

**An Investigation of Social Work Assessment
with Child Protection Cases in Non-Statutory Settings**

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with Child Protection Cases in Non-Statutory Settings**

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

(Signed)_____

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Contents

	page
Declaration	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Contents	iv
Tables	vii
Abbreviations	viii
Abstract	ix
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Theoretical and Value Stance of Thesis	1
1.2 Language and Meaning	3
1.3 Child Protection and Child Abuse	4
1.4 Social Workers in Health Care Settings	5
1.5 NSW Interagency Child Protection Practice	5
1.6 Child Protection and Social Workers in NSW Health Agencies	7
1.7 Casework and Clients	9
1.8 Assessment	10
1.9 Context of the Research	10
1.10 Self in Research	11
1.11 Rationale for Research	12
1.12 Thesis Outline	13
2. Literature Review	14
2.1 Literature Search	14
2.2 Issues in the Literature Review	15
2.3 Assessment in Social Work Practice	18
2.3.1 Social Work Assessment as Science	20
2.3.2 The Role of Values in Assessment	22
2.3.3 Aims of Assessment	23
2.4 Social Work Assessment with Child Protection Cases	24
2.5 Non-Statutory Social Work Child Protection Practices	28
2.4.1 Identifying and Reporting ‘Risk of Harm’	29
2.4.2 Psychosocial Assessment and Assessment for Treatment	30

2.6	Assessment Considerations	34
2.6.1	Research Methodology and the Construction of Knowledge	34
2.6.2	Case Considerations	35
2.6.3	Practitioner Considerations	40
2.6.4	Organisational Considerations	45
2.7	Summary of Literature Review	46
3.	Methodology and Analysis	48
3.1	Research Question and Aims	48
3.2	Epistemology	49
3.3	Reflective Practice	51
3.4	Grounded Theory Methods	53
3.5	Participants and Recruitment	54
3.5.1	Description of Participants	57
3.6	Ethical Issues	60
3.6.1	Human Research Ethics Committee Approvals	60
3.6.2	Informed Consent	61
3.6.3	Privacy and Confidentiality	61
3.6.4	Protecting Participants from Harm	63
3.7	Data Collection Tool	64
3.7.1	Rationale for Method	64
3.7.2	Description of Interview Format and Questions	65
3.7.3	Practical Considerations	68
3.7.4	Interview Process	69
3.8	Transcription	73
3.8.1	Process of Transcription	73
3.9	Analysis	76
3.9.1	Coding the Data	77
3.9.2	Writing Memos	79
3.9.3	Theoretical Sampling	80
3.10	Credibility (Reliability, Validity and Trustworthiness of Findings)	81
4.	Findings: Assessment Considerations	84
4.1	Summary of Cases Described	85
4.2	Dynamic Nature of Practice	88

4.3	Purpose of the Assessment	88
4.4	Context	90
4.4.1	Agency and Social Work Role	90
4.4.2	Interagency Issues	92
4.4.3	Stage of Case Career	93
4.4.4	Practical Considerations	94
4.5	Relationship	99
4.5.1	Identifying the Client	100
4.5.2	Engagement	101
4.5.3	Change	103
4.5.4	Power	104
4.5.4	Intra-agency Relationships	106
4.6	Intervention	107
4.6.1	Initial Intervention Decisions	107
4.6.2	Ongoing Intervention Decisions	109
4.6.3	Elements of Assessment	111
4.6.4.	Other Elements of Intervention	113
4.6.5	Evaluation	117
4.7	Content	119
4.7.1	Abuse Specific	121
4.7.2	Risk and Safety	122
4.7.3	Parenting	124
4.7.4	Child Development	126
4.7.5	Attachment	127
4.7.6	Loss, Trauma and Grief	127
4.7.7.	Strengths	128
4.8	Self	129
4.8.1	Experiences	129
4.8.2	Knowledge	133
4.8.3	Skills	135
4.8.4	Discourse and Values	136
4.8.5	Professional Identity and Education	139

5. Findings: How the Considerations Interact and Relate	141
5.1 How the Considerations Interact and Relate	141
5.2 ‘Own Assessment’	145
5.3 ‘All Families are Different’	148
5.4 Crisis	149
5.5 Summary of Findings	150
6. Discussion and Conclusion	152
6.1 Discussion	153
6.2 Implications	157
6.3 Conclusions	160
Endnotes	162
References	165
Appendices	
1. Defining ‘Risk of Harm’	184
2. Literature Search Strategy	185
3. Project Documents	
3.1 Recruitment letter	188
3.2a Participant information	190
3.2b Participant information (HAHS)	192
3.3 Participant Criteria	194
3.4 Consent Form	195
3.5 Publication Consent Form	196
4 Interview Schedule	197
5 Codes Used	202
Tables	page
3.1 <i>Participant agency geographic location</i>	58
3.2 <i>Participant agency type</i>	58
3.3 <i>Participant practice experience</i>	59
3.4 <i>Human Research Ethics Committee Approvals</i>	61

Abbreviations

AHS	Area Health Service (NSW Health)
CHW	The Children's Hospital at Westmead
CSAHS	Central Sydney Area Health Service
HAHS	Hunter Area Health Service
IAHS	Illawarra Area Health Service
SWSAHS	South Western Sydney Area Health Service
AVO	Apprehended Violence Order
BSW	Bachelor of Social Work (degree)
CIT	Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan 1954)
DoCS	Department of Community Services, NSW Government
DV	Domestic Violence
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
JIRT	Joint Investigation Response Team
MSW	Master of Social Work (degree)
NH&MRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NSW	New South Wales
NSW Health	Department of Health, NSW Government
PANOC	Physical Abuse and Neglect Of Children Service (NSW Health)
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy (degree)
PPM	Protection Planning Meeting
SAS	Sexual Assault Service (NSW Health)
UK	United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland)
US	United States of America

Abstract

This thesis presents a qualitative study investigating the understandings of social workers from non-statutory settings (health, hospital and mental health) of their assessment practices with children and families where child protection concerns have been identified. The study aims were to describe the considerations social workers identified as significant when undertaking such an assessment, as well as gain insight about how these considerations interact and relate.

The study was developed under a constructivist paradigm influenced by post-modern and post-structuralist thinking. Data collection involved a semi-structured in-depth interview based on concepts drawn from reflective practice and the critical incident technique. The participants were asked about their agency, their role and a recent case in which they had undertaken an assessment. Data collection and analysis were consistent with constructivist grounded theory methods.

Review of the literature suggests that social workers in statutory child protection practice and other settings consider factors relating to the case, themselves and their context in their assessment practice. Similar conclusions have been reached through this study. This study is unique in being the only qualitative study of social work assessment practices with child protection cases in non-statutory settings in NSW, to date.

The study found that social workers identified a range of considerations as important in their assessment practice. These considerations have been grouped thematically as context, relationship, intervention, content and self, in the presentation of findings in this thesis. These themes interact and relate in ways that are unique to the individual assessment circumstances rather than in a regular or consistent manner.

The findings of the study are relevant to social work practitioners, educators and researchers. The study furthers the understanding of social work assessment practice, and develops a clearer understanding and articulation of what is recognised

and termed as 'tacit knowledge' or 'practice wisdom' in this particular area of social work practice.