Book Review

Assessment, Risk & Decision Making in Social Work (An Introduction)

By Campbell Killick & Brian J Taylor

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This book is one in a series of books for social work students exploring key themes within a specific social work training subject area. The books have been published to assist soon to qualify or newly qualified staff to develop an awareness and understanding of the complexities of social work practice within the UK today.

The authors developed the text in consultation with students undertaking the pre-qualifying *Risk Assessment in Practice* module of the Masters in Social Work, and students undertaking the post-qualifying *Professional Decision Making in Social Work* for new graduates.

It provides the reader with links to the "Social Work Subject Benchmark Statement", developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for UK Higher Education (www.Qaa.ac.uk), which sets out the academic expectations for those working towards Bachelor's degrees at level 6 in The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and level 10 in The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland. The book is therefore relevant to a UK-wide audience.

The book provides the reader with the opportunity to consider the importance of evidencing the use of theoretical knowledge, and offers the opportunity, through small case scenarios and discussion points, to develop practice skills in assessment and risk. It also helpfully signposts the reader to relevant core elements of the "Professional Capabilities Framework" developed by BASW (www.basw.co.uk) for use in England.

Series Editor Professor Johnathon Parker states: Questioning everything, especially from a position of knowledge is central to being a social worker' (p. xiv). Within the book, this theme is evident and draws the reader to reflect critically on their personal and professional experience; the conscious or unconscious influence this can have when undertaking assessments and; consider the wider professional and societal influences that exist when practicing social work.

The focus of the book is to assist candidates within the four UK countries to consider their academic pathways to a social work qualification. There is however much in the book that provides those studying social work in other areas of the world with an insight into social work practice, expectations on standards, and societal and political influence upon the profession within the UK.

The book is set out in two parts;

Essential Practice Principals – chapters 1 -5

This section of the book aims to provide the reader with an insight into what effective practice not only should look like, but also to how it may feel for those receiving a social work service. It helps to focus the reader, to consider the positive impact social workers can have in developing relationships with people who use services, and in recognising and supporting those who require social work support to be at the centre of the decision-making and plans for change.

It provides the foundation elements from which the reader can develop their understanding of assessment and management of risk, emphasising the need for collaborative professional practice, and ensuring that the client is included and

instrumental in any planning arrangements made, wherever possible. This is best summarised in the following quote.

> Relationships may not always be free from conflict, but the skilled social worker will seek to understand the situation from the client perspective, and try to view conflict from the client or family perspective (p. 8).

This section also helpfully provides the reader with a clear outline of the sphere of influence a social work practitioner has, and helps the reader to consider the professional accountability of other elements of statutory care and support, for example Health or Education professionals.

Particular Considerations – chapters 6 - 10

This section provides the reader with an exploration of the "external" influencing factors that impact upon social work as a profession today, and underpins the need to ensure that the support and reflection opportunities afforded a trainee are as important and necessary post qualification, to enable individuals to develop into their role.

It gives a basic overview of the legal and ethical considerations in managing risk; the influence of societal and cultural pressure upon risk assessment decisions. It prompts the reader to question the skills required to identify and manage acceptable risk in promoting individual choice for service users, even when this may conflict with a personal or professional value base or the expectations of the wider society: 'No professional can "know everything"; the more important requirement is to recognise that you need to know, and know how to find out what you need to know' (p. 103).

In addition, the authors provide informative graphics, and clear and easily accessed reference points for further reading and study. There are clear references within the book for the reader to undertake more comprehensive and detailed research on subject areas discussed, as the book is essentially designed to provide an introductory overview to what is a very complex and ever changing

area of social work practice. To emphasise this point, there are clear statements within some chapters urging the reader to access more comprehensive academic texts on the range of assessment and risk methodologies detailed within the text.

Whilst reading the book I reflected that as a trainee social worker some 30 years ago I would have found this text an invaluable reference point from which to develop my thinking and use it to identify my theoretical or academic research to help develop my practice.

When I was a practice teacher, I would have valued this book to help me to provide trainee social workers with reference material to help develop their thought processes not only from reading the text, but also by discussing the practice examples and case studies that are included in all chapters.

I would recommend this book to enable the reader to either gain a basic understanding of the social work task around assessment and risk, or as a refresher for experienced practitioners who may want to take stock and re-evaluate their practice in the field of risk assessment and management. It would be a good "aide memoir" for practice teachers when preparing for supervision of a student social worker, and could be a good tool to use in developing practice discussions around risk, values and professional accountability and responsibility.

About the author

Michael Stewart is a Consultant – Child Protection at CELCIS. A qualified social worker, Michael has been involved in social work both pre and post qualifying for over 30 years. He has practised in residential, area team and specialist practice areas and was a member of the implementation team for the Scottish Independent Care Review. He joined CELCIS in June 2020.

This book is part of the Transforming Social Work Practice series. SAGE Publishing provided free 30-day access to this e-book for review.