Measuring outcomes and performance in child protection services

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Aims of the seminar

• Consider the purpose and use of performance measures in child protection

• Present findings from a study using publically available data on local authority children’s services

• Discuss implications for policy and practice
Practice and policy context

- New public management
- Audit, inspection and quality assurance
- Integrated children’s system (ICS)
- Institutional and professional risk
- Compliance and blame culture
- Evidence-based practice
- Child welfare inequalities

Hood, 1991; Munro, 2004, 2011; Bywaters, 2014; Bywaters et al., 2015
Performance-based accountability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effort</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How much did we do?</td>
<td>How well did we do it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect</td>
<td>Did anything change?</td>
<td>Was it change for the better?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Socio-technical systems design

- Majority of human error down to systems not individuals
- Measures should be derived from purpose of service – from service user’s point of view
- Design systems to deliver ‘value work’, e.g. services being delivered ‘right first time’ without fragmented workflows, referrals, hand-overs etc.
- Bad design leads to failure demand – often caused by focusing on cost

Seddon, 2008; Woods et al., 2010; Gibson and O'Donovan, 2014
Exploring child protection measures

- Publically available datasets – performance measures, finances, workforce data and Ofsted inspections
- Trends of local authority performance indicators over time
- Associations between quantity and quality indicators, including Ofsted ratings
- Impact of an ‘inadequate’ Ofsted rating on performance

Hood et al., 2016a; 2016b
Trends in quantity indicators

- Trends in quantity indicators
- Overall increase in quantity of work
- More emphasis on CP interventions
- Noticeable rise in CP activity post-2007
- Spike in care orders 2007-2010
- Effort and effect indicators show workflow in different parts of the system
Trends in quality indicators

- Timeliness measures show steady increase 2001-07, mostly to ceiling of about 80%
- Decline in initial assessment timeliness from 2007-13 (continuous single assessments introduced in 2013)
- Most CIN cases cease within 3 months, and most CP plans cease within 6-11 months
- Proportion of CP plans lasting over 2 years has been falling while the proportion of CIN plans lasting over 2 years has been rising
- Sharp dip in re-referrals in 2009-10
- Repeat CP plans in slow decline before rising steeply from 2010-14
Relationships between quantity and quality indicators

Workforce indicators

CIN per SW

CP

CIN

CP = 3 mths
CP > 2 yrs

Total spending

Referrals

CIN > 2 yrs

CIN < 3 mths

Re-referrals

Referrals NFA

Referrals not CIN

Assessments % of referrals

Initial assessments

Agency worker rate

Positive correlation

Negative correlation
## Indicators and Ofsted Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of initial assessments taking place within 10 days in 2012</td>
<td>-0.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of Section 47s during 2012</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of referrals with a prior referral during 2012</td>
<td>0.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social worker vacancy rate 2012</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social worker agency worker rate 2012</td>
<td>0.076</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ofsted and the inspection of children’s social care

- Increasing numbers of inadequate ratings given by Ofsted – 16% of all SIF inspections 2013-14

**Figure 2: Overall effectiveness judgement under the single inspection framework (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inspections (43)</th>
<th>Outstanding</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Requires improvement</th>
<th>Inadequate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages do not add to 100 because of rounding.

- What happens to services after an inadequate rating?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Movement in indicators from the first year of being <strong>predicted</strong> inadequate to the following year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group A (n=16) Predicted BUT NOT rated inadequate 2010-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>median change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rates of CIN</td>
<td>-46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rates of Referrals</td>
<td>-8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rates of Initial Assessments</td>
<td>-29.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Assessments &lt; 10 days</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rates of Core Assessments</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Assessments &lt; 35 Days</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rates of Section 47 inquiries</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rates of CP Conferences</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial CP Conference &lt; 15 days</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rates of CP plans</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review CP conference on time</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rates of Care Proceedings</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rates of re-referrals</td>
<td>-2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rates of repeat CP plans</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending on CP services</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rates of CIN per social worker</td>
<td>-1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implications

• The increasing focus on child protection is a particular problem for local authorities in areas of high deprivation, which are more reliant on non-statutory agencies to help manage demand.

• Local authorities in more affluent areas might have a greater tendency to use protective rather than preventative measures to work with families.

• Overall pressure on frontline services may partly be down to their ‘filter-and-funnel’ design, which means some families experience several assessments and even multiple case closures before their needs are addressed.

• Existing quality indicators tend to measure the timeliness of completing work processes, but these seem to have little bearing on outcomes.

• The Ofsted inspection process, with high numbers of local authorities rated inadequate, may be exacerbating the shift towards protective interventions in the sector.
References


