



**GRADUATE CERTIFICATE in Consolidation
of Social Work Practice
LEVEL 6 - 60 Credits
BMPPF6044**

**LEARNER PORTFOLIO
(PORTH AGORED and UNIVERSITY OF WALES
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Task 3

Safeguarding and working in complex situations – Case Study

Guidance;

Please ensure that you meet the National Occupational Standards and assigned Learning Outcomes for this task (see handbook).

Question:

Complete a critically reflective case study based on an assessment that you have undertaken with others, in your own area of work, concerning the safeguarding of either an adult or a child. You must demonstrate how the case relates to or could relate to safeguarding legislation, policies, strategies and procedures (including demonstrating an understanding of the interface between social services provision in Wales with the United Kingdom, the European Union (EU) and outside the EU). You must demonstrate your understanding of the integration of analysis in assessment, collaborative working and professional judgements in increasingly complex situations and the use of social work theories. You must refer to the specific dimensions of working in Wales.

4000 words (+/- 10%: include your actual word count at the end of each section).

In April 2016 it became the law that local authorities in Wales needed to support and safeguard children and adults who need care and support under the Social Service and Well-being Act (2014) (SSWB(A)2014). This Act has 7 key principles for children that include wellbeing, voice and control, early intervention and prevention, assessment of need, eligibility and care planning, safeguarding and looked after children. The purpose of the act is to promote children's rights, encourage partnerships between services and agencies, focus on prevention rather than respond to crisis and support families to stay together were safe.

When a family is referred to or self-refer to social service then they are assessed under Part 3 of the SSWB(A)2014 which sets out a legal duty on all local authorities to assess the needs of a child and family who may need care and support, then decide whether the child meets the eligibility criteria following the assessment which involves the whole family and considers the child's well-being and preferred and best outcome. Within the act part 2 looks at the well-being duty and prevention, part 7 looks at if there are any child protection concerns and part 6 looks at if a child enters care and is a looked after child and/or accommodated child.

When Part 3 is completed, there are three possible outcomes. The first is, no further action which means that the needs of the families can be supported by services such as school, general health and community groups. The second is early help where families can receive family support and parenting programmes, financial and housing support and advice and early intervention services. If there has been needs identified then the family can receive a care and support plan where the support is more formal which involve services around the child and family where they meet and create a plan with clear outcomes to support the family.

Family A included a single mother and her 5 children. They were assessed and was offered a care and support plan in order to respond to their needs. Key part of a care and support plan is that the family are willing to work with agencies as it's voluntary and they can refuse support at any time if they don't feel that they need

the support. Unfortunately, the situation at home wasn't improving for the children with neighbours and schools sharing concerns about school attendance, mother's poor mental health and concerns that the children were being left alone in the house. The mother's engagement was very well at the beginning of the intervention, but she slowly became distant, didn't turn up to appointments or open the door when professionals were knocking. It was obvious that something wasn't right but there was no evidence.

After 2 months of being offered care and support threshold for section 47 had been reached when the mother left the children alone over night while she went out drinking. There were no adults in charge of the children, and the oldest was 14 years old and youngest 3 years old. The police were called by a neighbour who was concerned for the safety of the children.

When the Police officers arrived at the house it was in disarray with dog faeces on the floor, the two younger children weren't wearing any clothes, there was no electricity or food in the house. The children's bedrooms were dirty and smelled of urine. The mother arrived home minutes after the Police Officer and Out of hours Social Worker and a Police Protection Order (PPO) which is a legal power under Children Act 1989 (ChA1989) was avoided. PPO allows the police to remove any child from a place that they are at risk of significant harm and they can keep the children for up to 72 hours while next steps are being discussed with Social Services as stated in the ChA1989.

This situation triggered a Strategy Discussion between Police and Social Service Team Lead to determine if there a reasonable cause to suspect if the children are or likely to suffer significant harm. From this meeting there can be three different outcomes: no further action, immediate protective action or a decision to trigger a Section 47 enquiry. This Section 47 enquiry can be single agency, which means completed by a social worker on their own. Or, as a joint investigation with the police. This process is explained and outlined in the ChA1989 and 2004 Act which is a development from the Act of 1989 to ensure the strong inter-agency cooperation which was included following the death of Victoria Climbié.

The SSWB(W)A 2014 is a legislation unique to Wales that underpins Child Protection with the key principles as shown in the Act as promoting well-being and early intervention and gives emphasis on multi-agency collaboration and protection from abuse, neglect and harm. The Wales Safeguarding Procedures (2019) also provides national set of guidelines for safeguarding children and adults that Social Workers use in their day to day work and as it is an app and is updated regularly. This app is a very useful tool to check, read and gain more information that is current. This has been part of a social worker's daily practice and part of developing skills and understanding within the role.

With this family it was decided at the Strategy discussion that a Section 47 enquiry single agency was needed. My Team Lead contacted me and asked me to complete the enquiry. A Section 47 enquiry (S47) is explained in the ChA1989 and SSWB(W)A 2014) as "social services are responsible for deciding what action to take and how to proceed following the S47". It goes on to explain that the process should always be child-centred and work in a multi-agency way and that the main aim is to ensure that the child's care is being met and they are protected from harm. The way that I responded to completing the S47 was to speak to each child separately, speak with parents and any professionals working with the children. As I was already working with the family I had the advantage of knowing a lot about the family already and the children knew me therefore were able to open up to me quite quickly. On reflection, if another social worker had to complete the S47 in my place I do not feel that the family would have opened up as much to someone that they do not know therefore, I feel that the social worker working with the family would be the best person to complete the S47 if possible.

Since I graduated, I have had the opportunity to attend training such as Achieve Best Practice with the police, Joint Investigation Enquiry training jointly with Social Service, Health and Police as well as observing colleagues and discussing with my manager within supervisions. I feel that I had the opportunity to build knowledge and experience before completing a S47 on my own. I will also continue to shadow colleague and attend training in order to maintain and develop my skills and knowledge further.

I waited to receive the CID16 before completing the S47. A CID16 is a police report that Social Service receive from the Police Officers that record the details of the incident. Receiving this report would enable me to have

a better understanding of what has happened, as I was not part of the Strategy Discussion and this is where I would find the information needed. On reflection, sometimes I do feel that the social worker should be part of these strategy discussions especially if we know the family in questions. This would have enabled me to ask more questions to the Police about what happened to have a clearer understanding. I do feel that some key information is missing from these reports especially about how the children responded, how they felt and if they said anything to the Police Officers. The child's voice is an imperative part of our work as children's social workers and it is extremely important that it is captured in situations such as this. I understood from this situation that there was an Out of Hours Social Worker present too but when I contacted for more information he replied saying that all information was in the CID16 and that he didn't speak to the children individually as the mother returned home shortly after they arrived. On reflection I don't feel that the collaboration work between the Police and Social Service is not as strong as it could be at times as it's only the Team Lead who has contact with them when completing the Strategy Discussion and this is not with the officers that attended the home address. There is limited co-working or discussion between officers and social workers and I do feel that in some situation it would be beneficial to work closer with the police day to day as police has so much important and relevant information and vice versa. It can also be difficult at times as there are so much different police officers working different shifts with some not having an in depth knowledge of child protection it can slow the process down for the families or not having the expertise needed to assess the situation.

As a children's social worker it is extremely important to gain the voice of the child in all situations. The family of 6 live on an estate in a rural and deprived area of Wales. According to the census, approximately half speak Welsh. Number of people living on the estate understand some Welsh but will not be confident in speaking it and would prefer to discuss anything through English. I have previously gained the family's preferred language and requirements around the 'active offer' (Welsh Government, 2016) and she chose to discuss in English.

When working directly with families I have learnt that it is important that my ethics and values are right and that I am responsive, aware and sensitive to other's values and ethics. As stated on the Social Care Wales website the "code of ethics Wales" are standards and rules that social workers must work towards to ensure a safe and well practice. Beckett et al (2017 p.3) explains values as a "central position in social work because the job, like that of other helpful professionals, constantly places us in the position of having to make ethical decisions, decisions about what is the right thing to do not in a technical sense but in a moral one."

I went to visit the all 5 children at school. I find that they are more open to discussion when in school or a neutral place as they are worried that their parents or siblings might hear if they talk to me at home. As a Children's Social Worker I always have the child's best interest as a focal point of all my work and decisions. The Children and Young People's Right Framework (UNCRC) helps with this as it outlines what children need to thrive and how adults and the Government should work towards to ensure that these rights are met and "Wales was the first UK nation to embed these right into law via the Rights of Children and Young Person (Wales) Measure 2011" according to Children's Commissioners' website.

When I visited the children, my approach is a little different depending on their ages and ability. The 7 year old is non-verbal therefore I needed to work collaboratively with his classroom assistant as she knows him better than I do and can communicate using the communication book. This ensures that Article 12 is active with him having the right to be listened to and be taken seriously. It is extremely important that we capture every children's lived experience and that it is out duty to make sure that we make sure that their voice is heard.

The eldest does not want her private life to be shared and is very selective of which teachers at her school know any information about her family. This has been discussed with her and keeping Article 16 of the right to keep some things private in mind. I will only share relevant information with key workers expressing the importance of not over sharing. I am wary to attending school when it's break or lunch time as I know that she would not want her friends to see. There are 3 schools between 5 children and I have to work collaboratively with all headteachers, teachers and support staff to ensure that all relevant information are being shared with all that are involved so that the children are supported in the best way possible. I do find it hard at times to keep everyone up to date with all relevant information in a timely manner. Sometimes I have another crisis

with another family, annual leave or even off due to illness. Other professionals will sometimes demand that we share all information with them and while reflecting on my time as a social worker I am gaining more confidence in my approach to share only what is necessary and to keep discussions to core groups or family meetings.

During the Section 47 Enquiry I will speak to all professionals involved with the family, including medical professionals, education, housing associations and community groups if appropriate. I will visit the parents to gain their views and to discuss with Mam why she left the children alone all night. During my discussion with her it became apparent that she is struggling to cope with all 5 children, including 1 with additional needs and feels that she needs a break. When I spoke to the fathers their involvement with their children were sporadic or absent. They did not see their children consistently and did not pay any child maintenance. On reflection, the Part 3 Care and Support assessment that was completed as part of the (SSWB(W)A 2014) and is a statutory assessment that the local authority must carry out to determine if a child has any care and support needs. Part 3 assessments are completed by social care practitioners or social workers within another team and then it is allocated to a social worker or social care practitioner within the children's team depending on the need of the family. The quality and depth of these assessments are different depending on the worker, time, willingness of the families to open and be honest during the assessment period and case load. The assessment for this family was not in great detail and did not involve the extended family or fathers of the children. On reflection the plan did not reflect the families true needs as it escalated to Child Protection quickly after my involvement with the family. The mother had not been completely honest about her situation during the assessment period. This could be in fear of having her children taken away as there is still stigma attached to social service and we have experienced being called "child snatchers" on several occasions in fear.

In England this assessment has to be completed in 45 working days but it states on the Wales Government's website that the "assessment must be timely, proportionate, person-centred...and should not be unnecessarily delayed." The intake team are under pressure to complete the assessment and according to the mother they only visited her twice to complete the assessment. I don't feel that this is enough time to truly get an understanding of their family life and what support they need.

During my S47 investigation when I approached a teacher in one of the schools to ask how the children have been doing she responded to say that there were talks on the estate that the mother was leaving the children alone in the house and has done several times over the past few months. I challenged her to ask why she had not shared this information with social services or with me as the children's social worker as she was part of the care and support meetings since the children have been open to social services. On reflection, I feel that the teacher may have withheld the information because it was classed as "hearsay" and difficult to determine if this was correct information or not but, I explained to the teacher that I could have explored this further with the mother and might have avoided crisis or PPO. I feel that schools have a significant role to play with safeguarding our children as well as giving them education. It has been shared within the news and Child Practice Reviews that services need to work closer together as well as all professionals receiving training on child protection. Although schools do attend child protection training I am not sure if the level they are receiving is sufficient enough and it seems much more as a tick box exercise. Data sharing and UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which is based on the EU GDPR plays a role here. It impacts how safeguarding data is stored, shared and accessed especially in multi-county cases as stated on the Government's website. When safeguarding is involved data protection principle is null.

All professionals working within their field have their own understanding and their own agenda but everyone has a duty to report as highlighted in the SSWB(A)2014. They might not understand or accept social service's way of working or decision making. All working within schools have to complete a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) to work with children. It is stated on the Government website that DBS are completed to "help employers make safer recruitment decisions. DBS also maintains adults and children's barred lists and makes considered decision whether an individual should be included in one or both listed and barred from engaging in regulated activity." The Birchard Enquiry which was completed by Sir Michael Birchard following the death of

Holly Wells and Jessica Chapam in 2003 when they were both killed by Ian Huntley who was a care taker at their school. The report states that Ian Huntley did have police checks completed when he applied to be a school care taker in 2001 but the DBS checks failed to expose his history of sexual offense allegations. It states that the search was completed under the wrong name of Nixon and that there were poor information sharing by police which resulted in Ian Huntley been cleared to work with children.

On the British Association of Social Worker's websites it states that when a child dies and they suspect abuse or neglect then there will be a Serious Case Review involving the organisations and professionals that have been working with that family. In Wales, these reports are called Child Practice Reviews as stated on Safeguarding Boards (Wales) Regulation 2015.

In 2022 Logan Mwangi was murdered by his mother, partner and a teen in Wales. The impact of the Child Practice Review is highlighting the multi-agency failings, same in England in 2021 when Arthur Labinjo-Hughes was tortured and murdered by step mother and father. The impact of the Child Practice Review highlighted a better information sharing. When reading any Child Practice Review I can see that the report will include recommendations about working collaboratively. This is a common theme that I have seen in these reports and what I experience day to day as a social worker.

Although the UK has left the European Union(EU) there are some legacy and frameworks remain relevant such as child abduction, trafficking and family law are still influenced by the EU. The Hague Convention is one international law on child abduction and protection and this is stated on the Government's website an international agreement where over 100 countries has signed it. This is to prevent international child abduction and return the child to the country of habitat.

In *Re E (Children)* [2011] UKSC 27, a mother took her children from Norway to England without the father's consent as she felt that they were at risk due to the domestic violence. The father applied for their return under the Hague Convention 1980. The supreme court determined that the mother and the children should return to Norway under the Hague Convention of 1980 but an assessment and protective measures such be put in place to ensure the safety of the children.

On completing my S47 investigation I share my findings with my manager and complete all necessary paperwork. This discussion with my manager is crucial to determine what support to offer the family and to discuss if the children are at risk of significant harm. With this family threshold for significant harm had been met. During my school visit with the children they shared that they must get cold showers as there was rarely any money for electric, there wasn't much food in the house and Mam was out drinking regularly and was bringing unsuitable individuals to their home and that they felt unsafe. This triggers an Initial Case Conference (ICC) which is explained in Part 7 of the SSWB(A)2014 as a multi agency meeting when a child is identified as being at risk of significant harm. The ICC should take place within 15 working days of the strategy discussion. The purpose of the ICC is to share information between agencies such as police, health, education and social services and to assess the risk to the child, protective factors are identified and a whether the children's names should be placed on a Child Protection Register and a child protection plan to be draws up to ensure that the children are safe and monitored. Throughout it is a child-centred practice and the active offer of an advocacy should be offered to all children an adult to ensure that they are supported in the process as stated on the Independent Advocacy Service website which is also part 10 of the SSWB(A)2014. During the ICC after professionals have decided if the children's names are placed on the Child Protection Register then they need to decide under what category of harm. According to the Wales Safeguarding app there are 4 categories; physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. The category for this family was emotional abuse. I explained during the meeting that thought that we should include neglect as the children were left home alone with no food or electric and need to have cold showers but other professionals disagreed and the chair had to go with the majority.

The Safeguarding procedures explains that an initial core group needs to be within 10 days o f the ICC and should include a smaller group pr key professionals such as education, health visitors or school nurse and support workers from services such as youth justice or substance misuse service. Within these Core Group a

plan will be created which is child-centred and has the child voice clear to see within the plan. These meetings will be held every 4-6 weeks to monitor progress. As the children's social worker I would need to see the children every 10 days in different locations such as school and home and to see them on their own as well as with family as it states within the Working Together to Safeguard People which is the guidance from the SSWBA(W)2014. Under the process a review case conference is held after 3 months to monitor progress and to share any concerns. If the children's names remain on the child protection register due to limited or no significant changes then the next review case conference will be held every 6 months until threshold of significant harm has not been met.

If the concern is still there and increasing or there is a crisis point of safeguarding concern for the children then under the Children's Act 1989 there is a formal pre-court process which is the Public Law Outline (PLO) and this is where the Local Authority will apply to court for a care order or a supervision order. PLO sets steps for the Local Authority to take before issuing court proceedings. This includes sending a letter before proceedings to parents to encourage them to gain legal advice in order to discuss safeguarding concerns and prevent the need to take court action. Families are entitled to free legal advice within this process. There are two outcome for the PLO process. If concerns improve then there will be no court application and the family could continue with support on a child protection plan. If the concerns remain then Local Authority proceed to court proceedings and apply for a care order or a supervision order. Luckily with this family we were able to avoid PLO and the situation changed for the better with the hard work of the mother and good support network of family and professionals around them.

This process is a structured process where everyone know what is expected of them. Since I qualified as a social worker I have gained experience and confidence in the process of child protection and feel that I weave legislations, policies, strategies and procedures naturally within my reports. On reflection I do feel that the process is still a little difficult for families to understand and process. The feedback that I have received at the end of any successful child protection is that it's an helpful process to help a family work through a difficult and hard times in their life. I reflect on the process and I am proud and privileged to be able to be by their side through the process and cheer them on at the end of a successful journey.

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