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Working together in Safeguarding

Findings from an exploratory study to understand partner professionals' experiences of working with social workers, across the NESWA partnership

Presenters:

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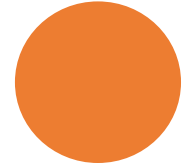
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Charlotte Swainston, Therapeutic Social Worker, Darlington Borough Council

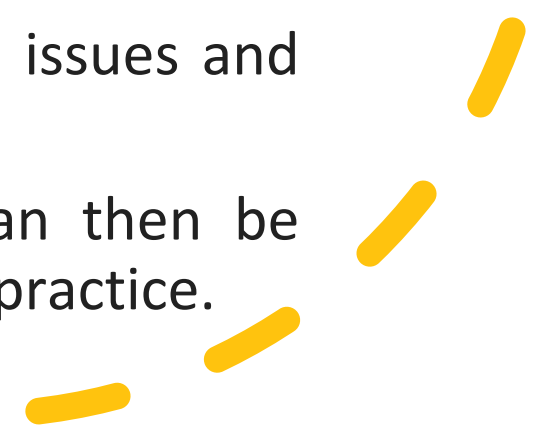




Facilitated Practice-based Research (FPR) ©University of Sunderland



- FPR is an empowerment model, designed by Dr Lesley Deacon at the University of Sunderland
- It positions practitioners as researchers by reframing their existing skills as research.
- The key to this is making research make sense to practice by using practice language and temporarily moving aside research terminology.
- Practitioners work together as a group to reflect on practice issues and co-design and co-conduct a piece of **group practice research**.
- A practice report is co-constructed by the group which can then be shared across all partners for immediate implementation into practice.





The cohort and the research

- From November 2022–October 2023 a cohort of practitioners worked together as a group to co-construct and implement a piece of practice-based research. (Accreditation: SWKM43 Reflexive Practice Research)
- Practitioners were from both Children’s and Adults’ Services from three different local authorities – Gateshead, Stockton and Darlington.
- The topic emerged from the practitioners’ shared experiences – **working with partner professionals in safeguarding children/adults.**



The research

The topic really emerged from Session 2 onwards

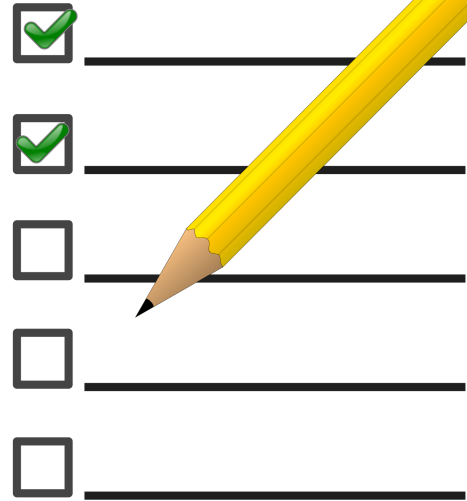
- Exploring different models of practice
- Ethical consideration
- Learning from SCRs – information sharing, professional curiosity

Research questions

How do partner professionals perceive and experience safeguarding of children and adults?

- How well do partner professionals feel they understand their own duties concerning safeguarding?
- How do partner professionals identify safeguarding risks and what do they look like in practice?
- What do partner professionals expect social work practitioners to do regarding safeguarding, and what is their experiences of them in practice?
- What has been helpful/supportive when engaging with social work practitioners in safeguarding?

Paige (Charlotte)



Method

- Whilst research into safeguarding is widespread, a specific focus on social workers seeking the perspectives of partner professionals is relatively unique.
- Therefore, as the research area is exploratory, the use of a qualitative survey, as well as enabling access to the participant voice, also enabled responses to be driven by the participants themselves rather than the researchers.
- Only five open questions were asked, to minimise the amount of time needed from participants to complete the survey.
- These questions specifically related to asking partner professionals to explain their perceptions of duty, risk, expectations of social workers, as well as what they have found helpful and supportive.

Participants

- We were a mixed group of children and adults social workers, so looked at the different professionals that may be involved with safeguarding adults and safeguarding children.
- **Partner professionals:** currently involved in safeguarding children or safeguarding adults procedures, excluding social workers, e.g. education, health, mental health, police, probation, third sector organisations, private sector organisations, housing etc. Restricted to those who have had interactions with the Local Authority organisations in NESWA

Respondents

Table 1.1. Responses

Area of experience	Number of responses
Adults	7
Children	30
Both	26
Total	63

Key Findings – safeguarding children

Transactional communication was seen as significant to partner professionals, i.e. not just one-way, but information and tasks shared back and forth.

Keep us updated on the progress of referrals and advice on actions going forward
PP62(Social Care)

Partner professionals often felt undervalued and not respected by social workers.

Creating an environment where discussion is welcomed and healthy challenges allowed and acknowledge
PP45(Heath)

Profession-specific risk, partner professionals highlighted issues such as absences from school, unexplained observable injuries/marks/bruises, or unexplained weight loss.

*a child with weight loss (PP16(Health))
have unexplained bruising to bodily areas not usually associated with bruising or finger/hand shaped bruises to body PP41(Health)
unexplained absences from school PP36(Education).*

A consistent approach was highlighted as important, shown in partner professionals' concerns about high social work staff turnover, disparities in advice and processes as well as not enough time given to them to read reports.

Having reports circulated in enough time for me to be able to digest all the information before attending meetings
PP56(Health)
I hope that they share the information as necessary and action this in a timely manner.
PP39(Health)

Key Findings – safeguarding adults

Transactional communication: was seen as significant to partner professionals, i.e. not just one-way, but information and tasks shared back and forth.

The majority of the time we need to chase up the referral to find out the outcome PP20(Health)
... would like feedback on a referral so my team could understand why no action is being taken PP24(Housing)

Profession-specific risk: Almost all partner professionals' responses referred to some form of vulnerability in a person e.g. self neglect, financial abuse, disability, health needs, domestic abuse and substance misuse.

...carers refusing to bring patients to appointments...
comments made by patients about their finances or their "friends" or family. PP15(Health)

... a gentleman who had a small fire in his home who wasn't at the property at the time. On entering to inspect found no furniture, no food in the cupboard and a limited way of living. PP(22)Housing

Professional respect: partner professionals often felt undervalued and not respected by social workers.

I often feel my professional judgement is disregarded
PP1(Charity)

PP26(Housing) highlighted how 'complex people in crisis can be routine for us and we are experienced and confident in what we are doing'.

Systemic issues: A number of participants observed that there were larger, systemic issues impacting on how effectively social workers were able to do their jobs.

P26(Housing) however identified how social workers had 'no resources' which, in adult services, led to issues in not being able to discharge fit patients from hospital beds as community resources were limited

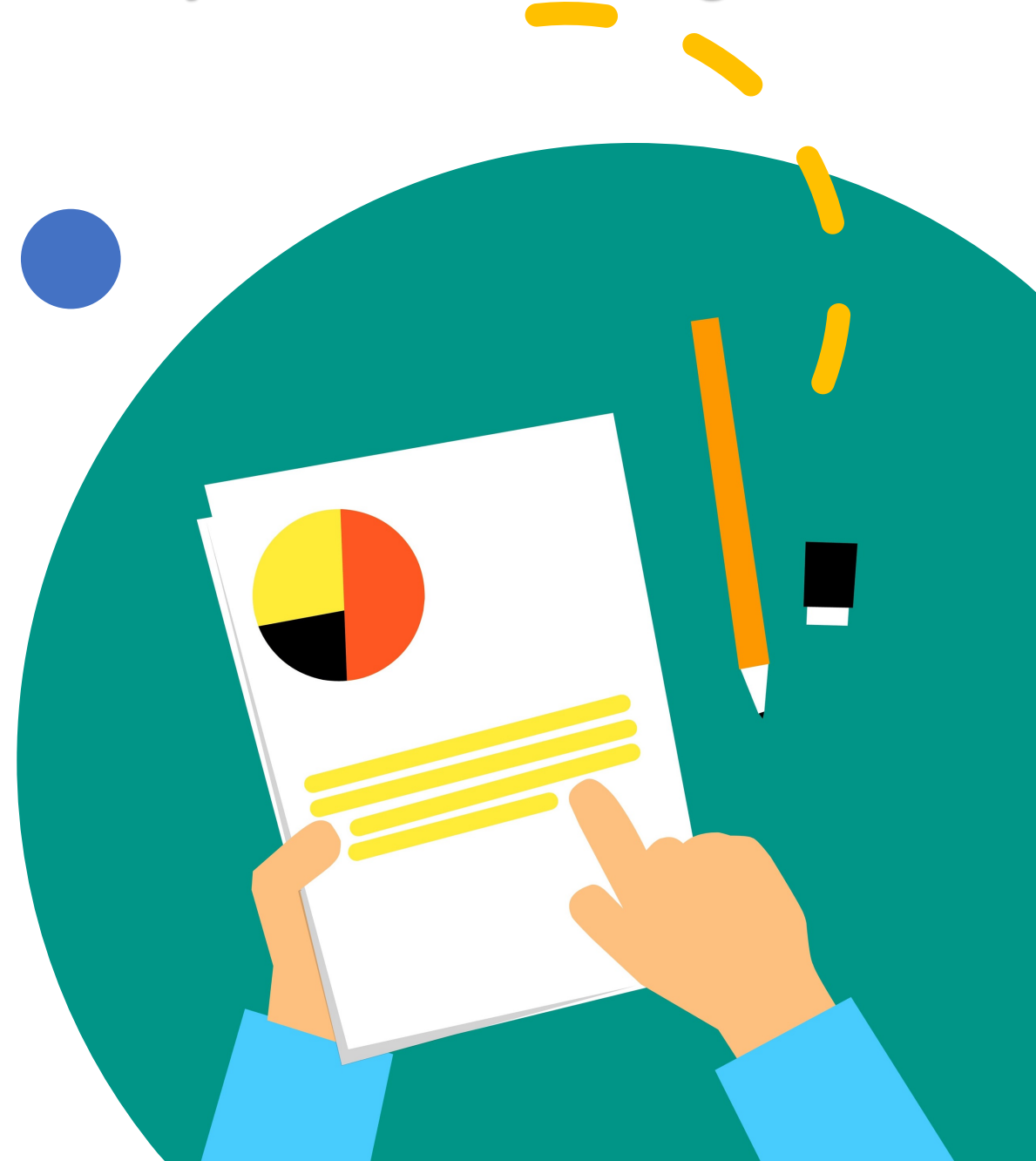
Descriptive findings, not theoretically framed at this stage

Report Recommendations

- Training to help both social workers and partner professionals understand what profession-specific risk looks like and to embed professional respect of partner professionals across all partners.
- Local Authorities to re-evaluate their policies and practice to ensure they are clear and consistent in applying thresholds for safeguarding intervention.
- Local Authorities to develop approaches in giving specific feedback to partner professionals on referrals, especially those not taken up.

Recommendations for further research

- To explore the differences in perceptions regarding what working together means for Housing departments; and at what point those in Education and Health feel their safeguarding duty is discharged.



Practitioner Reflections: impact on practice

- Paige:
 - Realising that social workers are researchers e.g as assessment is research.
 - Thinking what is going on behind everything.
 - Application of research into practice.
- Charlotte:
 - Mindful of asking 'why', exploring in more depth e.g. lifestory work.
 - Share knowledge, inspiring others.



Thank
you!

For listening...

Any questions?