

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 issue has taken a special importance worldwide. The prevention and protection of the child from the multiple problems that surround him requires not only qualified professionals but as well collaboration among all actors of relevant fields. In addition, the latter must work as a single body and reinforce their efforts on the best interest of the child. Child protection system ensures collaboration of both formal and informal actors who share the common aim of child protection. The referral system enables the provision of information, support and services in a coordinate manner.

The main purpose of this paper is to reflect some key findings about systems theory, child protection system's structures, functions and capacities, and to bring attention to the role of all actors involved and the importance of referral system.

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.

Key words: Child protection, child protection system, systems theory, referral system

INTRODUCTION

A substantial body of research now supports what child welfare workers have known for decades: The detrimental effects of child abuse and neglect are significant, long-lasting, and can impact every aspect of a child's life (Augoustinos, 1987; Cahill, Kaminer, & Johnson, 1999; Fagan, 2001; Glaser, 2000; Pollak, Cicchetti, Hornung, & Reed, 2000; Smetana & Kelly, 1989; Starr & Wolfe, 1991). Furthermore, many children experience additional trauma and problematic outcomes after they enter protective services (Dumaret, Coppel-Batsch, & Couraud, 1997; Fish & Chapman, 2004).

Preventing or minimizing harm to children is the purpose of child protection work. At the core of a child protection investigation is establishing whether or not a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, harm. The purpose of any subsequent work is to stop harmful things continuing to happen to the child, or at any rate to reduce the chances of them happening, and to reverse or mitigate whatever harm has already been done. Many developing countries governments are now actively promoting systems strengthening as a means to develop more effective and efficient child protection responses. (Beckett, C. 2003).

A systems approach places emphasis on holistic strategy and multi-level strategic partnerships with the aim of protecting all children, and moves away from small scale, vertical projects that only target at-risk categories of children, such as street children and child labourers. A child protection system, has been defined as ‘a comprehensive and sustainable approach to preventing and responding to child protection issues, comprising the set of laws, policies, regulations and services required across all social sectors – especially social welfare, education, health, security and justice – to respond to and prevent protection-related risks’. (Plan.Policy& Programming Resource Guide for Child Protection Systems Strengthening in Sub-Saharan Africa).

Child protection systems aim to improve the protective environment of children by simultaneously addressing underlying vulnerabilities of children, including the specific issues of particularly vulnerable children and child victims of violence (Davey, C. 2012).

One of the earliest references to social work and systems theory goes as far back as the mid-1970s (Forder, 1976). At that time the theory was being articulated most notably in works seeking to provide social workers with a unitary model of practice (see Goldstein, 1973; Pincus and Minahan, 1974), one that could offer a holistic framework within which to place social work practice.

Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968) was a German biologist who devised a general systems theory that could be used to explain how an organism worked: this could be achieved by studying the transactional processes happening between different parts. He understood that the whole was greater than the sum of its parts and that using this theory we could observe patterns and the way relationships were organised in any living system.

According to Beckett, C. (2003) Child protection work in a broader sense embraces not only social workers but a whole range of other professionals, such as doctors, nurses, police officers and lawyers and of course teachers, who arguably have the most important role in protecting children, since they are the only profession which has an overview, on a daily basis, of almost all the children in the country.

Collaboration between links (actors) remains important for the functioning and efficiency of the child protection system.

Many countries have observed a general trend of increasing child protection referrals (Parton and Mathews, 2001).

METHODOLOGY

The paper aims to provide an overall picture of the child protection system, focusing on the understanding of systems theory, referral system and on the collaboration of all actors.

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 helps the researcher to create, analyze and deepen the theoretical framework of previous studies.

The research 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

In the 20th century, child protection systems began in the not-for-profit and advocacy sectors, with rapid expansion from the 1960s. They then evolved into state/territory statutory systems for responding to children who could not remain safely in the care of their parent(s) (Fogarty, 2008; Lamont & Bromfield, 2010; Tomison, 2001).

These systems have grown beyond what anyone could have imagined back in the 1970s and early 1980s, when communities were just starting to become aware of the serious harms that some children face while supposedly in the care of their parents. Since then, there has been a growing expectation that governments - on behalf of the community - have a responsibility to intervene in private family life to protect the wellbeing of these vulnerable and damaged children (Higgins, D. (2011).

Historically, the child protection system has focused most of its limited resources on preventing maltreatment and promoting permanency and well-being among children who are identified as having already been the victims of abuse or neglect. A national Child Protection System is the coordinated series of functions and actions undertaken by a range of duty bearers at all levels, family, community, provincial, national and international that combine to prevent, respond to and mitigate, the multiple child protection risks children face. A Child Protection system should be framed within a rights-based approach and ensure the nondiscriminatory access to support for all children (UNCHR, 2010).

The overall purpose of any child protection system is to promote the well-being of children through prevention of and response to violence, discrimination, abuse and exploitation. A child protection system has certain structures, functions and capacities, among other components that have been assembled in relation to a set of child protection goals (Save the Children, 2009, UNICEF, 2008). A child protection systems approach starts with a purpose or goal. This is because both formal and informal actors are joined through a sense of common purpose. A child protection system can be defined as a set of laws, policies, regulations and services, capacities, monitoring, and oversight needed across all social sectors, especially, social welfare, education, health, security, and justice to prevent and respond to protection related risks (UNICEF, 2010). A child protection systems approach moves away from small scale, vertical projects that only target high visibility, at-risk categories of children. The foundations of the Child Protection Systems are premised on the State's human rights obligations to children under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), both of which Kenya has signed and ratified, together with Chapter 4 of the Constitution of Kenya, 2010. Child protection systems thinking emphasize the need of the different parts of the system to interact with issues within a given social, political and economic context. For the purposes of this guideline, the context will be a county. Generally, the systems literature defines a system as a collection of components or parts that are organized (i.e., connected to each other) around a common purpose or goal (Save the Children, 2009; EAPRO, 2009).

All systems are nested within other systems (Mizikaci, 2006). That is, a given system (e.g., the child protection system) has embedded within its boundaries other systems (e.g., foster care, child protective services reporting, case management). The nested quality of systems may vary by discipline, but the central idea remains: subsystems exist at various levels and are embedded within the larger system environment (Mulroy, 2004; Lemke & Sabelli, 2008). For example, educational systems are structured such that the classroom is nested within individual schools, which are nested in a larger educational system (Bowen, 2004). Health systems, too, tend to include various levels of care that fit one inside the other (Bennett & Eichler, 2006). Social service systems often have this same quality (Dale & Davies, 1985; Cohen, 2002). With specific respect to child protection systems, system functions have been described as falling into one of two categories: those related to case decision making (e.g., assessments, gate-keeping, investigation, placement, etc.) and those designed to support system performance (e.g., capacity building, research and evaluation, allocation of resources, cross-sector coordination, etc.; Save the Children, 2009). Although child protection systems typically serve a wide variety of functions, the effective and efficient operation of the system hinges, at least in part, on a clear statement of how functions and systems are related (Skinner & Bell, 2007).

The definition of structure is somewhat less precise. Whereas system functions refer to what a system does to achieve its goals, system *structure* sometimes refers to how the fundamental elements of the system are connected—that is, the framework or context within which system functions (e.g., services) are carried out (Hmelo-Silver & Pfeffer, 2004; Green & Ellis, 2007). In the field of international development, the notion of *system structures* refers to the framework within which agents in the system interact and form relationships (Brunner, 2007).

For the field of child protection, the structure of the system has been described as including laws, policies, standards, regulations, and the mechanisms to facilitate coordination across service sectors (Save the Children, 2009). More fundamentally, the structure of the child protection system has been discussed in terms of “the organization or structure of institutions . . . They include the different departments and agencies and their capacities” (UNICEF, 2009, p. 14). This latter definition comes closer to definitions of structure that regard structure as the relationship between components within the system (Senge, 1990).

SYSTEMS THEORY

Systems theory describes human behavior in terms of complex systems. It is premised on the idea that an effective system is based on individual needs, rewards, expectations, and attributes of the people living in the system. According to this theory, families, couples, and organization members are directly involved in resolving a problem even if it is an individual issue. (Simmon Staff.2014)

While closely allied, systems theory and the ecological model differ in significant ways. The ecological approach refers to living, a dynamic interaction with an emphasis on active participation with the environment. Systems theory assumes a broader perspective. Although some terms are similar in the description of the two approaches, they are emphasized differently in each theory. The ecological approach focuses on transactions between the individual and their environment at the interface or point where the environment and individual meet. Systems theory, while concerned with environment and individual interchange, is more focused on the equilibrium within the larger system and seeks explanations for behavior within the subsystems and homeostasis of those involved (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, Jr.1993).

Bertalanffy is considered the founding father of systems theory (Greene, 1999). Social work adopted a system theory orientation beginning in the late 1960s. "A system is a holistic, organized unit of

interdependent, transacting, and mutually influencing parts (individuals or collectives and their subunits) within an identifiable (social-ecological) environment" (Siporin, 1975, p. 106). Systems are those elements in lives that relate and interrelate, which have contact and impact on our ability to function. Systems theory's utility for social work practice is that it draws attention to the need for the social worker to examine the multiple systems in which an individual functions. Systems theory can be applied to systems of varying sizes and complexity and helps social workers intervene at multiple stages in an individual's life. The focus of systems theory is on the interrelatedness of social conditions and phenomena (Greene, 1999).

A frequent social work question is whether the environment causes a person to behave in a certain way or does the person affect the environment in ways which creates behavior. Systems theory steps back from that question and provides social work practitioners with a conceptual framework that shifts attention from the cause-and-effect relationship between paired variables to a person/situation as an interrelated whole (Andreae, 1996). Systems theory has also been instrumental in broadening social work's understanding of human behavior in the social environment. The theory's broad, universal principles that begin with the person-in-environment focus expands understanding of the human condition and promotes inclusion of cross-cultural content (Greene, 1991).

Recently, Professor Eileen Munro published a review of the systems for protecting children in the UK. Using systems theory, she argued that what has been created is "a defensive system that puts so much emphasis on procedures and recording that insufficient attention is given to developing and supporting the expertise to work effectively with children, young people and families" (Munro, 2011, p. 6). She emphasised the need for shared responsibility, with good articulation between prevention, early intervention/support, and statutory services.

REFERRAL SYSTEM

A referral system is a multiagent system in which the agents cooperate by giving, pursuing, and evaluating referrals. The referral system evolves to reflect the part of the social network (Yu and Singh, 2002).

Researchers have noted the importance of referrals for human information flow (Brown and Reingen, 1987; Tassier and Menczer, 2001). Further, there is evidence that referrals to acquaintances can be remarkably effective in searching large social networks. The sociologist Milgram discovered that strangers are connected via short chains of acquaintances (1967). Milgram found an average of six links in his sample of pairs of strangers in the US—hence the pop culture concept of Six Degrees of Separation.

Numerous studies have shown that one of the most effective channels for dissemination of information and expertise within an organization is its informal network of collaborators, colleagues, and friends (Granovetter 1973; Kraut 1990; Wasserman and Galaskiewicz 1994).

The study of referrals can support the development of multiagent systems that lack specialized agents such as brokers or facilitators (Decker et al., 1997) or which involve people and agents working with one another. Such multiagent systems apply in the following scenarios.

Referrals enable agents to share information so that untrustworthy parties can be weeded out. We previously developed a probabilistic model of reputation in which an agent combines evidence from a number of witnesses regarding a particular party (Yu and Singh, 2002). Referrals can be used to find reliable witnesses. In the 1960s and 1970s all 50 states passed new child maltreatment reporting laws whose uniformity has been enhanced by federal guidelines tied to funding. Further, referral of suspected cases is now mandatory for certain people; that is, they must report under threat of negative sanction for failing to do so. There has also been a dramatic expansion of persons who must and may report. Thus reporters are no longer only physicians, but also nurses, teachers, day-care providers, law enforcement personnel, social workers, and other mental health professionals. Such persons must report when "they

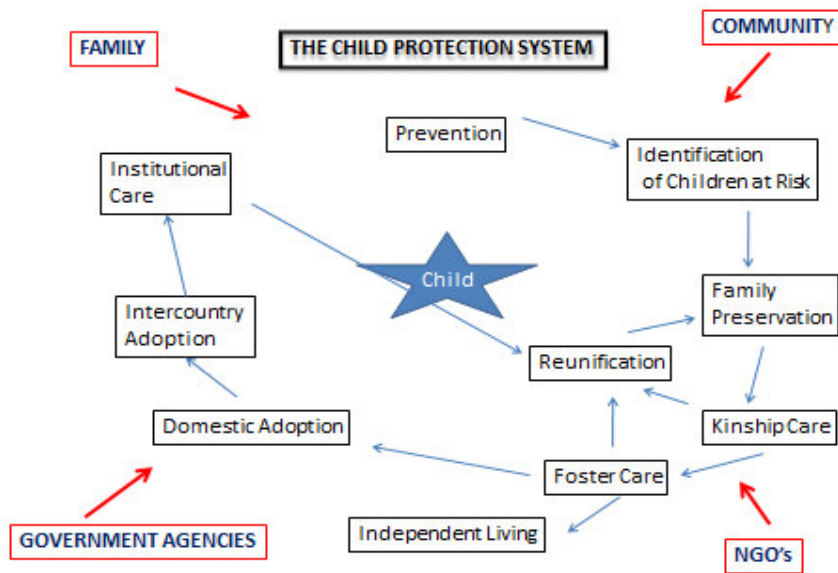
have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect" .Some states include potential, as well as actual harm to the child, as reportable. In a number of states, everyone not just certain professionals, must report. In other states, persons not specified by profession are permissive reporters and they may report (Faller, C, K. (1985).

Developing a referral system does not necessarily mean establishing new services but is about coordination of information, support and services by credible organisations that have a competency in providing quality services while documentation is key (Jennings, M 2010)

Building a referral system requires the cooperation of a broad range of service providers ranging from health, legal aid, safety (shelters), security (police and/or social organizations), economic, and psychosocial counselling providers. In most instances, services are already in existence though they may need to be adapted and coordinated to improve the response and protection of victims. These services may be provided by government, civil society and development agencies, and to a large extent the success of sustainable referral systems depends on the professionalism of those directly involved. This section sets out some of the main elements in building a referral system and is illustrated through case studies. (Jennings, M 2010)

In child welfare and child protection, social intervention includes systematic, planned actions undertaken to direct or influence a client’s actions or environment to prevent or remedy a condition that is harmful to a child (Schilling, 1997).

The child protection System: (Wood, B, Z.).



Berk and Rossi (1990) have defined this direct contact between social workers and clients as the most conspicuous element in the helping effort. They attend to referrals, investigate and assess, and decide on various measures as part of a fundamental intervention process (Soydan and Stål, 1994). In their descriptions of social intervention, the social workers proved to be valuable informants as they established the linkages between how they practise and contrasting ‘ruling discourses’ (DeVault and McCoy, 2002) of child welfare and child protection.

Howe (1987) explains that social workers always employ some frame of reference when making practice decisions, even if they are not consciously aware that they are doing so.

According to Broadhurst et al (2010), in order to “enter the assessment system, a...referral must meet local eligibility criteria...based not just on the nature and relevance of the concern but on team management oversight with the aim of identifying and addressing measurable ‘deficiencies’ in practice and via a concomitant growth in risk aversiveness (see Lymbery, 2001).

Many families experience multiple problems (Bromfield, Lamont, Parker, & Horsfall, 2010), so a challenge is to provide services in a coordinated way, such that families are not expected to be the experts in negotiating service systems and to "pick and choose" the services that they particularly need (Stewart, Lohar, & Higgins, 2011). Instead, there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that provision of family services in a coordinated way is more effective.

In particular, better coordination is needed between (a) services focused on child protection; (b) adult-focused services (such as drug/alcohol, mental health, or domestic violence); and (c) general community supports (Scott, 2007).

CONCLUSIONS

Child protection is necessary because it is common for children to be faced with maltreatment, abuse and neglect in the environment where they live. Furthermore, the traumas that children experience can impact children's life continuously and affect every aspect of their life. In order to better protect the children, different actors of all sectors and levels have to collaborate closely with each others. The child protection is a holistic strategy and multi-level strategic partnership, too. Actually, it is accepted and advocated by many professionals that work with children.

The child protection worker is the most important actor of the system. The systems theory helps him to understand the human behavior in the social environment and to intervene in an individual's life.

The researchers emphasize that the child protection system is a comprehensive, sustainable, active, organized, interdependent and interconnected approach which undertake structures, functions and capacities with the aim to provide the well-being of children, to prevent and to protect them from harms.

Formal and informal actors in child protection system use the referral system to collaborate closely between them, to share information and expertise, to ensure services and to create reliable witnesses and effective network. Collaboration is estimated as a desirable and productive work practice all over the world.

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