Social Worker Experience of Fatal Child Abuse, An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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Origins....

- Personal involvement, "near misses"
- CDRT
- Advanced Course in Child Death Management:
- A range of professionals including coroners, paediatricians, paediatric registrars and perinatal pathologists gave detailed insights into their roles and responsibilities in relation to child deaths.
- I reflected upon how “clinical” and emotionally detached the medical practitioners appeared, and how their analysis of events contrasted sharply with the often emotive and deeply moving insights given by “non-medical” personnel or parents who had experienced the loss of a child.

Origins...

- Differences in:
- Role SW: Child Protection/Palliative care/older people
- Role general: A+E, paramedic
- Nature of role: "owning the role of protector"
- Media image and response

Broadly Speaking...

- I wanted to capture the "human" lived experiences of social workers
- The emotions, relationships, feelings, etc. before, at the time of and after the child's death.
- I needed a research paradigm that would capture this...

why not try a bit of phenomenology?

In Reality

Method

- 4 Semi-structured interviews with social workers who have been directly involved in cases of FCA.
- Interviews lasted approximately 1 hour. generated 26,000 words of transcript
- Recruitment strategy did not work and had to be adapted !

VOICES…

- *When he (The Coroner) sat and read out the child's injuries, You know it's a shame I wasn't a drinker, I didn't know what to do, didn't know where to go, I didn't want to go home, I didn't want to "put on" my colleagues anymore. I just took the dog for an incredibly long walk and cried for a long time?*

VOICES…

- *I cannot hear the name Rebecca, I cannot hear it, and this sounds bonkers. It sounds bonkers, there was something that happened on the news and they said her name I went cold, I went ohhh. We are talking 4 years later; I heard it on TV and…"* (long pause, silence, time out)

VOICES

- *I now have my barriers up around things, so it does change you as a person but how could it not change you?*
- *It was fascinating how the local authority became a self protecting tool to look after itself*
- *I had a phone call from the service manager and an email from the manager because they wanted to make sure I was ok, because it was horrendous, absolutely horrendous, he was just broken, he was just broken, he passed away...he died*

Outcomes

- Disenfranchised Grief:
- Relationship not recognised-SW > Client
- The loss is not acknowledged – Time off to grieve
- The griever is excluded- Funeral, mourning rituals
- The Personification of Systemic Failure – Individual + Organisation+ SCR + Media, combine in different ways and at different levels to increase the feelings of blame and isolation experienced by the SW.

Links to practice:

- SW (+other agency) issues about support and supervision
- Assertiveness
- Management
- SCR’s a learning tool
- LSCB’s as learning organisations

Thank you for listening…