Family Preservation or Child Safety? How Experience and Position Shape Child Welfare Workers’ Perspectives

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Practice and Research Together

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Session Overview

• A Brief Exercise
• The Dynamics of Child Protection Systems
• The Decision Making Ecology
• Dalgleish Scale Results
  – No Place Like Home
  – Quality Improvement Center for Differential Response
• Discussion
The Dynamics of Child Protection Systems: A Matter of Balance

• Experience of Child Welfare System is Characterized by Pendulum Swings
  – Family Preservation vs. Child Safety
  – Protection of Children vs. Sound Financial Management
How is Practice Shaped?

Family Preservation

Child Safety
Child Protection System Dynamics

DECISION-MAKING ECOLOGY (DME) – A Systems Framework for Thinking about Child Welfare Decision Making
Decision Making Ecology
(Baumann, Dalgleish, Fluke & Kern, 2011)
Case Factors

- Type of Maltreatment
- Pattern of Maltreatment
- Risk of Harm
- Safety
- Child and Family Characteristics
Decision Making Ecology
(Baumann, Dalgleish, Fluke & Kern, 2011)

Case Factors
Organizational Factors
External Factors
Decision Maker Factors

Decision Making
Outcomes

Influences
Decisions
Outcomes
Organizational Factors

- Resources and Caseloads
- Time Pressures
- Bureaucratic Distractions
- Support & Unit Cohesion
- Policy
Decision Making Ecology

(Baumann, Dalgleish, Fluke & Kern, 2011)

Case Factors
Organizational Factors
External Factors
Decision Maker Factors

Decision Making

Outcomes

Influences
Decisions
Outcomes
External Factors

- Law
- Critical Events
- Community Engagement
- Funding
- Social Issues
Decision Making Ecology

(Baumann, Dalgleish, Fluke & Kern, 2011)

- Case Factors
- Organizational Factors
- External Factors
- Decision Maker Factors

Decision Making

Outcomes
Decision Maker Factors

- Experience
- Skills (inc. Training and Education)
- Values
- Comfort with Casework and Self-Efficacy
- Orientation (protection vs. preservation)
Training and Attitudes

• Alcohol and drug abuse training changed child welfare workers’ attitudes towards clients with these issues (Gregoire, 1994)

• But resource availability impacted ability to apply new knowledge and attitudes to practice

• Training and self-efficacy are interrelated (Scourfield et al., 2012)
  – Training increases self-efficacy
  – Workers with higher self-efficacy are more likely to use new skills and apply training to practice
Self-Efficacy and Attitudes

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is the extent or strength of one’s belief in one’s own ability to complete tasks and reach goals.¹

- Arises from four sources:
  - Performance accomplishments
  - Vicarious experience
  - Verbal persuasion
  - Emotional arousal

- Higher self-efficacy and increased competency well established in the research literature
Education and Attitudes

- Mixed results
- Some evidence to suggest social workers and non-social workers make different decisions (Fluke et al., 2010)
- Possible that workers with higher education levels assigned more complex cases
- Some evidence that graduate education (compared to undergraduate or college) results in better understanding of the structural issues impacting families
Response to Uncertainty: Risk Assessments

- Risk assessments based only on information that is readily available at one point in time
- Risk assessments are not exhaustive
- Intuition based on experience supplements risk assessments
- Intuition based on heuristics and attitudes
- Leads workers to attend to information that confirms their assumptions and ignore information that challenges assumptions
- Unconscious refusal to reanalyze maltreatment assessments causes avoidable child protection mistakes (Munro, 1996)
Factors Explaining Decision to Intervene

- Unknown (65%)
- Risk Assessment (14%)
- Interaction between attitude and risk assessment (3%)
- Worker attitude... (12%)

Factors Explaining Decision to Intervene

Worker attitude...

Risk Assessment (14%)

Interaction between attitude and risk assessment (3%)

Unknown (65%)
Decision Making in Child Welfare

• Subjective judgments influence caseworkers’ decision making; workers have latitude in interpreting and applying agency policy

• Decisions impact the trajectory of a family reported to CPS
  – To what extent do staff characteristics, experiences, and personal/professional beliefs influence these decisions?
No Place Like Home Evaluation

• 18-Month Data Collection Period

• Five Surveys
  1. Staff Survey
  2. Caregiver Survey
  3. Fidelity Survey (Participant and Coordinators)
  4. Case-Specific Questionnaire
  5. Caregiver and Participant Post-Meeting Surveys

• Administrative Data Extracts (Services, Outcomes)

• Site-Specific Evaluation Designs
General Child Welfare Staff Survey

Survey Contents

- Demographic characteristics
- Agency position (job)
- Employment experience
- Case skills
- Family meeting knowledge and attitudes
- Job satisfaction
- Family meeting effectiveness
- Organizational culture and climate
- Service availability
- Child Safety vs. Family Preservation proclivity
General Child Welfare Staff Survey

Respondents:

• Any staff member who may have referred families to No Place Like Home

• Any staff member participating in a family meeting (including facilitators)

• Any staff supervising direct service staff members
Staff Survey Study Sample

• 290 respondents in study sample
• 90% female, 49% white (32% Black)
• Nearly half had post-graduate education
• 70% carried a caseload
• Average 6.4 years in child welfare
• High ratings of job satisfaction, confidence in service providers, and organizational climate
## The Dalgleish Instrument

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Family Preservation Statement</th>
<th>Paired Child Safety Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pair #1</strong></td>
<td>• Work should be focused on keeping the family together.</td>
<td>• Child protection workers should be willing to be an advocate for the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pair #2</strong></td>
<td>• Work should be focused on keeping the family together.</td>
<td>• The client is the child and all other work is secondary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pair #3</strong></td>
<td>• Work should be focused on keeping the family together.</td>
<td>• Work should be focused on protecting the child.</td>
</tr>
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# The Dalgleish Instrument

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<th>Statement</th>
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<td><strong>Pair #4</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Families are the best place for children to achieve their full potential.</td>
<td>• The family’s right to guide the development of their children should be safeguarded.</td>
<td>• There is a need to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of all children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pair #5</strong>&lt;br&gt;• The family’s right to guide the development of their children should be safeguarded.</td>
<td>• Families are the best place for children to achieve their full potential.</td>
<td>• Children’s rights should be safeguarded so they achieve their full potential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pair #6</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Families are the best place for children to achieve their full potential.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• The state has a responsibility to protect children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Dalgleish Instrument

**Statement Pair #7**
- The state should not be responsible for families or their children.

**Family Preservation Statement**
- Families are the best place for children to achieve their full potential.

**Paired Child Safety Statement**
- There is a need to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of all children.
- Children’s rights should be safeguarded so they achieve their full potential.
Family Preservation or Child Safety Orientation (by Position)

Across Counties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement Pair #1</th>
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<td>FC</td>
<td>SP</td>
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<td>FC</td>
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<table>
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<td>SP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CW</td>
<td>SP</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note:  □ CW = Caseworker;  ○ SP = Supervisor;  ▢ FC = Facilitator/Coordinator
Family Preservation or Child Safety Orientation (by Position)

Across Counties

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<td>#1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>SP</td>
<td>FC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>FC</td>
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<td>CW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>SP</td>
<td>CW</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: CW = Caseworker; SP = Supervisor; FC = Facilitator/Coordinator
Constructing the Dalgleish Scale

• Staff were asked to choose a statement, but also to rate their strength of preference from 1 to 5.

• Dropping one statement pair (#7), a staff orientation “scale” was created by adding the statement selections and strength of preferences together.

• Range: -35 to 35
Dalgleish Scale Responses

Mean = 2.524
Std. Dev. = 14.4579
N = 290
Factors Contributing to Staff Orientation

What characteristics of workers are associated with their strength of orientation (preference) toward family preservation versus child safety?

- Age
- Gender
- Education
- County (Location)
- Race/ethnicity
- Organizational climate and culture
- Job satisfaction
- Workload
- Years of experience
- Perceptions of community services
Preliminary Analysis of Factors Associated with Staff Orientation

Years in Child Welfare
More years ➔ Family preservation orientation

Case-Carrying Staff
Carry caseload ➔ Child safety orientation

Org. Climate/Culture
Shared vision ➔ Child safety orientation

Weighted Orientation: Family Preservation (-) or Child Safety (+)
## Preliminary Models of Factors Associated with Staff Orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Ref: Female)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>-4.10</td>
<td>-3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity (Ref: Other)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>-0.62</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (Ref: Post-grad work)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree or below</td>
<td>-1.58</td>
<td>-0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County (Ref: County 4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County 1</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County 2</td>
<td>-3.96</td>
<td>-3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County 3</td>
<td>-3.52</td>
<td>-4.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log (Years in child welfare)</td>
<td>-6.93***</td>
<td>-6.71**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carries a caseload</td>
<td>5.12*</td>
<td>4.87*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>-1.06</td>
<td>-0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in finding services</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average OCC supervisor rating</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average OCC leadership rating</td>
<td>-2.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average OCC shared vision rating</td>
<td>3.52**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A significant increase in the log likelihood goodness-of-fit estimate and the increase in the $R^2$ estimate indicate the Model 1 (including worker ratings) is a slightly better predictive model.
Implications

• Strongest predictors of orientation:
  o Fewer years in child welfare and working directly with families

• Attitudes within an agency can be competing

• Implications for:
  o Organizational culture
  o Training needs
  o Compliance with policy mandates
  o Consistency and transparency in decision-making
  o Staff morale
QIC-DR Project: Methods

- Data from the Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response project (QIC-DR)

- Variables:
  - Education
  - Experience
  - Age
  - Worker role
  - Training
  - Perception of skill level

- Confidence in community resources to meet the needs of the family
- Confidence in Child Protection Services to meet the needs of the family
- Attitude towards child welfare
Participants

- Sample size: 1,413 workers
- 78.6% female and 21.4% male
- Age range 24-64 years (mean = 41.5)
- 51.7% had graduate schooling and 48.3% had college education
- Average 12 years in child welfare (range from less than a year to 39 years)
QIC-DR Results

- Older → Family preservation orientation
- Confidence in Community Resources → Family preservation orientation
- Perception of Skills → Child safety orientation
- Confidence in CPS → Child safety orientation
## Regression Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>-.338</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>-.210***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of skill level</td>
<td>.352</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>8.587***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in child protection system</td>
<td>.446</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>6.585***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in community resources</td>
<td>-.202</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>-6.287***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<.0005
## Model Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
<th>df1</th>
<th>df2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.165</td>
<td>.162</td>
<td>15.196</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1052</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attitude towards child safety**

- **16.5%**: Age, perception of skills, confidence in CPS, confidence in comm. Resources
- **83.5%**: Unknown
Discussion: Resource Availability

- Workers with higher confidence in the ability of community services to meet client needs were more likely to have attitudes in favour of family responsibility for child safety.

- Low confidence in community services results in a lack of inter-system collaboration (Ryan et al., 2001).

- Lack of collaboration between services results in a less efficient and effective inter-system service response by community agencies (Ryan et al., 2001).
Discussion: Resource Availability

- Workers with attitudes in favour of protecting any child at risk are more likely to investigate cases regardless of the availability of community services (Wells, Lyons, Doueck, Brown, & Thomas, 2004)

- Significant relationship between the availability of resources and worker’s ability to manage workload (Juby & Scannapieco, 2007)
Discussion: Training and Skills

- Stronger perception of own skills related to attitudes in favor of family responsibility for child safety
- Self-efficacy also related to intention to remain in the field (Ellett, 2000)
- Attitude towards responsibility for child safety could be guided by developing child welfare workers’ sense of self-efficacy

“If I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning.”

~ Mahatma Gandhi ~
Discussion: Education

• Education near significance, but not significant predictor of attitudes
• Education and perception of skills strongly correlated – indirect impact on attitudes
• Other types of education (social work versus non-social work) must be examined.

The value of a college education is not the learning of many facts but the training of the mind to think.

– Albert Einstein

www.quotesworthrepeating.com
Limitations

• Dalgleish Scale – forced choice dichotomy
• Other possible factors: case load size, job satisfaction, and supervisor/agency support
• Type of training
• Perceived skill vs. actual skill
• Number of Sites
Implications

• Attitudes regarding primary responsibility for child safety, the state or caregivers, are not inherently positive or negative
• Organizations may prefer one attitude or the other, depending on their mandate
• Agencies could direct their training towards understanding community resources and developing collaboration within the community
• Match older workers with younger workers, or case-carrying with those that don’t, to model practice decisions
Discussion

- What Thoughts Do You Have About the Exercise?
- What Influences Beliefs About Child Welfare and Family Preservation?
- Are Values and Beliefs About Child Welfare and Family Preservation Important Decision Drivers?
- How Can the Child Protection System Be Balanced? Is There a “Right” Balance?
Contact Information

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• Kristina Nikolova: kristina.nikolova@mail.utoronto.ca