habermas, 1989). However, the *functionality* of the public sphere in terms of communicative action and providing a platform for an ideal speech situation remains doubtful.

The Internet has provided a medium of communication that is much more pervasive than any other form of media, further complicating the coordination of social action by 'the public' (Dewey, 1927). At the same time, it has also created a platform where power differences of any form (gender, status, and ethnicity) can be overcome. This makes the Internet the most powerful medium for self-expression. Despite this immense power of the media, this study reveals that the social conflicts can

not be resolved through this medium alone. The Internet can help create spaces where the 'mice' and the 'elephants' can engage more freely and form coalitions for a common cause. At the least, the Internet offers a means of *initiating* communication among unequal partners in a negotiating process. It offers the social workers a chance to employ appreciation moves and the service users to have a voice.

Concluding Remarks

This study suggests that the Internet does provide greater freedom of speech to the participants. However, the communication patterns among group members mimic real life patterns. The virtual setting does not erase the power differentials experienced or otherwise perceived in the 'real' setting. The virtual setting contains the potential to create a space for rational discursive communication but barriers to participation in real life (social work practice) need to be lifted before constructive communication can be initiated.

Internet communities may offer constructive spaces for negotiation between groups in conflict. From the policy making perspective, this finding is important because it suggests a means of forming coalitions, a strategy that has been empirically established as effective in influencing policy makers (Sabatier, 2007). Although the power differences did not disappear in the virtual environment, it does seem that the Internet communities might offer a better platform to resolve conflicts among groups that might never negotiate face-to-face. Although negotiation literature emerges as a promising guide, further research is needed, specifically focused on online negotiations involving socially excluded groups, before any firm conclusions can be drawn.

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