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Child protection workers' judgment and decision making processes at the point of first referral. Methodology and analysis.

The relationship between social work practice and its ever expanding body of knowledge is a long standing issue (Bergmark & Lundstrom, 2002; B. Corby, 1993, 2006; Drury-Hudson, 1997, 1999; Fook *et al.*, 1997; Frost, 2002; Gambrill & Gibbs, 2002; Gibbons, 2001; Gira *et al.*, 2004; Gould, 2006; Harinck & Veerman, 1995; Osmond & O'Connor, 2006; Reid, 2001; Rosen, 1981, 1983, 1994; Rosen *et al.*, 1995; Sheldon, 2001; Sheppard, 1995, 1998; Taylor & White, 2001; Thyer, 1993; Van Yperen, 2005; Webb, 2001; White & Stancombe, 2003). Especially in the high-risk field of child protection, modes are continuously being sought in which practice can benefit from various forms of knowledge in order to improve judgment and decision making. These modes range from a positivist, evidence-based approach, to reflective and reflexive practice (see e.g. Taylor & White, 2001; Thyer, 1993).

Although a fair amount of useful research has been done regarding child protection decision making processes (Benbenishty & Chen, 2003; Britner & Mossler, 2002; B. C. Corby, 2003; DePanfilis & Girvin, 2005; Drury-Hudson, 1999; Gambrill, 2005; Jones & Gupta, 1998; Kelly & Milner, 1996; Platt, 2006; Rosen *et al.*, 1995; Shapira & Benbenishty, 1993; Spratt, 2000), such studies were usually undertaken on the basis of vignettes or retrospect. Such studies are problematic as they decontextualise the decision task that workers are confronted with, whereas context is regarded as an important determinant of practice behaviour.

This study takes a prospective in-context approach to child protection decision making at the point of first referral and specifically focuses on the various kinds of knowledge that can be distinguished in various stages of that process. It is also asked how these forms of knowledge relate to each other.

A case study methodology which draws on documentary research, participant observation, and interviewing is presented along with the used framework for analysis.

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