

The Assessment of Need and the Assessment of Risk: The Challenges for Child Protection

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Abstract

Since the implementation of the Children Act 1989 in October 1991, the centrality of the assessment within social work has gained momentum, this has been closely linked to a debate between the appropriate emphasis of social work practice in terms of risk and need. This paper seeks to consider and to deconstruct that debate discussing the meanings attributed to the concepts of assessment, need and risk within social work practice. The findings from a review of the literature are that the emphasis upon the perceived dichotomy between need and risk, obscure the wider problems facing assessment within the current political and structural climate of social service departments.

Assessment has always been integral to social work practice. Since the 1990's there has been a steady increase in interest in the field of child care social work assessment, its importance in social work practice is widely acknowledged. Assessments are undertaken by social workers to gain access to resources such as family support workers and social grants; and they are used by managers, courts and panels to inform the decision making process, consequently the social work assessment can have a lasting and profound impact upon children and their families.

Within this paper I will explore the historical social work landscape from the 1940's to the present day, considering the important political, legislative and professional developments, in constructing an understanding of the context in which the central issues surrounding the social work assessment have developed. Secondly the paper will review the literature on assessment with a view to developing a working knowledge of the concepts of risk and need in addition to a theoretical and procedurally understanding of assessment. Finally the paper will consider the issues and challenges presented by assessment within child protection social work.

Historical Context

Between the 1940's and 1960's child abuse had been re-discovered, it was viewed within a medical framework, as a disease, consequently social work developed casework as a means of intervening and 'treating' families (Parton, (1985: 48-68). During the 1970's social work evolved as a profession and much of the legislative and procedural changes were focused upon developing a systematic social work response to child abuse (Corby, (1993: 30-1).

In 1984 Jasmine Beckford was killed, by her step-father, whilst the 'subject of a Care Order to the London Borough of Brent' (London Borough of Brent, (1985: 2). The inquiry report into the death of Jasmine Beckford highlighted a number of concerns regarding social work practice with families where child abuse was a feature, including failure to take account of 'high-risk' situations (*ibid.*: 288), the lack of child-centred practice and the failure of generic social work to provide workers with the specialist knowledge they require (*ibid.*: 293). This case affected an immediate procedural response within social work, including the 'reframing [of] child abuse work as child protection work' (Corby, (1993: 33). This change meant that no longer was social work intervention into family life simply about effecting change through preventative case work, there was now a move towards the need to assess risk and dangerousness within a child protection context, this was reflected in the guidance published by the Department of Health '*Protecting Children: A Guide for Social Workers Undertaking a Comprehensive Assessment*' (1988), known as the 'Orange Book'. After Jasmine Beckford there were numerous other public inquiries into child deaths at the hands of their parents, including Kimberly Carlisle (1987) and Tyra Henry (1988).

In July 1988 the Cleveland Inquiry was published. In contrast to the numerous child death inquiries this report concerned the 'over-enthusiasm and zeal' (Cleveland 1988: 244) with which action was taken to remove children from their families where there were concerns regarding sexual abuse. Most of these children were removed following medical assessments, on the basis of what was considered dubious scientific knowledge. This

time the child protection system had failed to respect and protect the rights of parents and families.

The subsequent discourse to emerge from the dichotomy between under-protection, highlighted by the Jasmine Beckford case, and over-protection, was the need for social work to establish an appropriate balance, 'between family autonomy and state intervention...[and] between the power, discretion and responsibilities of the various judicial, social and medical experts and agencies.' (Parton *et al.* 1997: 31-2). The 'Orange Book' attempted to introduce 'a clear practice framework for assessment' (*ibid.*: 5); it reflected concerns of the time and was essentially a framework for the assessment of 'high-risk families' (*ibid.*: 12), focusing particularly upon physical abuse and neglect.

The 1989 Children Act constituted the largest single review and change to child care law in recent history. Although the Act responded to increasing concerns during the 1980s, reflected in the numerous public inquiries into child deaths, including that of Jasmine Beckford, it had been a long time in the making, the process having begun in 1984. When it came, the Act aimed to:

create an enlightened and practical framework for decision-making, whether the decision is taken in the family home, in a local authority office, in a health centre or in a courtroom, Allen, (1996: 1)

The Children Act 1989 sought to maintain the supremacy of the family as the institution for the raising of children, whilst acknowledging that for some children this ideal fell short and providing clear structures for the protection of those children. The Act introduced the concepts of 'children in need' (s.17) and children in need of protection' (s.47). It was implemented in October 1991. Until the introduction of the Act child protection was primarily a social and medical concern; child protection now had a legal front. The legal threshold criterion became known as 'significant harm'; in section 31(2) of the Act the significant harm should be attributable to the care given or likely to be given to the child by the carer. Under section 31(9) it is further defined as ill-treatment or impairment of health or development, compared to what could be reasonably expected of a similar child (White, (1988: 18 -19).

During the early 1990s the government commissioned a series of pieces of research on the functioning of the Children Act 1989. These were published in 1995 as *Child Protection: Messages from Research* (DoH, (1995). This document concluded that the pendulum had swung too far, that social work was now focused almost exclusively upon risk and investigation to the exclusion of assessing and providing services to children in need. This was problematic, as the research highlighted that 'long-term difficulties seldom follow from a single abusive event' (*ibid.*: 53). The document suggested that many vulnerable children were falling through the net because they were not being considered within their wider environment. *Messages from Research* effectively challenged the dominant socio-medical model of child abuse and reframed and contextualised the concept of the 'dangerous family' in child protection work (*ibid.*: 54).

Out of *Messages from Research* followed a discourse on the refocusing of child protection services to embrace a more holistic understanding of children and their families. This debate within social work coincided with the new Labour Government and

their 'explicit family policy' (Skinner, 2003: 19) aimed at supporting and working in partnership with families on a multi-level basis to reduce child poverty, build stronger communities and reduce crime (*ibid.*: 19-24). Over the late 1990s the Labour Government established a series of policies and projects aimed at reducing social exclusion. Although much of this work overlapped with what social workers called 'children in need', most of the provision was set up in the form of non-governmental organisations and within the voluntary sector (Jordan, (2000: 71-82; Skinner, (2003: 34-6). Parton argues that:

debates prompted by *Messages from Research* (DoH, (1995) have been overtaken by other more wide-ranging policies and priorities being introduced by New Labour concerned with supporting the family, parenting and early interventions, (2002: 24)

Concerns around the poor performance of 'looked after children' led to the implementation of the 'Quality Protects' initiative in 1997. Quality Protects sought to improve the life chances of young people in the care system and 'good assessment [was] seen as lying at the heart of this initiative' (Gray, (2002: 175).

In 2000 the government introduced the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* (DoH, (2000). This framework was developed as a response to recent developments within child protection, concerns which had emerged out of *Messages from Research* (DoH, (1995), critics of the comprehensive assessment, such as Katz (1997), who found that the *Comprehensive Assessment* (DoH, (1988) was being used by some social workers rigidly as a checklist. The *Framework* sought to change the way in which social workers approached the assessment and intervention of children and families, encouraging social workers to 'take a more holistic approach to family assessment and consider the wider environment and its influence on family functioning' (Hamilton and Browne, (2002).

Defining 'Children in Need'

Within the Children Act, 'need' is dealt with under section 17: on an aggregate level each local authority has a duty to identify populations of children in need and provide universal services to meet those needs (Rose and Ward, 2002, pg.16). The Act requires that each local authority produce materials to publicise the services they provide for children in need, encouraging parents to access those services if appropriate, in addition to facilitating services to children in need provided by voluntary agencies (Allan, 1996, pg.68). On an individual level a child is said to be in need if:

[He] is unlikely to reach or maintain a satisfactory level of health or development, or [his] health and development will be significantly impaired without the provision of services...[or he] is disabled, DoH, (2000: 5)

In such cases a local authority 'may assess the needs of any child who appears to be 'in need' within the meaning of section 17' (Allan, (1996: 69).

Brandon *et al*, (1999) argue that within the Children Act the concept of 'children in need' is vague and there is extensive scope for individual local authorities to further define what

constitutes a child in need (*ibid.*: 11). Rose (2001) found that after the implementation of *Looking After Children* (LAC) materials in 1995, with its seven dimensions of children's developmental needs, social workers had an understandable framework for monitoring need (*ibid.*: 37). Aldgate (2002) develops this further, suggesting that many local authorities did not have the necessary infrastructure or understanding to take on board the substantial task of identifying aggregate need within their area, and were concerned about the potential budgetary implications of identifying needs and being required to provide services (Aldgate, (2002: 149-153).

With the publication of *Messages from Research* in 1995, and the election of the Labour Government in 1997, the definition of 'need' began to take form, in a way that it had not previously. The *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families* (DoH, (2000) establishes three domains for assessment:

1. The developmental needs of children (Health, Education, Emotional and Behavioural ***** , Identity, Family and Social Relationships, Social Presentation and Selfcare Skills)
2. The capacity of parents or caregivers to respond appropriately to those needs (Basic Care, Ensuring Safety, Emotional Warmth, Stimulation, Guidance and Boundaries and Stability)
3. The impact of wider family and environmental factors on parenting capacity and Children (Family History and Functioning, Wider Family, Housing, Employment, Income, Family's Social Integration and Community Resources) (DoH, (2000: 17).

As detailed previously, the Labour government had a broad agenda about creating a more inclusive society; its target was children and families. The Government aimed to improve communities by improving children's life chances, through a variety of initiatives within communities such as Sure Start, and Education Action Zones. The introduction of the Quality Protects initiative in 1997 and the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families* (DoH, (2000) firmly located the concept of need within a developmental and ecological framework consistent with the government's broader agenda.

Defining and Understanding Risk

Within the Children Act 1989, there is no definition of risk; child protection is constructed in the term 'significant harm'. The Act states:

Where a local authority -

- a. are informed that a child who lives, or is found, in their area –
 - i. is the subject of an emergency protection order; or
 - ii. is in police protection; or
 - b. have reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives, or is found, in their area, is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm,
- the authority shall make, or cause to make, such enquiries as they consider necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare, White, (1998: 9-10)

Working Together to Safeguard Children (1999) states that:

Under s.31(9) of the Children Act 1989:

'harm' means ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development;

'development' means physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development;

'health' means physical or mental health; and

'ill-treatment' includes sexual abuse and forms of ill-treatment which are not physical.

Under s.31(10) of the Act:

Where the question of whether harm suffered by a child is significant turns on the child's health and development, his health or development shall be compared with that which could be reasonably be expected of a similar child, DoH. 1999: 8)

Within social work the concept of 'risk', although not specifically defined within the legislation is closely associated with the concept of 'significant harm'. Risk assessments are normally undertaken once harm has occurred and has been identified, and their purpose is to prevent further harm occurring (Adcock, (1998: 39; Sargent, (2001: 183). Within social work the assessment of risk has been associated with the negativity of harm and child death (Parton, (2000: 146-7). Because of this Parton *et al*, (1997) argue that notions of risk are deeply embedded in cases that are categorised as 'child protection' at the point of initial assessment (*ibid.*: 242).

Macdonald and Macdonald (2001) argue that the assessment of risk is related to the probabilistic component of our knowledge base (*ibid.*: 17), therefore the assessment of risk necessarily involves the weighing up of both positive and negative outcomes for children and families. Caddick and Watson (2001) discuss the individual's right to chose to take risks and the need for an understanding of risk in order to also understand the consequences of those decisions for society and others (*ibid.*: 53-67). The application of this to child protection leads us back to the dichotomy discussed earlier in relation to under-protection and over-protection. In the late 1980s the Conservative government sought not only to protect children, but to protect the hegemony of the family, therefore the use of risk as an assessment framework reflected the broader policy objectives of the government. At the individual level, Macdonald and Macdonald (2001) highlight that clients are not passive within risk assessment, and that consequently 'interventions to reduce adverse risk may have the opposite or no effect' (*ibid.*: 41). The client may chose to take greater risks as their perception of the current risk reduces.

Assessment in Social Work

Milner and O'Byrne (2002) outline three different models of social work assessment identified by Smale and Tuson (1993):

1. The questioning model: here the social worker holds the expertise and follows a format of questions, listening to and processing answers. This process reflects the social workers agenda.

2. The procedural model: the social worker fulfils agency function by gathering information to see whether the subject fits the criteria for services. Little judgment is required, and it is likely that checklists will be used.
3. The exchange model: all people are viewed as experts on their own problems, with an emphasis on exchanging information. The social workers follow or track what other people are saying rather than interpreting what they think is meant, seek to identify internal resources and potential, and consider how best to help service users mobilise their internal and external resources in order to reach goals defined by them on their terms, Milner and O'Byrne, (2002: 52-3)

Critiques of the 'Orange book' were based upon the tendency of practitioners to work through the 167 questions listed within the framework mechanically and rigidly, resulting in the assessment locating itself theoretically within the questioning model. Calder (2003) suggests that this model of assessment does not adequately take account of the impact of structural disadvantage such as race, gender and disability, leaves little room for social work values such as empowerment and inherently assuming that the social worker holds a 'monopoly of knowledge' (*ibid.*: 43). Stevenson (1998) argues that social work assessment 'needs to be able to take account of the dynamic interaction between parents and children' (*ibid.*: 103).

With the exception of the assessment of sex offenders, the procedural model is rarely used in the child protection field for anything more than the allocation of services that, once allocated, would usually be followed up with a more detailed assessment. The assessment of adult sex offenders is undertaken by the police and the probation service, although social workers are more likely to be involved in the assessment of young people who sexually abuse (Print *et al.*, in press).

The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families (DoH, (2000) essentially lends itself to the exchange model. Despite this, Calder (2003) argues that some of the underpinning principles of this model present a challenge to the rigid procedural frameworks implemented alongside the assessment framework. In an attempt to prevent delay and drift in child protection, the government introduced rigid timescales for the completion of the assessment: seven days for the Initial assessment, and a further 35 days for the Core Assessment, a total of 42 working days. Calder (2003) argues that:

for many cases where there are child protection concerns this takes no account of the time it is likely to take to engage with the family, who may initially be hostile and angry towards the intervention;
the entering into a dialogue and exploration of issues and beliefs with adults and children is a complex and a time consuming process;
effective communication by professionals across cultural and ethnic boundaries avoiding assumptions and prejudices is a time consuming process; and
partnership with children and families is only likely if the professional takes things at their pace, Calder, (2003: 33-44)

Consequently the imposition of these rigid timescales is likely to result in the assessment moving towards a more questioning model. Similarly Horwarth (2002) argues that, firstly, there is a danger that the assessments become 'form-led' (*ibid.*: 204), and, secondly, that the timescales mean that there is too little time for practitioners to engage meaningfully

with children.

Ironically *The Challenge of Partnership in Child Protection: Practice Guide* (1995) argues that, 'A co-operative working relationship between the helping services and families is *essential* if the welfare of the child is to be ensured' (1995: 9, my emphasis) and that practitioners 'will require sufficient time to exercise their skills and work at the individual child's pace' (*ibid.*: 17). Further, the assessment 'may take longer if a number of family members have special needs which have to be met so that they can contribute to the best of their ability' (*ibid.*: 75). Whilst there is a need for assessments not to become too protracted, drift, and lose focus and direction, for assessment to be purposeful it cannot be seen as an exclusive process. Assessment takes place within a context, for both the family and practitioner. Different families and individual family members enter the assessment at different stages in their life courses, and practitioners approach assessment from a social work value base, which includes the need to work in partnership, and to consider the impact of equality issues. Consequently the loss of flexibility within assessment is almost inevitably going to come at the cost of principles such as partnership and empowerment. For children there is as much evidence of the negative impact of this upon their outcomes as there is for the need to prevent delay and drift:

When social workers were asked whether they considered that their attempts to involve family members had had a positive or negative impact on the outcome for the child, most said that they considered that it had been positive and none considered that it had been negative. The major reason given for this was that they believed that their attempts to work with family members has speeded up the process of assessment, planning, and the provision of appropriate services. Thus, even if their attempts were in the end unsuccessful, they considered that they were able to make plans which were in the interests of the children more quickly than if family members had been left outside of the whole process, Thoburn *et al.*, (1995: 221-2)

Raynes (2003) suggests that the forms produced to accompany the Assessment Framework contradict the ethos of the overall framework. He notes that although the framework is designed to be 'ecological', the structure of the forms inhibits this as the dimensions of the framework are presented independently, suggesting that: 'Unfortunately in practice guidance has less impact than forms' (Raynes, (2003. pg.121). In addition, it is argued that the forms stress the collection of information, with little guidance and structure for analysis and planning: 'consequently the information can remain separate and un-ecological' (*ibid.*).

Milner and O'Byrne (2002) suggest a basic structure for social work assessments: 'preparation, data collection, weighing the data, analysing the data and utilising the data' (*ibid.*: 61-4). A similar structure is suggested by Lloyd and Taylor (1995). Despite the criticisms of the Assessment Framework, it also adopts a similar structure. Within this structure the assessment is viewed as a process rather than a static event, where the assessment will need ongoing updating as knowledge is increased (Reder *et al.* 1993: 83). Lloyd and Taylor (1995) argue that assessment is not a 'once-and-for-all process whereby the work arrives at the definitive 'right' answer' (1995: 699).

Discussion

The literature highlights a continuing distinction within social work practice between the assessment of need and risk. This distinction appears to have its roots in the historical development of social work, which since the 1970s has gradually evolved into a child protection service, with a focus upon harm and risk (Parton, (1997: 216-220). This distinction is, ironically, seen most clearly within the Children Act 1989, although when the concept of need was identified within the legislation there was an insufficient attempt to provide a definition and structure within which the concept could be developed at a local level:

The concept of need is an important component of welfare legislation, extending before and beyond the 1989 Act. However, the boundaries of need are unclear...The Audit Commission (1994: 5) points out that 'reasonable standard' is not defined 'and neither are the indicators which would suggest such a standard is not being met', Brandon *et al.*, (1999:11)

The effect of this distinction was first highlighted within *Messages from Research* (DoH, (1995). Its disabling effect and consequences with regards to assessment for all concerned - children, families and practitioners alike - have most recently been highlighted by the *Victoria Climbié Inquiry* (Laming, (2003):

Throughout the inquiry, I repeatedly heard evidence which caused me great concern about the way in which social services departments interpret their responsibilities under sections 17 and 47 of the Children Act 1989...[The] approach to the use of sections 17 and 47 can only be described as dangerous, Laming. 2003. pg.364-5)

Since the mid-1990s there have been significant attempts from governments to 'refocus' child protection services, seeking a greater emphasis upon the global needs of children. *Messages from Research* (DoH, (1995) provided the rationale for this 'refocusing'. While there is a wealth of knowledge on the sense of approaching children and their families in a wider ecological and developmental framework, the ability of social work practice to make an effective transition is fraught with a number of difficulties.

At its roots the statutory system for supporting and managing children in need and their families remains a child protection system. Consequently the concept of and the need for thresholds predominates, and the fears and anxieties within the system are centred around risk. Parton *et al*, (1997) argue that the current attempts to 'refocus' child protection does not 'fully grasp the nature of practice in child protection' (*ibid.*: 241). Whilst the current government has created a whole new layer of family support services, these services are mostly provided by non-governmental organisations such as Sure Start. There has been a conscious decision not to locate these resources for children in need within the statutory sector. Consequently the statutory sector has been asked to 'refocus'. However, the failure to understand the reasons why the service operates in the way it does has left practitioners continuing to work predominantly with cases of child protection where harm has already occurred (Hamilton and Browne, (2002: 42). At best practitioners will be referrers of children in need to other agencies:

The new framework for children and families has potential to be dominated by health and privatised services – with the role of social work within that becoming marginalized and defined as care management, Skinner, (2003: 35)

Despite this the assessment of risk and the assessment of harm are not diametrically opposed positions. There are differences and similarities between the assessment of risk and the assessment of need within child protection in terms of how comprehensively situations are assessed, the methods of undertaking the assessment and how the information is aggregated, Dalglish, (2003: 87-89). Dalglish highlights the significant similarity between the two types of assessment, in that they are both forms of assessment, and contends that 'both are essentially linked. One should not do one without the other' (*ibid.*: 88). The children and families involved with child protection services are multi-faceted and bring a variety of problems. To engage in a discourse which focuses on either risk or harm is likely to reduced the possibilities of working effectively with these multi-faceted and multi-problem families.

In his exploration of the implementation of thresholds within social work Dalglish (2003) explores another side to the risk versus need debate. Dalglish argues that research undertaken by Rossi *et al*, (1996) highlighted the problem of 'common scale, varying thresholds' (Dalglish, (2003: 91). This is where practitioners are using the same scale for assessment, but are, however, operating different thresholds for intervention. This study demonstrated that tension between child protection and family support within the national debate was reflected between practitioners, and that practitioners 'experiences and history have led them to have different thresholds' (*ibid.*: 94). With this in mind there is a level of futility in continuing to debate simply between risk and need, if, as soon as a framework reaches social workers, practice digresses in several directions as practitioners all use their individual interpretations of the threshold criteria.

Changing the framework for social work assessment in itself is not enough to change the practice. The discourse of risk versus need fails to understand adequately the possibility of assessment as a means of building and developing understanding about children, families and their functioning. Focusing upon risk and need lends itself towards a tendency to focus almost exclusively upon the objective and outcome of the assessment, to the exclusion of what goes on in between. What goes on in between is crucial if assessment is to be located within wider social work practice, and within an ecological model of understanding the child and family.

The importance of what goes on between objective and outcome is demonstrated by Holland (2000) and Woodcock (2003). Holland found in her research that social work assessments were heavily reliant upon the assessment of the personalities and social skills of the parents. Parental co-operation with the local authority was assessed on the basis of perceived co-operation with the assessment. Practitioners were found to rate highly a parent's willingness and ability to provide a plausible explanation for concerns or to accept the concerns expressed by them. Parents who were able to demonstrate these attributes were all reunited with their children, parents who were seen as passive and inarticulate were unlikely to be reunited with their children (Holland, (2000). Similarly, Woodcock (2003) found in her research on the assessment of parenting that practitioners' assessments were based heavily on the perceived personality traits of parents. Although

many of the social workers' expectations could be located within a psychological model of parenting, they seemed to have limited ability to move the assessment towards developing an awareness of the struggles these parents were experiencing. Consequently social workers were identified as having a 'surface-static' notion of parenting. For the dichotomy between child protection and family support to be broken down practitioners need to be able to understand the 'psychological mechanisms which mediate between provision of services and parental change' (Woodcock, (2003: 101).

Iwaniec, (1996) says that assessment should include:

Information obtained from interviews with parents (and with children of appropriate ages), from direct observation, from clarification of observed behaviour and family functioning, from examination of medical and psychological reports, and from communication with the agencies and individuals to whom the child and family are known, *ibid.*: 100)

Stevenson says that the more in-depth an assessment, the more extensive the knowledge base of the practitioner will need to be (Stevenson, (1998: 105). Assessment is an ongoing *cycle* made up of planning, information gathering, analysis and review. Within assessment the family and the practitioner are not static actors; they are involved in a dynamic that will evolve and develop throughout the assessment. Failure to address the dynamic process of assessment leaves many families and parents, such as parents with learning disabilities, whose needs could not be identified or met under the conditions highlighted by Holland and Woodcock, disempowered.

The focus upon the dichotomy and tensions between child protection and family support, and risk and need, is only part of the current challenge to social work practices in respect of the possibilities of the social work assessment itself within the current political context.

Conclusion

Within this paper I have argued that there continues to be a tension between the concepts of risk and need within child care social work which is reflected within assessments in child care. The system of child and family welfare is divided into two categories, children in need and child protection. While the Children Act 1989 appears to locate responsibility for the assessment and provision of services to both children and families with local authorities, the emphasis is heavily influenced by government policy. This currently means that while the responsibility for children in need remains with the local authority, a substantial amount of the services and resources are with non-governmental organisations and the voluntary sector. Consequently, the link between the assessment of children and their families and the provision of resources is becoming increasingly disjointed.

While there appears to be a tacit acceptance that the difference between 'children in need' and 'children in need of protection' is simply one of degree and severity of need, and that these two categories are opposite ends of a continuum, there is little evidence that such an understanding has been effectively translated into policy at a local level. In addition, there appears to be only a limited understanding within policy that any family, over a period in time, may move up and down this continuum, effectively having a

continually changing status. This highlights the importance of social work theory around assessment in promoting assessment as a process which involves the exchange of information between client and worker.

The recent introduction of *The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* (DoH, (2000) represents a potential for a significant advance in the assessment of children and families within social work. Despite this it needs to be acknowledged that no framework can ever be 'all embracing', and there remains a responsibility with individual workers to use the framework to develop an understanding of the child and family, rather than to undertake an exercise of fitting the family into the framework. In addition, there appears to be a greater emphasis upon the objective and outcome of the assessment, with little care for what has occurred in-between. The emphasis upon the production of a document called a 'Core Assessment' rather than the process of social work in developing a functional understanding of children and their families, is likely to conflict with many social work principles as well as having a lasting impact upon the assessment of the children and families involved.

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Risk assessment in child protection occurs during the processes of notification and investigation. It aims to determine whether a report of concern about a child needs further investigation and which service, or level of intervention, is required to respond. Consensus-based and actuarial risk assessment instruments. This is because actuarial tools are usually developed by statistically modelling the factors that increase the risk of re-referral to child protection services. They enable practitioners to make evidence-based judgements about which children are at the highest risk of re-referral to child protection services (and therefore warrant greater scrutiny), and direct practitioners to prioritise their finite resources on the cases of these children. The aim of the study was to conduct an original investigation into the outcomes for children and young people assessed as being "at risk" of sexual exploitation, as well as exploring how best to support young people when responding to CSE and the challenges involved when doing so. This was the first instance in the UK in which all children and young people aged between 9 and 18 years who were involved with Children's Services across a single local authority, were each assessed for their risk in relation to sexual exploitation. The original exercise involved young people linked to children's services through duty and assessment, child protection, Child in Need, aftercare services, and Looked After Children's teams.