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University of Wales
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Children, Young People and Families (BMHP5004_LON)

Assessment Component 1

Case study - Written Report

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Learner declaration

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Introduction

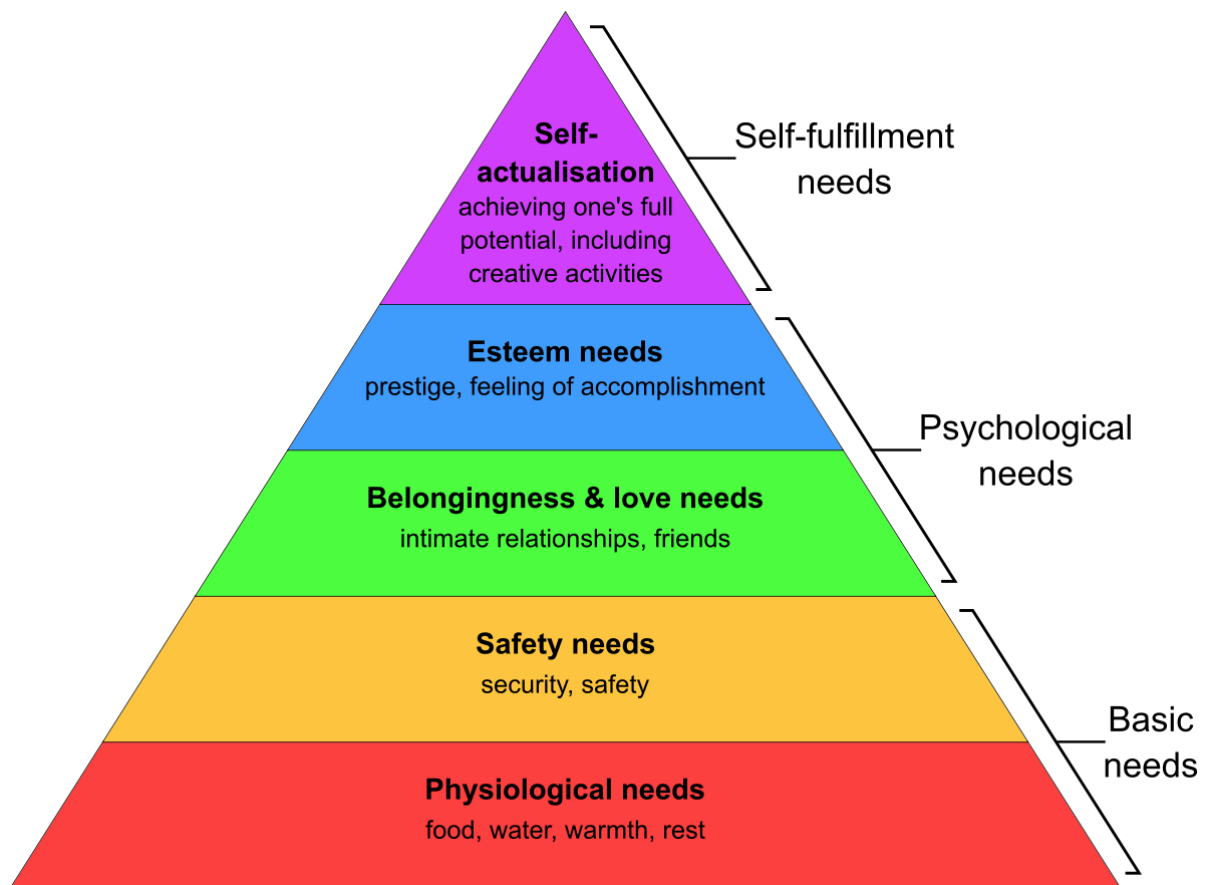
Children are very dependent as they are often helpless, also children are always needing, care, love, and protection, this is often where the parents can give them these unconditionally; to give children a good start in life. However, sometimes the protectors, which are the parents become the predators. This case study will be identifying a family facing adversity. The specific issues in this case study will be discussed and explored, the issues include alcohol misuse, drug abuse, child neglect, child kidnapping and the involvement of the criminal justice system. An analysis of the efficacy of the professional involvement, of the health and social care agencies; playing an active role and the current policy and decision-making processes, will be identified, and discussed. Current policies and the case management initiatives used by multi-disciplinary services to meet the various needs and vulnerabilities of the child and family involved in this case study will be identified. Finally, recommendations for improvement required in this case study will be discussed

The case of Shannon Matthews happened in 2008, in West Yorkshire, England. Shannon came from a single-parent family and lived with her mother called Karen, Shannon rarely got a home-cooked meal and lived mostly on chocolates and biscuits. It was stated that Shannon requested to go and live with her father. Shannon was known by the social services and was on the high-risk register. Karen reported to the police that her daughter was missing, it was after twenty-four days that Shannon was found drugged and afraid, in Paul Drake's house who was Karen's boyfriend's uncle. Both Paul and Karen were found guilty of kidnapping and false imprisonment and given eight years in prison. (Moss, 2018).

What is a vulnerable Child?

A vulnerable child could be defined as a child that is in danger, which could be due to different unfavourable conditions that the child is been subjected to. Public Health England (2020) defines a vulnerable child 'as any child at greater risk of experiencing physical, or emotional harm, and or experiencing poor outcomes due to one or more factors, in their lives'. Sharon could be identified as a vulnerable child because she was not fed properly at home, all the child benefits Karen got for Sharon's upkeep was not used to look after Sharon but was used for buying alcohol and unhealthy foods for Sharon and the rest of the family. When considering Maslow Hierarchy of needs (2020), for an individual to get to the level of self-actualization

needs which is the highest level, one of the levels is food, the individual to be able to cloth eat well and living conditions need to be comfortable. In Sharon's situation, the living conditions were not conducive for a child, so it could be stated that she needed a comfortable and stable home life, which appears to be absent in this case. Below is a diagram of the Maslow hierarchy of needs.

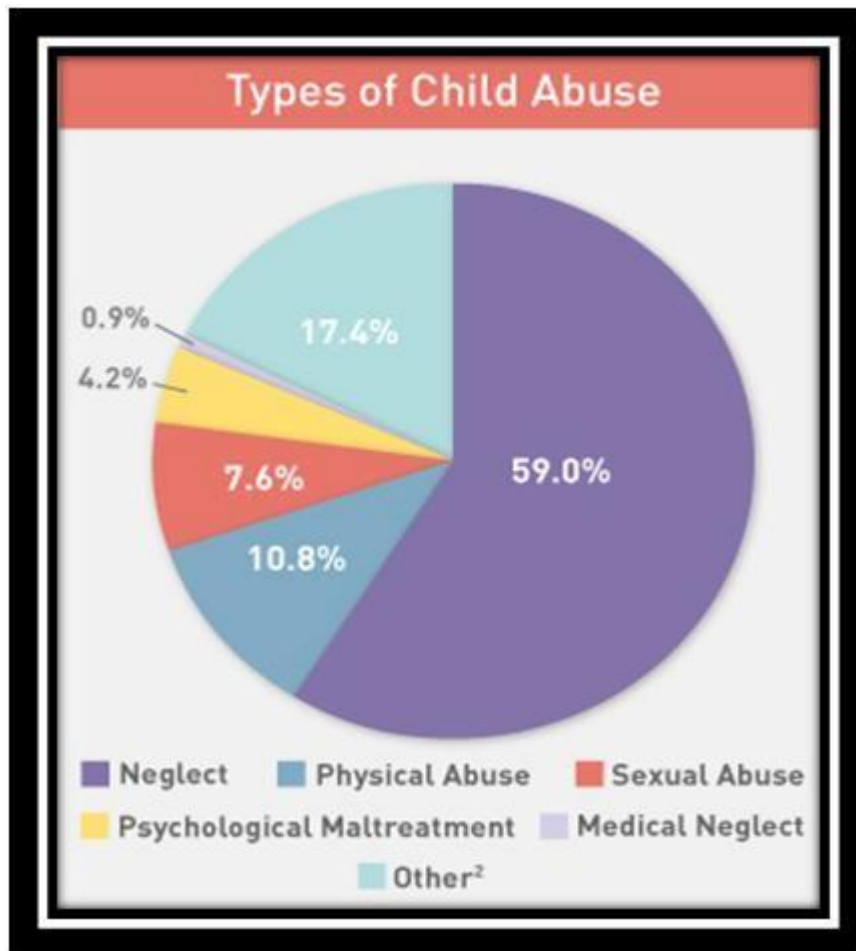


The Maslow Hierarchy of Needs (2020)

The Risk Factors That Made Shannon Vulnerable

Neglect

Neglect could be defined as when an individual such as a child is not given the supervision and care that is needed to make such a child comfortable and free from harm. NSPCC (2020) defines "child neglect as the failure to meet a child's basic needs and the most common form of child abuse". Shannon was neglected hence the reason where the social services decided to put her on the "at-risk register". The case study did not state that there was any other follow-up as to Shannon's welfare. Below is a chart from NSPCC showing the percentage of children that suffer from neglect is 59.0%. Which is high compared with other forms of abuse.



NSPCC chart of types of child abuse (2020)

Alcohol Abuse

Shannon's mother used the child benefit that should have been used for buying food and other essentials for the family to buy alcohol hence the statement that Shannon made that she hoped she would get a cooked meal. Children perform better when they live in a structured and healthy home. Panico et al (2019) explain that children tend to develop better when raised by married parents on average as their cognitive, emotional and development outcomes in childhood. Hence Shannon was at a disadvantage as Karen was not interested in looking after her. House of Parliament (2018) explain that parental alcohol misuse can have very negative impacts on children's everyday routine and affect their mental and physical wellbeing, consequently, Shannon was not happy with her mother drinking with her boyfriend and other friends that came to the house, however she was not in the position to make any changes to her living conditions as she was a minor.

Child Kidnapping

Shannon was subjected to child kidnapping by her mother and her mother's boyfriend's uncle. This was the utmost betrayal on the part of Shannon as Karen was supposed to be her protector and make sure no harm came to her. Karen tried to pretend that she did not know what had happened to her daughter, but this was not true. Karen did television interviews to appeal to the public to please come forward if anyone knows Shannon's whereabouts. This was all stage managed as Karen knew where her daughter was.



Perpetual fostering: Missing children statistics UK 2021

Last year 68,944 missing children reports were filed last year in England and Wales. Which demonstrates the high rate of missing children, yearly.

Analysis

The assessment, intervention of multi-agency and results

The Assessment Framework Triangle



Image: Working Together to Safeguard Children A guide to inter agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (2018)

The Social services had a referral as regards Shannon's poor school attendance. The social services then decided, whether an assessment needs to be carried out and in the case of Shannon, this was necessary. Shannon became the subject of assessment by the health and social care agencies when her attendance in school was very low.

For Shannon to be put on the "at-risk register", above is the assessment framework needs to be utilised to assess Shannon's situation to see if she is at risk. The fact that Shannon was not going to school regularly, and was looking unkempt, made the health care professional put her on the "at-risk register". Shannon could be described as a child facing adversity, hence the reason why she was put on the at-risk register. For Shannon to be seen as a child at risk there were three questions that she had to meet the criteria, firstly is Shannon in need? (Section 17 children act 1989) Secondly, is there reasonable cause to suspect that Shannon is suffering or is likely to suffer? Lastly is Shannon in need of accommodation? (section 21A children act 1989)

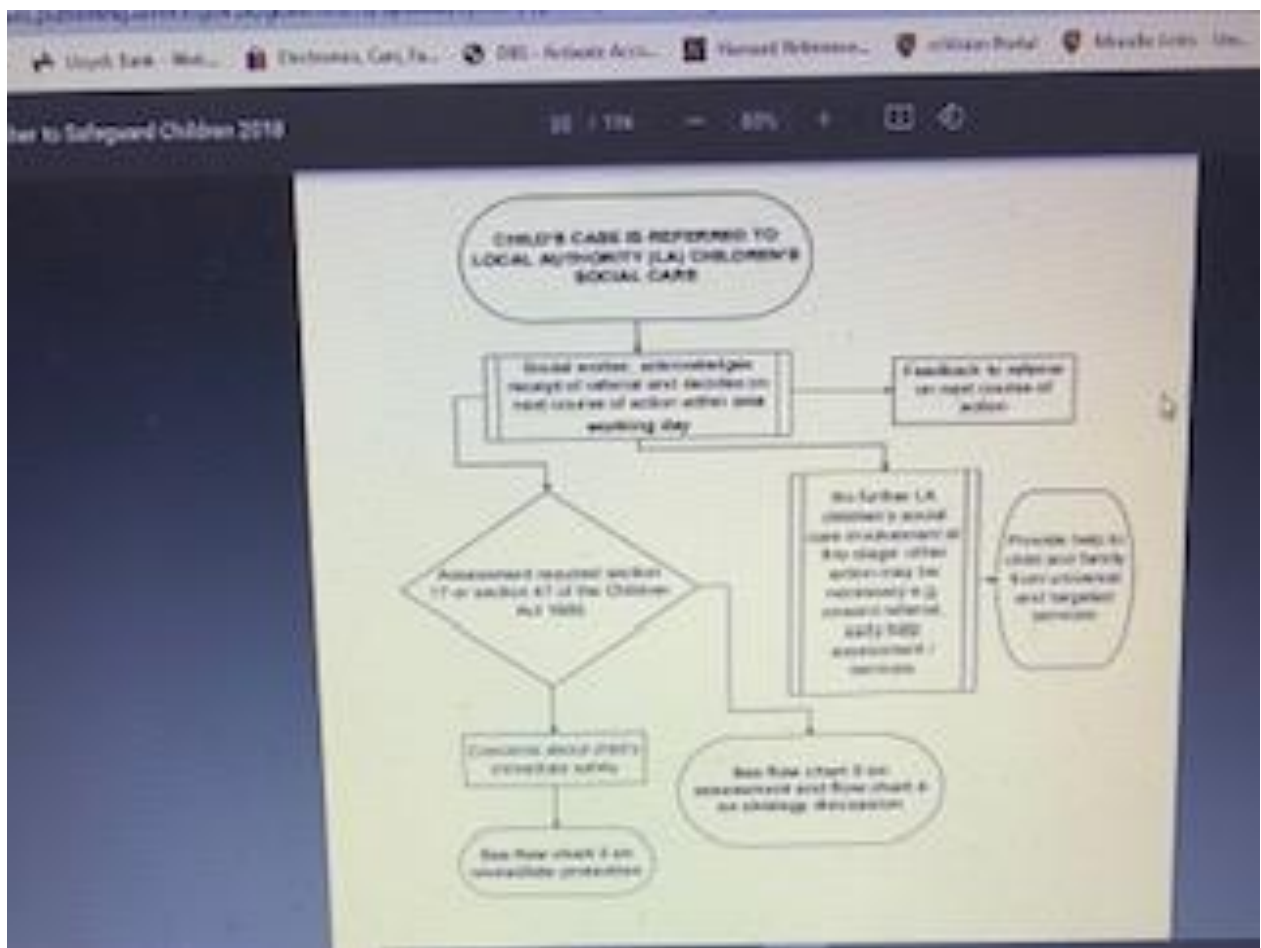


Image: Working Together to Safeguard Children A guide to inter agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (2018) page 35

Above is a flow chart that the social services use to assess if a detailed assessment is needed. The local authorities must decide within 24 hours.

Discussion

The children's Rights – Human Rights Joint Committee (2007) states that the UNCRC 1991 highlights that every child has a right to education, consequently the reason why Shannon's attendance in school was being monitored. The right to a standard of living is adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual-moral, and social developments, therefore Shannon needed

to be protected, physically, mentally, spiritually and her social developments. The Equality Act (2010) states that every child has a right to equal access to health and care services and support. Hence Shannon deserved the best and should have been treated better than the way her mother did. The Police force had to get involved in Shannon's case as she was reported missing, they worked very quickly and data protection (2018), was taken into consideration and all the multiagency health and social workers were able to share information discretely. The local authorities and the social workers worked effectively also Shannon's school would have been contacted and they would have given information that they had in order to find Shannon safely.

Evaluation

Shannon was found quite quickly this was due to the support of the neighbours and the fact that the police force acted quickly. The fact that Shannon was found drowsy and possibly drugged was very worrying. Most of the time social workers aim not to split families apart, however in the case of Shannon the mother was the predator and was the one who planned Shannon's disappearance, such a rule of keeping the family together would not be possible in this case study. Shannon would have wanted to live with her father but it is not known the living conditions of Shannon's father so it may not have been a viable option.

Ashiabi et al (2015) explain Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory and state that there are four layers, first is the microsystem which is the immediate environment in which a child lives, in the case of Shannon there were issues as regards this, as her mother was not looking after her properly. Shannon rarely had cooked meals. The second layer is the mesosystem, which describes interrelationships between different microsystems in the case of Shannon this was absent as Shannon's mother had no relationship with Shannon's school, however, this would have helped Shannon academically. The third layer in the ecosystem involves the parent's place of work, in the case of Shannon, her mother was unemployed so that layer was not an option for her. The fourth layer is the macrosystem which includes cultural values and describes the economic conditions of the family. In the case of Shannon, her mother was unemployed and had left home at the age of 16. She is not reported to have had any education or to have ever been employed. Shannon's mother was on benefits which demonstrated that she was poor. Below is a diagram of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory

The Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory

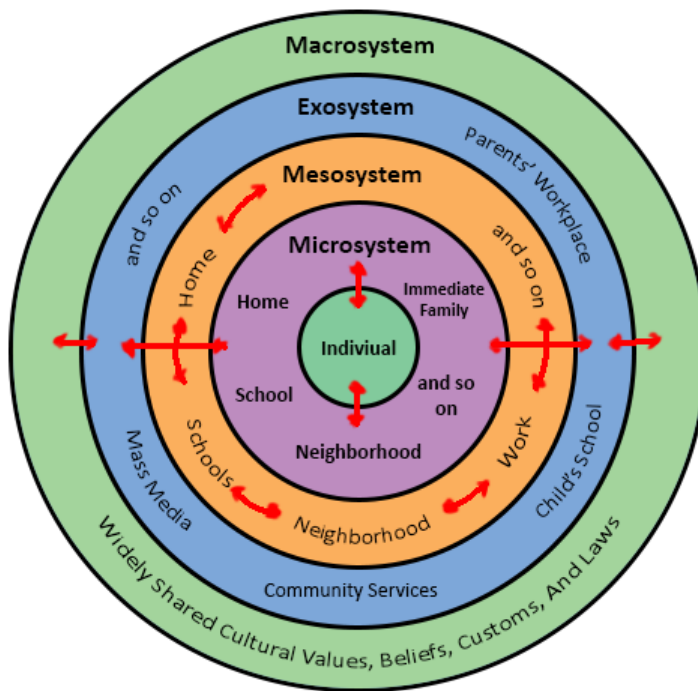


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Recommendations

Shannon could have left her mother's care if her voice was heard. It was stated that she had told her mother that she would prefer to live with her father. Shannon's mother did not want to let her go since she was collecting her child benefit. The local authority could have got involved with the family earlier and probably paying the family a visit and see how the family lived. It was stated that Shannon's mother left her door open to visitor and was not conducive to raising children.

The local authority could have helped Shannon and her family more by getting closer to the family and finding out what the issues were. Shannon was not able to express herself enough to give the social workers a better insight as to the actual issues. Any decision that was decided as regards Shannon must be in her best interest. This is because Shannon is in the middle of this case and her voice should be heard and her wishes should be taken into consideration.

Conclusion

Shannon's case study has demonstrated how important the multi-disciplinary team need to share information effectively and efficiently. The Police force needed the local authorities to share the information they had about Shannon and her family. If information was not shared the result of this case could have been different. Shannon was found alive and would be, separated from her mother who happened to be the cause of her problem. Stability was what Shannon wanted but her mother Karen failed her. This case has shown how important it is to protect vulnerable children as they are very defensive less, hence the reason why the government over the years has come up with different policies to protect the rights and safety of children.

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