The Impact of 'risk' on professionals' perspectives and responses towards young people with complex needs and their families

Raising awareness among social care practitioners

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Daughters of Charity Child and Family Services

Meeting the needs of families in a constantly changing world

Focus of Presentation

▶ Bring attention to the impact of risk on perceptions, attitudes and decision making for social care practitioners

▶ How risk is experienced by workers

▶ How it influences decision, assessment and responses 'Blame' – problem families

▶ Importance of 'relationships'

▶ Present an example of an organisational approach of 'value based practice' within Daughters of Charity Child and Family Services

Covid 19 – The great leveller?

- Pre-COVID-19 inequalities documented by the Growing Up in Ireland and other studies have grown in the wake of the pandemic

- Negative effects on wellbeing and mental health have been more apparent among those from disadvantaged backgrounds as well as among younger adults.

- Fndings are suggestive of increased inequality for Children also.

- In addition to formal education, learning outside school is also severely affected, with limited options available to young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds

- Wile the pandemic impacts on the outcomes of all children, the gap between the advantaged and less advantaged is likely to widen as it will be harder for the more vulnerable groups to 'catch up'

  - (ESRI, 2020)

Referrals to Tusla rose 23% last year to almost 70,000

More than 8,500 young people on waiting list for primary care psychological services, Dáil hears

Minister Mary Butler told the Dáil today she was "especially concerned about the rise in eating disorders among girls and young women".

MORE THAN 8,500 young people are waiting for primary care psychological services, while around 2,500 children and adolescents are on waiting lists for mental health services, a TD has said.

The Dáil heard that the coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated mental health issues across many cohorts of people in Ireland.

Sinn Fein's Mark Ward said the country has gone from a mental health crisis to a mental health emergency since the onset of the pandemic.

STATEMENTS and Questions and Answers on Mental Health and Covid-1

Sinn Féin TD Mark Ward speaking in the Dáil today.

Image: Oireachtas TV

Childcare crisis: How a creaking, outdated model is leaving working parents high and dry

Creches say they can't cope with the demand for places as parents return to the office after Covid, leaving many families in the lurch. We report on an industry in crisis

COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts Mental Health Worldwide

PHYSICAL DISTANCING MEASURES TO MITIGATE VIRAL SPREAD INCREASED ANXIETY

A study conducted by Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health researchers reports a high global prevalence of both depression and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also shows how the implementation of mitigation strategies including public transportation and school closures, and stay-at-home orders impacted such disorders. Results are published in *Psychological Medicine.*

The Caring Professions – Occupational Hazard

Heavy workloads, too few staff: social care workers say stress is inevitable

Guardian survey finds 93% of those working in public services and the voluntary sector are stressed because of their jobs

▲ One social worker said they were 'just exhausted all of the time, irritable, snappy'. Photograph: Bruce Ayres/Getty Images

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A qualitative study of experiences of NHS mental healthcare workers during the Covid-19 pandemic

Elisa Liberati, Natalie Richards, Janet Willars, David Scott, Nicola Boydell, Jennie Parker, Vanessa Pinfold, Graham Martin, Mary Dixon-Woods & Peter B. Jones ✉

Abstract

Background

The Covid-19 pandemic has imposed extraordinary strains on healthcare workers. But, in contrast with acute settings, relatively little attention has been given to those who work in mental health settings. We aimed to characterise the experiences of those working in English NHS secondary mental health services during the first wave of the pandemic.
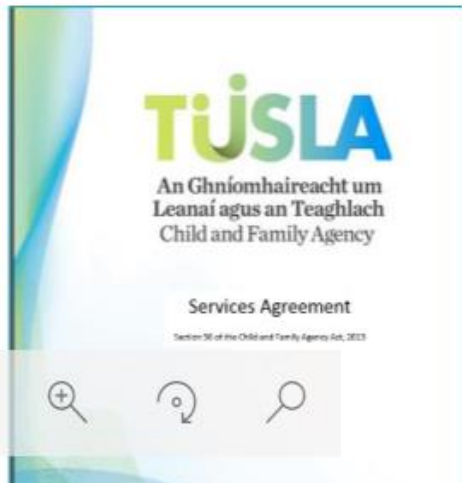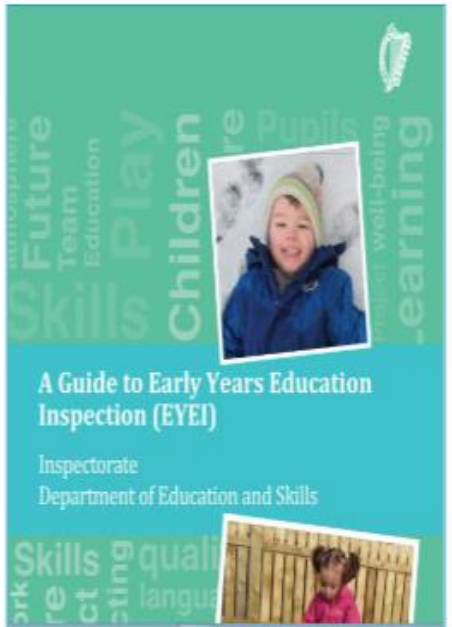
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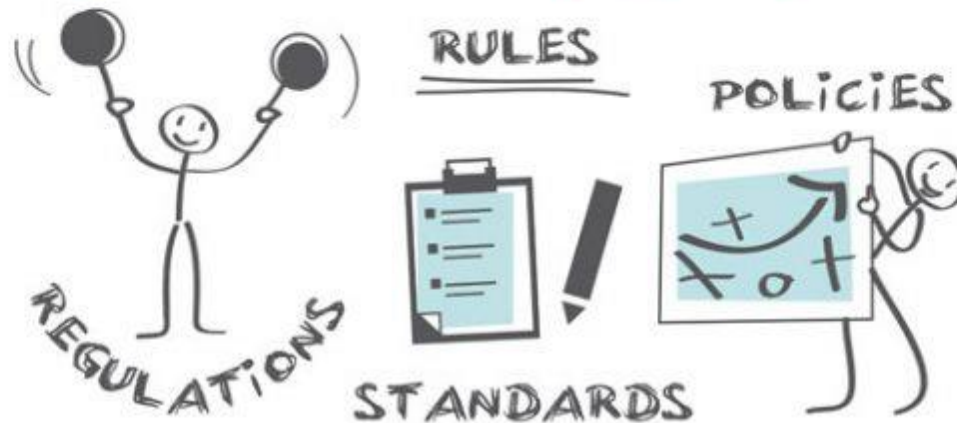
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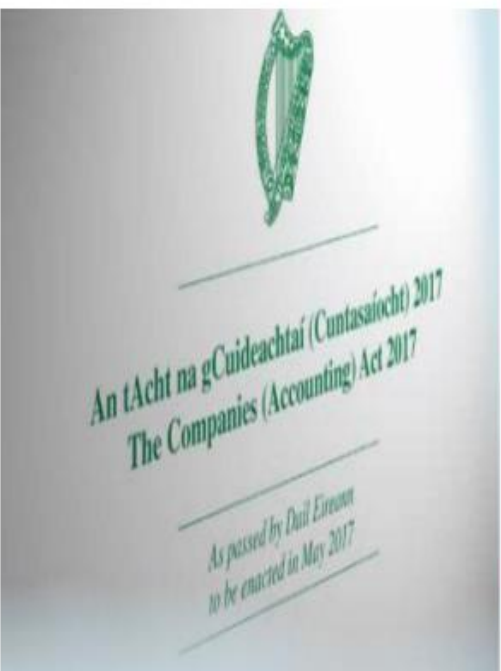
Relationships & Space to Reflect

'Culture of fear' was pervasive and limited the ability of care staff to develop 'relationship-based practice' with children in their care (Browne et al 2018)

There is a need for professionals engaged in human service work to confront the powerful and primitive emotional states that underpin helping relationships, particularly with families in most need. (O'Sullivan, 2018)

The negative impact of risk on the day to day practice of professionals and their relationships with service users is well documented (Brandon et al., 2008; Colton & Roberts, 2007; Ferguson, 2009; Hood, 2014; McElvaney & Tatlow Golden, 2016)

State: History of Service Provision to 'Complex Youth' in Ireland

▸ Dual emphasis on care and control

▸ Unclear definition of 'risk' and 'need' in responses

▸ Young people identified as a 'threat' coercively confined to protect, rehabilitate and remoralise (Raftery and O'Sullivan, 1999)

▸ Reliance by the Sate on non state organisations

▸ Risk, control and blame discourses influencing factors in attitudes and responses

'Risk' within policy, practice, attitudes and decisions – what the research tells us

- Increased pressure and workloads has led to feelings of frustration and powerlessness (Colton and Roberts, 2007; Ferguson, 2009; McElvaney and Tatlow-Golden, 2016)

- Long waiting lists because of cuts to services affected young people negatively in accessing an appropriate service (McElvaney and Tatlow-Golden, 2016).

- Differing thresholds of need and categorisations of risk in implementing multi-agency responses (Brandon, et al., 2008; Platt and Turney, 2014; Hood, 2015).

Practice Models

- Thresholds (need-harm continuum)

- Signs of Safety

- Early Intervention and Prevention 'Just Parent Better'

- Adverse Childhood Experience Scale

The Case Study – Young People with Complex Needs

- To explore the factors that informed attitudes, decisions and resulting service responses of multi agency professionals providing services to young people with complex needs

- 27 participants across within 6 categories of services (14 disciplines) in North East Region ROI

- Qualitative – Semi structured interviews and vignettes

- Ecological Systems Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1994)

'Complex Youth' – Definition and Characterstics

- Youth involved in both child protection and youth justice services (Huan, Ryan and Herz, 2011) and to those involved with several other services including mental health, educational support, and other support services (Biehal, Sinclair and Wade, 2014; Haight, et al., 2014).

- More likely to experience greater challenges in their lives, bringing them into contact with a wider range of services

- Range of professionals engaged with these young people

- Challenges in assessing and responding appropriately to these young people

- Effective working at a multi-agency level is inhibited by inadequate and poor integrated data across the services

Young people continue to struggle

- 15 – 17 year olds disproportionally subject to more Section 12 orders by the Gardai than other age groups (NUIG, 2020)
- Parenting issues main reason for removal

YP in detention experience complex needs
- 50% have a mental health need,
- 60% are not engaged in full-time education prior to detention
- 40% have suffered the loss of one or both parents either through death, imprisonment or no long-term contact
- 70% have substance misuse problems
- 40% have either been in care or had significant involvement with Tusla prior to their detention in (Oberstown Annual Report, 2020)

Ecological Context of Attitudes and Decisions

Structural

societal attitudes,

Managerialism,

bureaucratic factors,

multi-agency relationships, practices and resources

Interpersonal

workplace,

practice knowledge, reflexivity

Intrapersonal

age, race, gender, professional qualifications, experience, personality
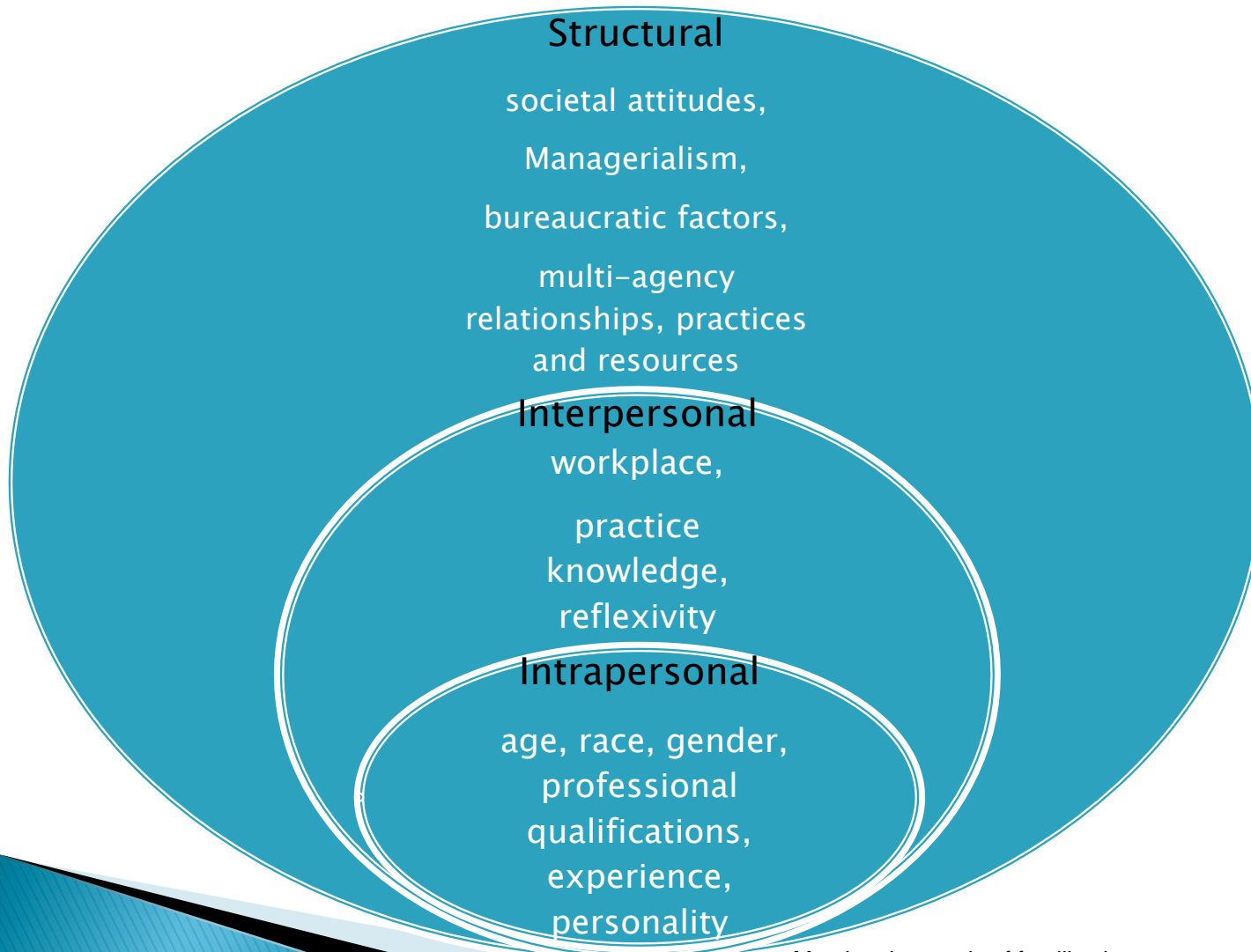
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Reliance on Practice Wisdom

▸ Overreliance on intuition, implicit knowledge, and confirmation bias based on previous experience can override any empirical knowledge and leave assessments open to error (Sheppard, 1998; Munro, 1998, 1999; Gambrill, 2005; Bartelink, van Yperen and ten Berge, 2015).

▸ The reliance on practice knowledge, in filling in the gaps in the analysis of information, suggests that a large degree of trust and reliance is based on previous experiences which inform current analysis (Kemshall, 1998; Howarth, 2007; Baker, 2008) and that this is distinct from 'knowledge as product' or factual knowledge derived from theory (Sheppard, 1995, 1998).

Findings
Risk within the Social Ecological Context of Practice

Intrapersonal –

developmentalism discourse (risk normalised and expected – positive)

Interpersonal –troubled families discourse (blame for risk with families – arising from unmet need)
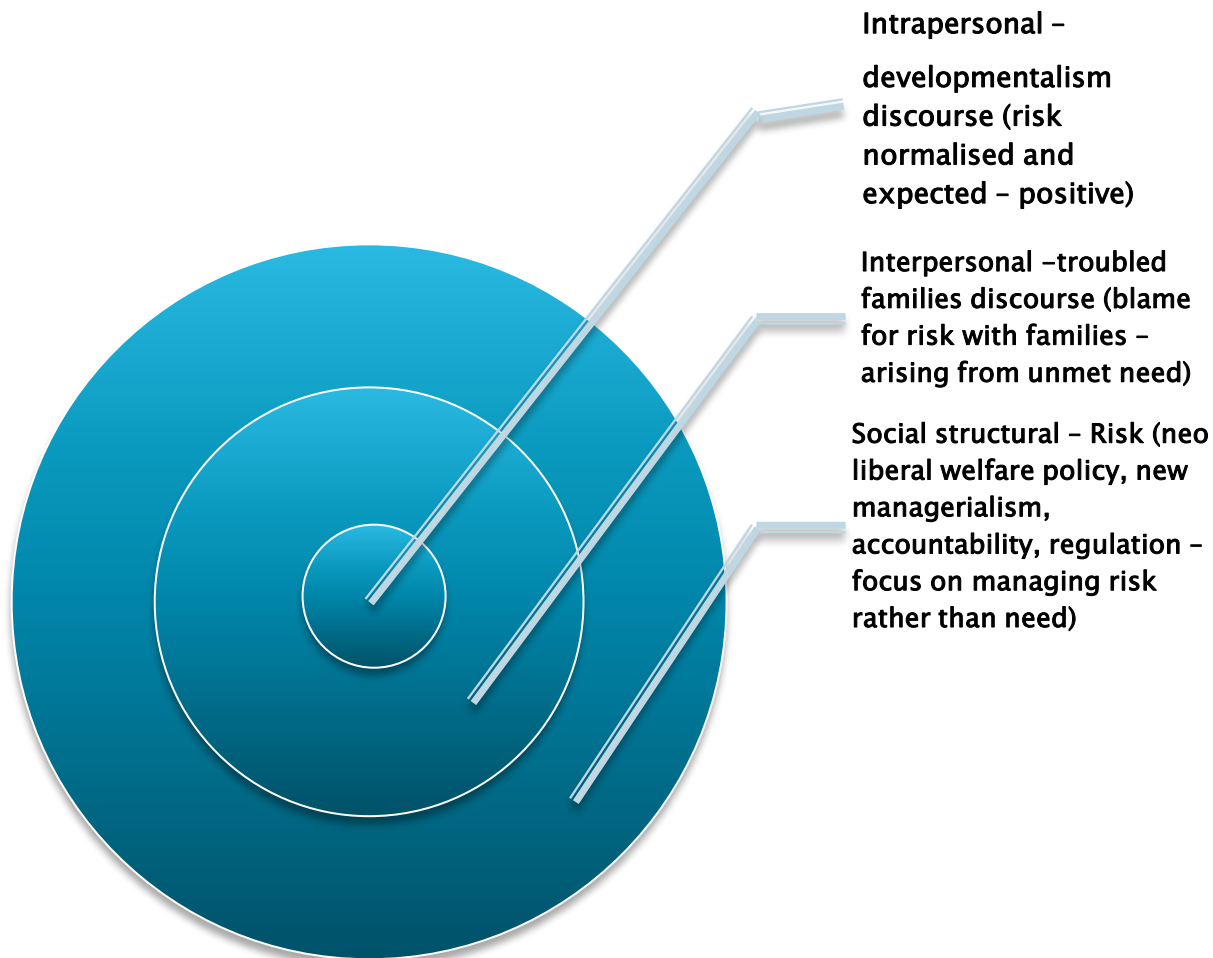
Social structural – Risk (neo liberal welfare policy, new managerialism, accountability, regulation – focus on managing risk rather than need)

Key Findings and Practice Implications
Influence of Structural Risk

- Focus on 'managing risk' rather than 'meeting need'

- Struggle to manage the risk agenda in practice in juggling access to scare resources

- Voice of the Professional and service user silent and absent

- Default to moral values and attitudes

- Over reliance on uncertain and subjective 'practice wisdom'

- Danger of lens of 'blame' focused on certain categories of 'problem' or 'deficit' families without consideration of structural inequalities

- Rationalisation for not accessing services based on 'what has gone before'

- Strategies employed by professionals perpetuate this cycle

Moral attitudes (values) Interpersonal – 'Problem' Families

▸ Taken for granted view that the risky behaviours of certain categories of 'different from' complex youth is as a result of 'deficit' and 'problem' families

'I suppose young people who are damaged wouldn't be the right word but you do feel they have less of a chance nearly because their parent, person whoever, they've lived with haven't really met their needs' (Suzanne, youth justice services).

Problem and Weak Families...

▸ Suggests that a high threshold of parental responsibility is applied to families of complex youth

'We often get that, take them away and fix them and we're thinking have you any level of responsibility for that because as a parent and professional in this field if my son had difficulties I'm not going to land up on a doorstep and say take him into care. I'm going to work through this at home and with my extended family or if I can get something in school for him or in the community'. (Miriam, child protection and welfare)

Reliance on Practice Wisdom...

▸ Reliance on 'what has gone before'

'I see the same sort of kids... back in the 1970's when I was a youth leader, the same vulnerable kids from the lower socioeconomic groupings where there was unemployment, addictions, they were the ones ending up in trouble. Where there was some level of functionality in the family, they tended to do better. I don't think that's changes, its pretty much the same' (Neil, addiction services)

Structural Risk and its Impact on Practice

➢Findings indicated professionals are paralysed and constricted by the culture of   fear, driven by a culture of accountability and litigation

'Its fear of retribution, or a case going wrong, or what you haven't done..that's the focus' (Amy, Child protection and welfare services)

'

Structural Risk and its Impact on Practice

‣Professionals were under pressure to focus on risk 'first' and to prove the effectiveness of services

'Its management of the risk first. Parents ask that of us, courts ask that of us, systems and schools ask that of us. Its about managing the risks we need to show our interventions are effective by reducing risk, you know.. So the risk is being managed but its not meeting the need.' (Robert, mental health services)

Impact of Managerialism…

- Impact of high waiting lists and cuts to services.

'Young people have been used to being bounced around. It's very hard for me to trust the service. You only feel like you're getting started with some of these young people and then they're gone..I suppose its the waiting list is the priority'(Winne, community and voluntary services).

Impact of Managerialism…

▸ Pressure on staff to do more with less

'We all love our jobs, we really do, so we end up working all the hours but that doesn't really work either cos you're showing that you're doing better than you actually are, so that doesn't really work for kids either because people are thinking you've all this done, but it's a false perception of what you're actually doing' (Amy, child protection and welfare services)

Impact of Managerialism…

- Impact of compliance and accountability on meeting need

    'So, it's kind of accountability and everything has to be recorded. And there's has this been recorded is there a phone call record 'cos we could get in trouble if this wasn't and I know that's important because of laws at the moment but the young person is suffering'. (Ellen, community and voluntary services)

Practices used by professionals to cope with impact of 'risk'

▸ Deflection of referral to another service

▸ Making a referral fit a service

▸ Drawing on professional relationships and networks

▸ Escalation and de-escalation of risk

▸ Accepting the 'inevitable' and 'second' best'

Professional and Practice Implications...

▸ Voice of the Professional silent and absent

▸ Reliance on uncertain and subjective 'practice wisdom'

▸ Danger of lens of 'blame' become focused on certain categories of 'problem' or 'deficit' families without consideration of structural inequalities

▸ Rationalisation for not accessing services based on 'what has gone before'

▸ Focus within practice about 'managing risk' rather than 'addressing need'

▸ Strategies employed by professionals perpetuate this cycle

▸ Creation of 'expert knowledge' based on 'riskiness'

▸ Compounded by practice models ACE, Trauma Informed, SOS and Threshold of Harm

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse Childhood Experience Survey		
QUESTION	**Yes**	**No**
Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?		
Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?		
Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever… Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?		
Did you often or very often feel that … No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?		
Did you often or very often feel that … You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?		
Were your parents ever separated or divorced?		
Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?		
Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or who used street drugs?		
Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?		
Did a household member go to prison?		
Add up your "yes" answers – that's your ACES score		

What are Adverse Childhood Experiences

Relationship between early childhood trauma and health and well-being problems later in life.

Source: World Health Organization

Death

Birth

Early Death

Disease, Disability and social problems

Adoption of Health-risk Behaviors

Social, Emotional, & Cognitive Impairment

Adverse Childhood Experiences

What are Adverse Childhood Experiences

How many adults reported each ACE in 2017?

Child maltreatment | Household ACEs

Verbal abuse 20% | Physical abuse 16% | Sexual abuse 7% | Parental separation 25% | Mental illness 18% | Domestic violence 17%

Neglect was measured for the first time in 2017. Most people who reported neglect had multiple ACEs.

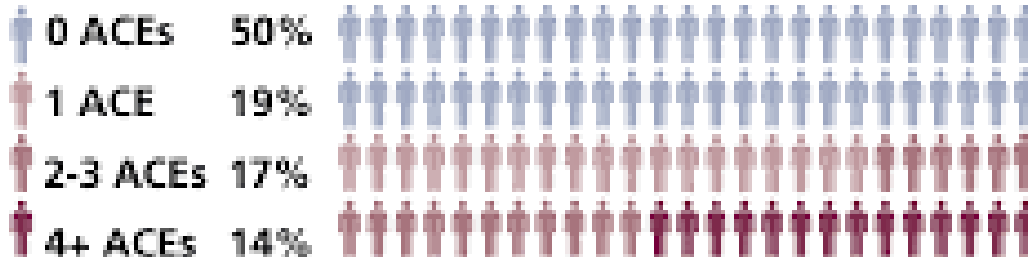Emotional neglect 7% | Physical neglect 4% | Alcohol abuse 13% | Drug abuse 6% | Incarceration 4%

For every 100 adults in Wales,
50 had at least one ACE and 14 had four or more

0 ACEs 50%
1 ACE 19%
2-3 ACEs 17%
4+ ACEs 14%

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'Problem Family' in policy

- UK social policy responses aimed at targeting these families as 'troublemakers' and on the margins, most recently the 'Troubled Families Programme' (Crossley, 2018).

- Strong link between austerity, local area deprivation and family policy with policies becoming more focused on placing individual responsibility for families in areas of high deprivation (Bywaters et al., 2018)

- Families socio economic profile linked to children placed on child protection plan (Bywaters et al., 2018)

Recommendations

Social/Structural:

▸ Create opportunities for leadership in organisations to discuss the impact of structural risk on policies, procedures, resource allocation and service delivery

Organisational

▸ Reconnect with vision, mission and values of the organisation AND of the practitioners within them

▸ Organisational responses and commitment to exploring impact of risk on all levels

Interpersonal/Intrapersonal

▸ Reflective practice built into daily practice and supported through organisational processes to explore impact of moral attitudes and practice wisdom on decisions

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Recommendations
giving voice and visibility....

Social/Structural:

▸ Create opportunities and fora for leadership within individual organisations to discuss the impact of structural risk on policies, procedures, resource allocation and service delivery

▸ Models of practice are developed that not only identify social structural issues and their impact on 'complex youth' and their families (service users) but actively challenge them too

Organisational

▸ Reconnect with vision, mission and values of the organisation AND of the practitioners within them

▸ More multi agency practice models with 'complex youth' are developed

▸ Group supervision between professionals become embedded as a core part of service delivery (SOS)
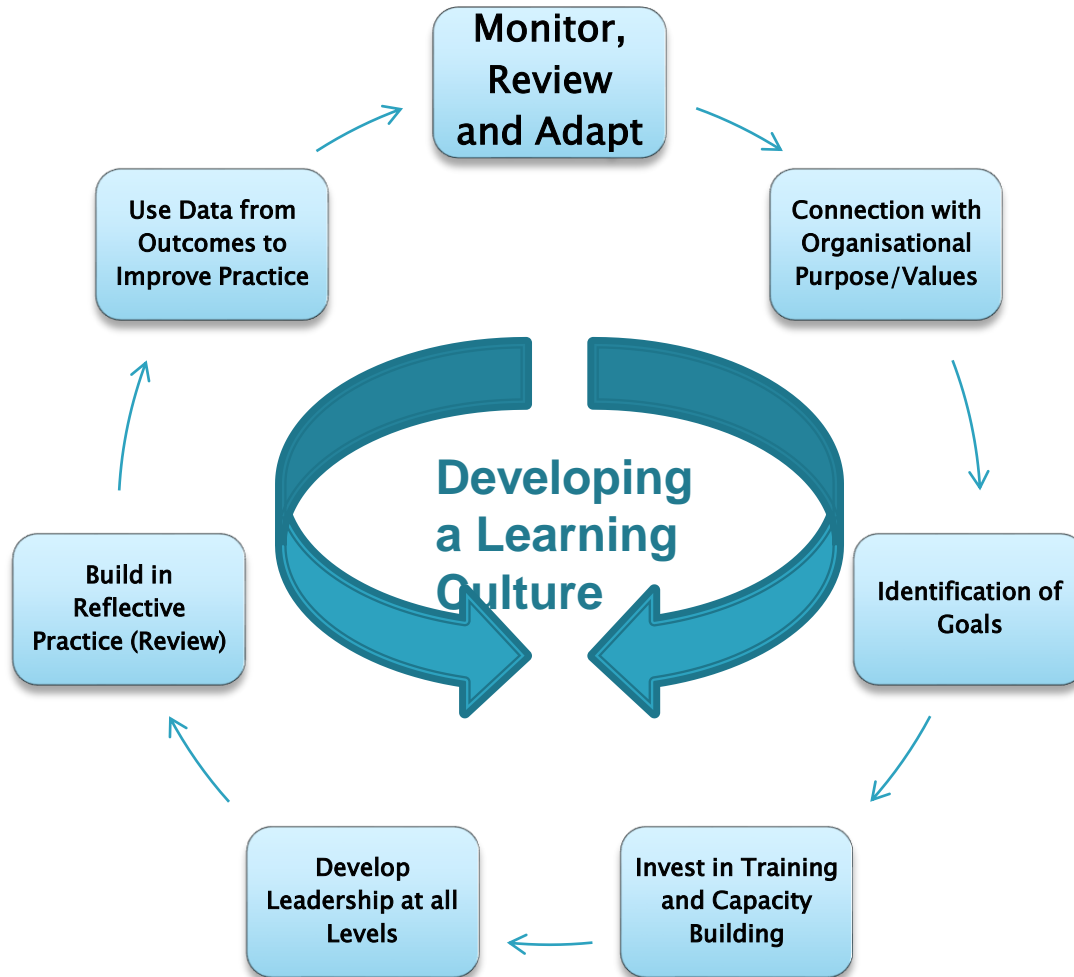
Interpersonal/Intrapersonal

▸ Informal spaces for professional reflection are built into daily practice and supported through organisational processes and structures

Organisational Context of Value Based Practice

Strategic Pillar   -   Staff Wellbeing and Support Strategy

Cultural/Structural Vision, Mission, values

Interpersonal Within/ between levels

Intrapersonal reflective practice

Staff, management and leadership within organisation

Values, Vision and Mission of the organisation core to the work

Risk within welfare policy and impact on organisation Compliance, managerialism, accountability

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Thank You
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