

THE RELATIONSHIP'S EVALUATION BETWEEN CHILD PROTECTION WORKERS IN COLLABORATION WITH OTHER KEYS OF REFERRAL SYSTEM: LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The child protection is necessary to be studied because children are in the focus of every society and their maltreatment occurs all over demographics areas. All referral links at child protection system play an important roles in safety and welfare of the child. According to Wolfe, social workers are adept at working with multiple disciplines and across multiple systems to direct team efforts. A lot has been written about outcome measures in child protection and it has been argued that multiple outcome measures offer more validity than any single measure (e.g. Huxley, 1994; Quinton, 1996). Furthermore, constructive relationships between professionals are the heart and soul of effective child protection practice. The main purpose of this paper is the reflection of some findings about the relationship that exists between child protection workers and other major chains of the referral system, problems encountered in collaboration between them and the factors that influence its improvement. In order to realize the creation of a more complete view, a detailed review of contemporary domestic and foreign literature was undertaken, including scientific articles which are published recently and internationally recognized addresses which study this phenomenon. Literature review gave to the researchers a picture of concepts, variables, vocabulary, theories that exist about this topic of study. The study of the literature on the collaboration in the child protection field has shown that researchers are limited. This introductory article will help professionals for a better understanding of the situation and will provide them different researcher's points of view.

Keywords: child protection system, child protection workers, professional relationship, collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Every society has established a special focus on the child. Each one of us is aware of that children need particular attention, care and protection. They are not responsible for the harm that may be caused to them. Children are vulnerable due to their age, lack of power, limited status, gender, lack of a voice and the trust they give to adults to care for them. (Evaluation Study of Child Protection Units, p 27). We often consider them as values, the future of a nation, therefore any investment in this regard is valuable and important. Each of us is responsible and must contribute to the maintenance of security of the child. According to Herbert Hoover "Children are our most valuable resource natural".

Many years ago, child protection pioneer Vincent De Francis lamented, "No state and no community has developed a Child Protective Service program adequate in size to meet the service needs of all reported cases of child neglect, abuse and exploitation." (54. DE FRANCIS, supra note 16, at 11). President George W. Bush recognized the need for a comprehensive integration of services in an April, 2007, proclamation stating that, "Family members, educators, public officials, faith-based and community organizations all play

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

Child protection is necessary because maltreatment occurs across all demographics (Belsky, 1993). Child protection services are not voluntary and are used as an intervention strategy into child maltreatment; the chance of a child having experienced a traumatic event prior to child protection involvement is the rule more than the exception. The field of child protection is an area which requires qualified and motivated professionals. Morrison (1996) has suggested that anxiety especially in high-risk fields, such as child protection, is a powerful motivator for working together, as no single agency wants to be left alone with such a problem. Wolfe notes: “For a team to grow and thrive, each individual should acknowledge his or her own role in their disciplines and be respectful of the roles of others, both on and off the team”.

Dale et al. (1986) proposed that professional relationships were analagous to the variety of formal and informal communication patterns, healthy and destructive patterns of behaviour that develop between members of a family. Just as a family may obstruct or block change, workers may accidentally or deliberately hinder interagency communication (Dale et al., 1986; Preston-Shoot & Agass, 1990; DoH, 1991). Mattessich and Monsey (1992) performed an exhaustive literature review of the factors influencing successful collaboration and ranked the following traits as the most important:

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

METHODOLOGY

The paper intends to present a picture of the child protection system, focusing on the importance of this process, to mechanisms that make it functional, to understand the process of the collaboration between child protection workers and referral system links. To realize this was taken a detailed literature review of the reports, scientific articles, government documents, conference proceedings and web resources who study this phenomenon. According the Boote & Beile, a researcher cannot perform significant research without first understanding the literature in the field. Review of literature considers every available piece of researches on child protection field. It help the researcher to create, analyze and deepen the theoretical framework of previous studies. The reseach was conducted using the keywords that define extensive study which gradually is narrowing to a more limited list. In this paper, especially, the researcher is focused in understanding the collaboration’s process in the child protection system. He has taken on a neutral and objective perspective and claims to just present the facts. Review and analysis of the literature has been a systematic, rigorous and continuous work. It helped establish which theories already exist, what are the relationships between the existing theories, and to what degree the existing theories have been substantiated. It is need a period of three months to gather this information. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) estimate that a decent literature review for a dissertation will take between

three and six months to be completed. The literature review has been organized methodologically, as in an empirical paper (i.e., introduction, method, results and discussion).

CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

According to Dr. Bissell UNICEF Associate Director, Chief of Child Protection, emphasized that in spite of slightly different perspectives, many child protection organisations agree that a child protection system can be defined as: “Certain formal and informal structures, functions and capacities that have been assembled to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children. A child protection system is generally agreed to be comprised of the following components: human resources, finance, laws and policies, governance, monitoring and data collection as well as protection and response services and care management. It also includes different actors – children, families, communities, those working at subnational or national level and those working internationally. Most important are the relationships and interactions between and among these components and these actors within the system. It is the outcomes of these interactions that comprise the system”.

In 2006, the UN Secretary General’s Study on Violence against Children recommended that “all States develop a multifaceted and systematic framework in response to violence against children, which is integrated into national planning processes.” A 2007 UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion on Children at Risk noted that “States should promote the establishment and implementation of child protection systems...”. There is general agreement that child protection is both a sector and intersectoral. Thus, it is important to explore the scope and boundaries of child protection system and how they interact with other social systems such as health and social protection. Likewise, given the importance of state responsibility in ensuring the protection of children, it is important to examine the coordination of child protection systems across geographical or administrative boundaries within countries and also internationally.

The child protection system could not be understood without the child protection social work. Child protection social work is unique because the traumas experienced by children who enter the child protection system are due to varying reasons. These reasons make the child protection social worker a professional who has to have a grasp on multiple levels of trauma related to all forms of abuse and neglect (CPS Training Institute, 1996). A lot has been written about outcome measures in child protection and it has been argued that multiple outcome measures offer more validity than any single measure (e.g. Huxley, 1994; Quinton, 1996). The Child Protection Worker is the person in charge of protecting and promoting children rights. He defends them from harm or abuse, neglect or exploitation and he ensures children to develop his/her full potential.

The Child Protection Worker will take the responsibility for gathering information about a child’s health, education, and family, stage of development, living environment, concerns regarding his/her welfare and/ or protection and community. He will work in partnership and cooperation with specialists and/ or organizations dealing with child’s rights protection and have an interest in the child’s welfare or development. This form of cooperation is formally known as “multi-disciplinary” and is widely acknowledged as the most appropriate form of support and assistance to any child who requires child protection services. The research suggests that effective child protection workers make use of collaborative problem-solving processes (sometimes referred to as working in partnership). They help clients to identify personal, social and environmental issues that are of concern to them. They then help their

clients develop goals and strategies to address these issues. The more effective workers tend to work with the clients' definitions of problems rather than their own (the worker's) definition and they deal with a range of issues which are of concern to the client or client family. The workers take a holistic and systemic approach and focus on the issues that have led to the abuse or neglect, rather than the abuse itself. (Trotter 2002, p. 39)

COLLABORATION BETWEEN LINKS

Every state has its own distinct child welfare system and each system has its own unique relationship with the social work profession. "The social worker is the glue that holds a team together," says Debra Schilling Wolfe, MEd, executive director of the Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice & Research. According to Wolfe, by virtue of their training and perspective, social workers are adept at working with multiple disciplines and across multiple systems to direct team efforts.

"Each discipline obviously brings their respective skills, and an effective multidisciplinary team can greatly enhance the child's outcome," Snider notes. Dickinson and Gil de Gibaja (2004) note that in any successful partnership, two or more entities contribute distinct expertise, resources, and knowledge to create a synergistic whole that is more than the sum of their individual attributes and contribution. Creating an effective multiprofessional team depends on members' willingness to develop new ways of working that engender sharing and mutual trust, overcoming professional rivalries and feelings of insecurity about their respective roles, which is where interprofessional education (IPE) comes in. (Parliamentary Briefing: March 20th 2007, Every Child Matters).

There is a consensus in the field that "the quality of the helping relationship is one of the most important determinants of client outcome" (de Boer & Coady, 2003) and research has consistently shown the worker-client relationship to be a key component in change processes. All the evidence indicates that children are safeguarded best where there is clarity and understanding between different agencies about roles and responsibilities, underpinned by good working relationships at all levels (CSCI 2005 p.33). However, in 2010, the first study proposing expert consensus on child protection team performance and effectiveness was published (Kistin, Tien, Bauchner, Parker, & Leventhal). This study surveyed professionals working on or with hospital-based child protection teams and reported that a collegial atmosphere and interdisciplinary collaboration are major keys to effectiveness.

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

UNDERSTANDING THE COLLABORATION

The National Network for Collaboration defines collaboration as "process of participation through which people, groups and organizations work together on strengths of the family and /or community to achieve desired results." Collaboration is an advanced form of an "interagency linkage," the traits of which include shared vision and goals, well-developed and formalized roles for participants, sharing of power and decision-making, and joint assumption of risks and resources. Operationally, this study employed a definition laid out by Mattesich, Murray-Close, and Monsey (2001) in their studies on behalf of the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation:

A mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations. The relationship includes a commitment to mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and sharing of resources and rewards. (p. 22)

Collaboration itself has been defined by Bruce Frey in 'Levels of Collaboration Scale' as "the cooperative way that two or more entities work together towards a shared goal." Barbara Gray in her book 'Collaborating: Finding common Ground for Multiparty Problems' (Jossey-Bass 1989) states that "collaborations are designed either to advance a shared vision, or to resolve a conflict, and they result in an exchange of information, a joint agreement or commitment to action." In practice, collaboration is commonly interchanged with terms such as cooperation and coordination. However, the scholarly literature distinguishes among the terms (see Hord, 1986; Kagan, 1991; Melaville & Blank, 1991).

A continuum moving from cooperation to coordination to collaboration moves generally from low to high formality. Cooperation is characterized by informal relationships that exist without a commonly defined structure or planning effort. The emphasis is on the sharing of information and authority is retained by each organization or group. On the other hand, coordination is characterized by more formal relationships. There is a modest amount of structure complexity and some planning and division of roles are required. The emphasis is on common tasks and communication channels are established. While authority still rests with the individual organization or group, there is some increased risk to participants (Winer & Ray, 1996). Task forces are examples of coordinated efforts. Collaboration requires a more durable and profound relationship. The process unites previously separated groups or organizations into a new structure to achieve a mutual purpose. Such relationships require comprehensive planning, a shared vision and frequent and well-defined communication. Authority is determined by the collaborative structure and risk is more substantial because each member of the collaboration contributes its own resources and reputation.

"Collaborative" is a term now commonly applied to a set of processes intended to create consensus among parties who, under normal circumstances, disagree about the issue at hand. Typically, collaboratives take the form of stakeholder groups, sometimes called consensus groups, which come together to try to solve problems jointly which none of the parties could solve alone, or which if any party tried to would create broad resistance (Reilly, 1998; Winer & Ray, 1996).

Defining "Successful" Collaboration

Often, when we refer to collaboration we strongly emphasize the effective communication. It is assessed as a key component for establishing trust (Das & Teng, 1998). Communication is significant at three levels: communication between members of the partnership, communication between the partnership and individual organizations, and communication between the partnership and the wider community (Huxham & Vangen, 1996). "Every multidisciplinary team is a work in progress, whether due to longstanding issues between agencies or to new membership through staff turnover and attrition. The most effective teams strive towards open communication with agency members and mutual respect for the roles and expertise other team members bring to the table," Snider says. Within each partner organisation, there are multiple layers of participation in the collaboration (Rubin, 1998; Gray, 1996) and open communication between partners (Austin, 2000). Members share power equally (Shaw, 2003).

Research on collaborations have suggested that there must be several essential components for the internal operation of a collaborative including:

- (1) a central purpose that incorporates good timing, a shared vision and a critical need for action;
 - (2) membership that is broad based, able to compromise and effectively represents the respective constituents or affected interests;
 - (3) a structure that has clearly established roles, agreed upon ground rules, open and frequent communication and access to credible information that supports problem-solving;
 - (4) a process that is open, has the buy-in of people in power to support outcomes, allows for interim success, and is able to effectively monitor the group's progress; and
 - (5) resources that include sufficient funds, entrepreneurial leadership and a skilled facilitator that can effectively guide the group to consensus-based decision-making (Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Gray, 1989; Kagan, 1991; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Melaville & Blank, 1995).
- Creating an effective multiprofessional team depends on members' willingness to develop new ways of working that engender sharing and mutual trust, overcoming professional rivalries and feelings of insecurity about their respective roles, which is where interprofessional education (IPE) comes in.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION

The presence of social networks and social supports to children and families, as well as positive balance between supports and strains, has been posited to be important to child well-being and the prevention the child maltreatment the cross-cultural literature support the hypothesis that social networks and embeddedness of child rearing in a social context are crucially significant protections against child maltreatment (Helfer, M., E., Kempe, R., S., & Krugman, R., D.. (1997). The cross-cultural record suggests that children with diminished social networks are vulnerable to maltreatment social networks have the potential to serve multiple protective functions for children.

1. networks provide the personnel for assistance with child care tasks and responsibilities.
2. networks provide options for the temporary and/or permanent redistribution of children.
3. networks provide the context for collective standarts and therefore, for the scrutiny and enforcement of such standards.

Tomison (1999) points out that coordination in child protection networks has been generally adopted in the western world as a desirable work practice (Jones, Pickett, Oates & Barbor, 1987; Morrison, 1994). Such coordination may provide more effective assessment of family needs and to provides a response that can positively affect family wellbeing and ensure the protection of children from abuse and neglect (Tomison 1997). Specifically, good coordination can lead to greater efficiency in the use of resources, improved service delivery by the avoidance of duplication and overlap between existing services; the minimisation of gaps or discontinuities in services; clarification of agency or professional roles and responsibilities in 'frontier problems' and demarcation disputes; and the delivery of comprehensive services (Hallett & Birchall, 1992).

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

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

Collaboration between links remains important for the functioning and efficiency of the child protection system. But referring to the studies it is noticed that achieving coordination of links remains a challenge itself. Hallett and Birchall (1992) have suggested that the research about the definition, practice, and efficacy of collaboration in the child maltreatment field is confusing and incomplete. The authors fear that many collaborative efforts begin without an appreciation of the true complexity of the effort and that the process of collaboration often gets confused with the outcomes of the effort. Reducing some of the uncertainties surrounding collaboration will require addressing appropriate funding and the development of formal mechanisms to bind outcomes. A considerable amount of funding and resources are needed for effective collaboration. Funding for initiating and sustaining a policy outcome through collaboration is rarely available at the level needed (Berman, 1996; Porter & Salvesen, 1995).

Inter-organisational working permeates current government policy for the care of children (DfES, 2005a), but the number of professions working with them has long posed problems for effective coordinated working (Hall, 1997). Numerous inquiries into the abuse of children from Maria Colwell (Department of Health & Social Security, 1972) to Victoria Climbié (Laming, 2003) have drawn attention to failures in communication, collaboration and trust between the professions involved.

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

Both Hallett and Birchall (1992) and Ovretveit (1996) stress the need for the partnership to be composed of appropriate members. This is often a challenge at the higher levels of collaboration where there might be a wide variety of agencies seeking representation, especially from the non-government sector (Huxham & Vaugen, 2000). However, it remains the case that “partnership” is still seen more as a means to promote interprofessional working rather than a way of placing service users at the center of agencies’ attention, as the primary stakeholder for collaboration. This was reflected in Morrison’s survey (described in Morrison & Lewis, 2005) of over 200 English members of 16 Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs).

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

Establishing the goals for collaboration can be complex because of differences in use of language, organizational cultures and procedures (Huxham & Vaugen, 2000). Lipsky (1980) also notes the goals set by senior managers may be differently interpreted by front-line practitioners. "If members are unclear about the structures of the collaboration, they cannot be clear where the accountabilities lie" (Huxham & Vaugen, 2000, p. 800). Tomison (1999) undertook research designed to evaluate the decision making of the various professionals involved in the management of suspected and confirmed child abuse and neglect cases. The study was carried out in the predominantly urban, Barwon region of the State of Victoria. The study found that the child protection network under investigation suffered from a number of inter-professional coordination and communication problems. Missing cases and missing data was a problem. In extreme instances this meant that basic child demographics were not collected and/or the official designation applied by the worker to identify the type of maltreatment that was suspected for specific cases was omitted (Tomison 1999).

Turnell and Edwards point out that: The challenge is to create a structure and models of child protection practice that address the seriousness of alleged or substantiated maltreatment while maximizing the possibility of collaboration between families and workers (Turnell & Edwards, 1999, p. 27). Collaboration is compromised if there is no one person responsible to orientate the new person to the ways of the team (Burbank et al, 2002). Other reports have also called for better coordination, for example, guidelines (Department of Health, 1988 & 1992) to assist in implementing the 1989 Children Act. Long before, the Warnock report (1978) had recommended a named person for each child with special needs, a simple idea but the reality has often proved more difficult (Audit Commission, 1994).

Much has nevertheless been done to overcome these problems. Designation of a single professional able to liaise with a range of practitioners from other professions on behalf of a family is proving to be a success in many parts of the UK (Appleton et al., 1997). It has, for example, been a huge achievement in Leicester where coordinated team meetings are now the norm (Anderson & Couloute, 2005). The outcome is greater understanding of interprofessional relationships at the point of service delivery. However, as Anderson & Couloute highlight, professionals still find it difficult to agree on shared goals and assimilation of different perspectives remains a challenge. An essential element of communication is the exchange of relevant and timely information between professionals. Reder and Duncan found a lack of information sharing between professionals – as well as delays and inaccuracies – was recorded in most of the case reviews they examined.

CONCLUSIONS

According to literature we emphasize the idea that collaboration is the key of success in a child protection system. The child protection worker stands at the core of this system. He is a bridge who connect all the professionist together in the best interest of the child as their primary consideration. The child protection worker takes the responsibility for gathering information about a child's health, education, and family, stage of development, living environment, concerns regarding his/her welfare and/ or protection and community. Social networks have significant protective functions for the children. Each member part of this collaboration contributes with its own resources, expertise and reputation. All this makes the collaboration more essential. The field of child protection is an area which requires qualified and motivated professionals because high-risk fields need more support and expertise. The researchers point that the collaboration between the links of the system is very important to bring changes and outcomes to the client. In this process it is needed an open and effective

communication, shared vision and goals between the links, clarity and understanding about roles and responsibilities, trust between the professionals involved, good coordination, joint assumption of risks and resources, etc.

There are a number of problems that influence the process of collaboration but essentially it is estimated as a desirable work practice.

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