10 Minute Oral Presentation Abstracts
Alphabetical by presenting author

Therapists' experiences of 'internet exposure' in the therapeutic relationship: an interpretative phenomenological analysis

Stacey Baraniuk, Middlesex University & Metanoia Institute

The aim of this research was to investigate the effect on the therapist and the therapeutic relationship when clients obtained personal information about their therapist online and went on to disclose that information in a session. As social media has grown in popularity, many people have become accustomed to publishing information about themselves and others on the web. In this context, it is harder than ever for therapists to keep their personal and professional lives separate.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was the chosen methodology because it offers a framework for exploring individuals' lived experiences, providing a rich understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Semi-structured, one-to-one interviews were conducted with six participants. Each participant was interviewed twice. The second interview provided an opportunity to capture further reflections that may have emerged after interview one. Participants were qualified counsellors and psychotherapists who had had the experience of a client disclosing information about them that was obtained online – information that the therapist would not have willingly revealed to the client.

Four superordinate themes emerged during analysis: (1) Tension in peacetime (2) Breach of defences (3) Weapons (4) The aftermath: renegotiation with client and self. The war metaphor represents the struggle experienced by the participants and follows the journey from pre- to post-client disclosure. The analysis uncovered feelings of exposure, vulnerability and shame for the participants. These feelings made it difficult to navigate the therapeutic relationship, which was immeasurably changed in both positive and negative ways.

_____

Personal View: Integrated Phased Intervention for Complex Posttraumatic Stress Disorder with Comorbid Substance Use Disorder Following Intimate Terrorism

Julie Beaumont, Yasuhiro Kotera & Greta Kaluzeviciute
University Of Derby

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic isolation requirements may cause an increase in prevalence of Intimate Terrorism, a categorised type of Domestic Violence. This typology is characterised by coercive control and chronic fear. This alongside increased alcohol consumption potentially leads to a higher incidence of PTSD and CPTSD with comorbid Substance Use Disorder. Considering the differential outcomes for this population a specific approach to diagnosis and treatment is required. A phased integrated approach utilising Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) in conjunction with Seeking Safety (SS) is recommended. Pharmacological and Psychodynamic Psychotherapy are also discussed. Methods of improving treatment uptake are proposed. Requirement for further research to establish best practice delivery of CPTSD intervention is required alongside Group, self-administered and online formats.

_____

Exploring the facilitators and barriers to following COVID-19 guidelines on social distancing among young people in Northern Ireland

Emma Berry, Queen's University Belfast

Background: COVID-19 has rapidly changed societal relations, and one of the most critical change has been the need to social distance from others. Young people may experience social distancing guidelines as particularly challenging because of their developmental stage and lifestyles, which are typically centred on peers and relationship building. This study explored the facilitators and barriers to young people practising social distancing.

Methods: Cross-section survey data was collected using Qualtrics. Young people aged 16-25 years from Northern Ireland (NI) were recruited through email/social media between July and August 2020. The survey closed on August 24th prior to School/University restarts. The survey (containing closed and open-text questions) was developed and analysed by members of the Public Health Agency Behaviour Change Cell. The survey items were guided by the COM-B model. Quantitative data underwent frequency analysis, while qualitative data underwent Thematic Analysis.

Results: Most respondents (N=477) were aged 19-22, were students, and were living with family at during data collection. The majority of respondents reported minimal exposure to COVID-19. Most respondents knew how to social distance, and approximately half were practising this frequently. The influence of peers and physical environment were two out of a number of factors which influenced social distancing. Thematic analysis uncovered the contextual factors underpinning social distancing.

Discussion: Social distancing among young people from NI is influenced by psychological, social, and environmental factors. Many young people play an active role in reducing transmission through social distancing, but a significant proportion could be supported to maintain this behaviour.

_____

The associations between Memories of Benevolent Childhood Experiences and Student Mental Health. What do we really know?

Saskia Craig, Ulster University

This projected aimed to explore Benevolent Childhood Experiences (BCEs) and student mental wellbeing. Consequently, the Memories of Home and Family During Childhood Scale (MoHFDCS) questionnaire and DASS-21 questionnaire scores were evaluated.

A convenience sampling and cross-sectional design recruited 315 Ulster University students (74 males, 239 females and 2 students identifying as non-binary), aged 18-61.

Quantitive analytic tests of descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, stepwise regression and t-Tests were performed and calculated on SPSS software.

Childhood support, wellbeing, independence, valued, growth and security (representing BCEs) negatively correlated with DASS-21 scores. Significant correlations were found between age and depression scores $r(313) = .154$, $p < .01$ and gender and anxiety scores $r(315) = .167$, $p < .01$. Regression analyses showed significant results between BCEs and depression scores ($F(1, 313) = 22.10$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = .116$), BCEs and anxiety scores ($F(1, 313) = 26.84$, $p <.001$, $R^2 = .079$) and BCEs and stress scores ($F(1, 313) = 21.607$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .087$).

T-test analysis found (with the exception of wellbeing) participants who did not have a past mental health history scored significantly higher on MoHFDCS sub-scales.

In conclusion, students with a previous mental health history reported fewer positive childhood memories. Moreover, childhood feelings of value and growth significantly reduces student depression, support significantly reduces student anxiety and independence significantly reduces student stress. This project's limitations need addressed to aid how we can reduce Northern Ireland students' depression, anxiety and stress experiences, which are on the rise (Betts & Thompson, 2017).

_____

Children of the forgotten women - attachment in mother and baby home survivors

Natasha Dalton, Ulster University

Objectives: This is the first study to look at attachment in the children of women who were committed to mother and baby homes in the UK and Ireland. The objectives of this study were to determine the attachment state of mind (SOM) and experiences of a sample of adults adopted from mother and baby homes using the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI).

Design and methods: The current study made use of the all information gained by the AAI procedure by analysing the interview transcripts in two ways: (i) by using the AAI scoring system (Main, Goldwyn & Hesse, 2003) to reveal each participant's SOM (ii) thematic analysis of the transcripts producing an inductive set of themes. Participants were recruited via social media post as part of a broader study in adopted adults. Five participants were born in and spent their early lives in mother and baby homes, these five were grouped and analysed separately for the current study.

Results and conclusion: Results of the AAI showed that all participants had an insecure SOM with regards to attachment. Three out of the five participants were unresolved/disorganised with loss or trauma. Preoccupied was the highest represented classification, including those who were unresolved/disorganised but had preoccupied as the underlying classification. Qualitative analysis of transcripts identified seven overarching themes and a further eight sub-themes. This study also identified issues with participant's adoption experiences and can add to the wider discussion of adoption as a traumatic experience.

_____

Children's School Lives: The impact of teacher support and having additional educational needs (AEN) on pupil wellbeing in Irish primary schools

Maire Fitzgerald, Jennifer Symonds, Jacqueline Horan, Giulio D'Urso, Seaneen Sloan & Dympna Devine
University College Dublin

Children's wellbeing is an emerging topic in Irish policy and education guidelines. There is growing concern for the mental and emotional wellbeing of children with learning disabilities and other additional educational needs, and how best teachers can support them.

The current study utilised multi-group structural equation modelling to examine how well teachers' efforts to foster autonomy, relatedness, and competence predict educational wellbeing, and if this varies for children with identified additional educational needs (AEN).

Participants were 1112 Irish primary school pupils (558 female) aged 8-9 years. Data were gathered, as part of the Children's School Lives project, from pupils using a self-report questionnaire and from their class teachers using online questionnaires.

Analysis is ongoing and findings are still being generated. It is hoped that these findings will contribute to the development of practice and policy related to the provision of additional educational support in Irish primary schools.

_____

Beneath the Surface: the Influence of Music and the Dark Triad Traits on Stress and Performance

Teresa Gomes Arrulo, Michail Doumas & Kostas Papageorgiou
Queen's University Belfast

Objectives: This study aimed to assess the effects of hip-hop/rap and the Dark Triad traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy) on self-reported stress and performance, whilst accounting for music preferences and habitual music uses. It was hypothesised that hip-hop/rap would reduce stress levels after stress-induction, narcissism and psychopathy would predict variations in stress and performance, and music preferences and uses would moderate the relationships between music and stress, personality and stress, and personality and performance.

Design: An experimental design was used to test the stress-reducing effects of hip-hop/rap, compared to those of classical music and silence.

Methods: Seventy healthy adults (18-45 years, M = 22.8, SD = 6.6) completed measures of Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, music preferences, and music uses, and undertook a stress-inducing procedure involving arithmetic tasks. Participants were then randomly allocated to three groups: hip-hop/rap, classical music, or control, being exposed to the respective genre or silence for 20 minutes after the predicted peak in induced stress. Data was analysed using analyses of co-variance and hierarchical multiple regression analyses.

Results: Results showed that classical and hip-hop/rap music equally facilitated stress reduction. Narcissism predicted lower stress when classical music preference was high. Narcissism also predicted enhanced performance but also greater stress, when paired with infrequent stress-management through music.

Conclusions: These findings, although relying on self-reported measures of stress, highlight the contextually advantageous nature of hip-hop/rap and narcissism, demonstrating how these can positively contribute to stress reduction or cognitive performance, despite being predominantly perceived as socially aversive.

_____

Understanding the lived experiences of Healthcare Professionals during the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Interpretative phenomenological analysis

Emily McGlinchey[1], Catherine Hitch[1], Sarah Butter[1&2], Laura McCaughey[1], Emma Berry[1] & Cherie Armour[1]
[1]Queen's University Belfast, [2]University of Sheffield

Background: Little research has examined the impact of working within the context of COVID-19 on UK healthcare professionals' (HCPs) mental health and well-being, despite previous pandemic findings indicating HCPs are particularly vulnerable to suffering mental health difficulties due to the nature of healthcare work. Specifically, it appears that no research has employed qualitative methodologies to explore the effects of working amidst COVID-19 on mental health for HCPs in the UK.

Objective: To qualitatively examining the lived experiences of HCPs in Northern Ireland, working during the early stages of the pandemic and lockdown period.

Method: Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to explore the experiences of HCPs, who were working during the COVID-19 outbreak. Ten HCPs were recruited via social media and snowball sampling. All interviews were conducted via telephone.

Results: Three superordinate themes with subordinate themes were elicited. Theme one highlighted present and future challenges of HCPs working during the pandemic, such as current and future challenges of the COVID-19 context, infection concerns, resources and patient interpersonal care. Theme two highlighted the mental health and wellbeing of HCPs, focusing on the impact of mental health, coping strategies, resilience and the patients. Theme three related to HCPs' perceptions of public attitudes relating to stigma, community spirit and messages to the public.

Conclusion: To the authors' knowledge this is the first study to explore the unique experiences of frontline HCPs in Northern Ireland, offering a detailed account of the challenges confronted in these unprecedented circumstances and support needs within this cohort.

_____

A thematic review of barriers and facilitators to collaboration between NEPS psychologists, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators and Senior Leadership Teams in Irish post-primary schools.

Maria Holland & Johanna Fitzgerald
Mary Immaculate College

Objectives: A thematic review was conducted to evaluate policy, theory and research regarding barriers and facilitators to collaboration between Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) and National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologists in Irish post-primary schools. Results were used to identify directions for future research.

Design: NEPS has transitioned towards a whole-school, consultative role; however Irish policy has not explicitly addressed the SENCO role in post-primary schools regarding collaboration with NEPS and SLT. Furthermore, special education has become a mainstream concern in post-primary schools. A thematic review was necessary to begin to clarify the nature of collaboration between NEPS and post-primary schools across the Continuum of Support (CoS).

Methods: Policy and theoretical papers relating to the CoS and SEN provision were evaluated using thematic mapping. Primary research was reviewed systematically based on the themes identified in theory and policy, namely special education, inclusion, consultation, and collaboration. The review was framed using Dynamic Systems Theory.

Results: The review highlighted research gaps and tensions regarding the themes outlined above. No studies were identified which specifically explored collaboration between SENCOs, SLT and NEPS across the CoS in Irish post-primary schools, within the context of special or inclusive education.

Conclusions: This review provided a theoretical and research-based analysis of tensions within policy and practice regarding consultation, collaboration, special education, and inclusion. Research is needed to explore the role of SENCOs, SLT and NEPS across the CoS, and the nature of collaboration within the changing context of special and/or inclusive education.

_____

"It's more just a warning.": Young people's experiences and views of sex education in Northern Ireland and suggestions for improvement.

Sophy Irwin & Colin Gorman
Ulster University

Objectives: This study aimed to explore young people's experiences, views and opinions of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in Northern Ireland.

Design: This qualitative study consisted of three single-sex focus groups (one male, two female). Single-sex groups were chosen to reduce embarrassment and the likelihood of disengagement. The literature stated that focus groups were the best way of talking to young people about sensitive topics.

Methods: A secondary school was invited and agreed to participate. The vice-principle invited students to participate and distributed information leaflets and consent forms. Fourteen students aged 16-17 years took part. Students had to be over the age of 16-years as this is the age of consent in Northern Ireland. Focus group questions were semi-structured. The researcher transcribed the data verbatim and then used thematic analysis to analyse the transcripts.

Results: Four main themes emerged from the discussions: Sources of Information; Morality, Expectation and Shame; Consent; and Delivery.

Conclusions: This study is limited in that the sample size is small and unrepresentative of RSE throughout Northern Ireland. However, it does highlight the need for more research of this kind. The RSE message experienced by these students is heavily dominated by abstinence and it is perceived this is due to the strong influence of religion in Northern Irish schools. Despite CCEA guidance, this group believed that different sexualities, gender issues and sexual consent are not being discussed, placing many young people at risk. This study extends knowledge in the area of how RSE can be improved.

_____

A Mini-Systematic Review of Victim Empathy Treatment for Convicted Sex Offenders

Emily Jeanneault, Ulster University

Objectives: This mini-systematic review evaluates the effectiveness of the victim empathy treatment component applied within sex offender treatment programs.

Design: This study created a new review of the literature examining the effectiveness of victim empathy training among sex offenders by covering multiple treatment methods, providing detailed accounts of the various treatment procedures, examining cognitive and behavioural measurements, and evaluating treatment outcomes and follow-up assessments.

Methods: The PRISMA framework was applied. Studies were located though Medline and Criminal Justice Abstracts. Restrictions were to include published peer reviewed journals between January 1990 and December 2019 that followed a randomised controlled or a quasi-experimental study design. Papers were excluded if they didn't disclosed population or were on an unrelated topic.

Results: The qualitative synthesis of study findings were complicated due to the lack of control groups, minimal follow ups completed, small sample sizes, inadequate inclusion of selected psychometric instruments, and a wide variation in treatment lengths. Three studies completed follow-ups; two with short-follow up times which created a bias in

concluding the intervention's effectiveness. Overall, the quality of studies examining victim empathy improvement requires further improvement and development. Improvement in victim empathy was found within convicted sex offenders however, due to the lack of rigour applied within many of the studies the reliability and accuracy of the findings are called into question.

Conclusions: Conclusions about the long-term effectiveness of treatment cannot be made due to lack of follow-up data available. Failure to explore recidivism rates must be corrected in future research.

_____

The Effectiveness of Psychotherapeutic Interventions for Inpatients with Borderline Personality Disorder: A Systematic Review

Ryan Luney, Ulster University

Objectives: The label of Borderline Personality Disorder is the most commonly diagnosed presentation amongst UK psychiatric inpatients. However, despite evidence that psychotherapy may be beneficial, these individuals are normally treated with psychopharmacological interventions in isolation. Therefore, this mini-systematic review analyses previous research to determine if psychological interventions can be a beneficial option for BPD inpatients.

Methods: Following PRISMA Guidelines, systematic searches were conducted in 'Proquest Complete Collection' and 'Web of Science' using predefined search strategies. Researchers screened reports against inclusion criteria: participants were inpatients diagnosed with BPD (no specific age or gender), exposed to a psychotherapeutic intervention, with specific focus on intervention effectiveness on BPD symptomology. All studies had to be primary research (either between-subjects or within-subjects designs), with a quantitative treatment measure, published after 2015 in English (no restriction on location). This review employed narrative description and did not statistically analyse treatment effect sizes.

Results: Eight reports were identified (4 within-subjects, 3 between-subjects and 1 unclear study design), all were of modest quality by CASP standards. Despite employment of different measures and interventions (including DBT, PDT and NET), all articles reported significant positive impacts/effects on BPD severity, including reduction in suicidal/self-harm ideation/behaviour, aggression, impulsivity, and improvements in functioning.

Conclusions: These studies' limitations include low sample sizes, sources of funding, research location, differing employed interventions, outcome measures and BPD diagnosis/symptoms (decreasing ability for comparisons). Despite this and small evidence base, these studies demonstrate that psychotherapy may be effective for BPD inpatients. However, the quality and quantity of research urges caution in making reliable and definitive recommendations.

_____

Staying Connected to Zoo – How connecting to zoos can help us feel connected to animals and each other during COVID times.

Alaina Macri & Deborah Wells
Queen's University Belfast

Zoos and aquariums can provide excellent opportunities for people to connect with each other while connecting with animals. Unfortunately, most of these organisations have been closed due to COVID-19, so animal enthusiasts can only connect with these facilities remotely. This study aimed to explore who remained connected with their favourite animal attractions, how they kept in contact, and what benefits would this allow for those who chose to do so.

A purpose-designed online survey was developed to investigate people's feelings of animal connectedness while visiting a zoo/aquarium. The survey collected data on demographics, information about their last zoo visit, if they had stayed connected to animal attractions, and if so how and why they stayed connected. The survey was administered on Qualtrics and was available to adults who had visited a zoo/aquarium in the last 5 years.

Pearson's Chi-Square and binary logistic regressions explored the relationships between demographics, and how, why and which people stayed connected. Out of 548 participants, 56% chose to stay connected. Demographic variables that demonstrated their 'overall animal interest' were the best predictors of who stayed connected or not ($\chi2$ = 180.88, df = 4, p<.001). People with zoo work experience were more likely to use their zoo connection in discussions with family and friends than those without experience ($\chi2$ = 13.31, df = 1, p<.001). This may illustrate that these participants were utilising their zoo knowledge to enhance their sense of social connectedness during these difficult times.

_____

Psychological Motivation for Compliance to Covid-19 Precautionary Measures: The Role of Empathy, Age and Gender

Laura Mahady, Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology

Objectives: In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, a rapidly-generating body of research has developed investigating psychological and demographic correlates of compliance to precautionary measures. Research has indicated a relationship between temporary state empathy and compliance. However, little research has examined the relationship between dispositional empathy and compliance to these measures. The present study sought to explore this perceived gap in the literature and demographic correlates of compliance in an Irish context.

Design: A quantitative, within-groups, correlational design was employed.

Methods: Participants were recruited using convenience sampling, via social media, to complete a questionnaire-based online survey. Data of 125 participants resident in Ireland was analysed using inferential statistics (age range 19-81, 59% female, 41% male).

Results: Standard linear multiple regression analysis indicated that age and gender played a significant role; specifically, being female and older is associated with greater compliance. Furthermore, despite a significant correlation between dispositional empathy and compliance, dispositional empathy did not appear to directly predict compliance when accounting for demographic factors.

Conclusions: This study indicated two notable practical implications. Firstly, appealing to the Irish populations sense of empathy may not be adequate to motivate widespread compliance. Perhaps public health messaging may emphasise benefits for the compliant citizen and society on a whole, rather than altruistic messages. Secondly, this study reveals groups at risk of non-compliance; males and younger adults. Public health authorities may benefit from focusing on encouraging compliance in these particular groups. Thus, the present study provides insight regarding the Covid-19 pandemic which is specific to Ireland.

_____

Trajectories of depression, anxiety and PTSD in the first UK lockdown: data from The COVID-19 Psychological Wellbeing Study (CV19PWS)

Kerri McPherson[1], Kareena McAloney-Kocaman[1], Cherie Armour[2], Emily McGlinchey[2] & Pia Faeth[1]
[1]Glasgow Caledonian University, [2]Queen's University Belfast

Objectives: Understanding the physical, psychological and social impacts of COVID-19 is crucial to supporting individuals and society. Growth Mixture Modelling was used to investigate mental health symptomology in the first UK lockdown and explore vulnerabilities and protective characteristics associated with those trajectories.

Design: A longitudinal, 3-wave online survey, launched on March 23rd 2020. Participants completed wave 2 data collection one month after wave 1, and wave 3 two months after completion of wave 1.

Methods: 1958 participants were recruited through a social media campaign and the online participant panel Prolific. Measures of depression, anxiety and PTSD symptomology were completed at each time point, in addition to sociodemographics, COVID experiences and worries, loneliness, social support and meaning of life.

Results: For each outcome a 4 class solution was optimal: 1) a 'high and stable' class reported consistently and clinically significant symptomology; 2) a 'resilient' class reported consistently low symptomology; 3) an 'increasing symptomology' class had delayed onset of clinically significant symptoms; and, 4), a 'progressive improving' class had clinically significant symptomology that improved at follow ups. Pre-existing mental health conditions and mental health symptoms in the first 4 weeks of lockdown were associated with 'high and stable', and 'increasing symptomology' trajectories, as were worries about COVID-19.

Conclusions: Vulnerabilities to poorer mental health during lockdown were identified and this can inform how to direct support in response to greater need as COVID-19 develops. In particular, reducing worry associated with COVID-19 and supporting those with pre-existing conditions should be a priority.

_____

"Jesus, Here We Go Again": Experiences of Loneliness during the COVID-19 Lockdown in the UK

Phoebe McKenna-Plumley, Lisa Graham-Wisener, Emma Berry & Jenny Groarke
Queen's University Belfast

Objectives: Loneliness has devastating effects on wellbeing and is highly relevant in the context of COVID-19. This study explored one research question: What are people's experiences of loneliness while practising physical distancing due to a global pandemic?

Design: A qualitative design was utilised in which semi-structured interviews were conducted with people who had felt lonely during physical distancing. This was chosen to enable in-depth insights into experiences of loneliness in this context.

Methods: Participants were recruited through social media, researchers' networks, and a survey of adults practising physical distancing and not working outside the home. Semi-structured interviews were completed in May, 2020 with eight adults (21–67 years old) in Northern Ireland and England who indicated recent loneliness. Interviews were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis informed by a critical realist approach.

Results: Four themes were identified: 'Loss of in-person interaction causing loneliness', 'Constrained freedom', 'Challenging emotions', and 'Coping with loneliness'. Physical distancing was described as causing conditions that entailed loneliness and difficult emotions, while coping strategies were less accessible. Digital interaction was viewed as an insufficient alternative to in-person interaction. Moreover, respondents felt that their freedom was curtailed in the pandemic context.

Conclusions: These findings indicate that physical distancing can contribute to loneliness and other challenging emotions. Given the importance of distancing, it is vital to consider loneliness in these circumstances and develop supports to mitigate the impact on loneliness and wellbeing. The use of online methods is a limitation of this study as it may have excluded some individuals.

_____

A freedom of information request on HSC Trust service provision for adults with autistic spectrum disorder

Claire Mcveigh, DECPNI

Objectives: This research aimed to investigate across the 5 Trust areas: wait list list times for autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) assessment and intervention for 2019 and 2020; services available within each Trust area for adults with ASD; involvement of adults with ASD in Trust policy development and the process; criteria for an adult assessment of ASD as used by HSC and clarification as to whether referrals can only be accepted via GP; and impact of the COVID pandemic.

Design: The Autism Act NI (2011) amended the pre-existing Disability Discrimination Act (1995); creating an autism strategy to set out how the needs of persons with autism are to be addressed throughout their lives. The focus of this paper was to investigate HSC Trust service provision for adult diagnosis of ASD.

Methods: A freedom of information (FOI) request was sent to each of the five trust areas to request data in January 2021.

Results: Frequency data on the FOI returns will be reported to provide a picture of adult ASD service provision before and during the COVID pandemic. Relevant data and policy as reported by the Trust in response to the FOI request will be outlined.

Conclusions: Can more be done for those with a later in life, adult diagnosis of ASD in line with the Autism Act NI (2011)? In addition, recommendations will be made on making FOI requests, arising from the author's experience.

_____

The Relaunch. Back to School after COVID-19 Restrictions. Guidance from the Psychological Society of Ireland

Marian Naughton, Psychological Society of Ireland

PSI launched its booklet, The Relaunch, in July 2020, to support primary and secondary schools and teachers of children with special needs in the return to school after COVID-19 Restrictions.

There were already some very helpful documents in circulation from other services and authorities and these informed this booklet.

It was decided to be brief and to-the-point in relation to specific advice in order to be helpful without overwhelming readers with too much text. Hence, the ten-step countdown to relaunch. The count was down-wise, in an effort to create a sense of getting there – being ready, rather than adding on yet more-and-more tasks and ideas.

The aim was also to produce a useful and flexible document, a type of tool kit that could assist teachers in tailoring strategies to match their own specific needs and to adjust their strategies in response to an evolving situation. With this in mind, notes on the psychological models and theories that informed the booklet were included in a set of appendices.

The theme 'relaunch' was chosen for a number of reasons. The concept of launch is a positive one – a beginning, an adventure, something new. The re in relaunch, on the other hand, provides reassurance as we travel through uncharted territory. Our past experiences, our skills and knowledge, and doing what we are trained to do, equip us for this journey.

At our presentation, contributors to the booklet will give a brief background and a guided tour of the booklet.

_____

Understanding Life in Lockdown for Autistic Young People

Gillian O'Hagan & Bronagh Byrne
Queen's University Belfast

The objective of this research study is to document the experiences of life during Covid-19 lockdown for autistic young people in Northern Ireland. In particular, the project seeks to illuminate the challenges faced by these young people during lockdown with a particular focus on their experiences of education during this time. A young people's advisory group worked alongside a research team from Queen's University Belfast to design the research project.

The study engages the participatory arts based research method of Photovoice whereby autistic young people aged between 11-15 years of age used photography to document their lives in Northern Ireland during the period of lockdown March - June 2020. Forty-two photographs from nine participants from a range of post-primary schools across Northern Ireland were submitted.

The four co-researchers working with the QUB team to thematically analyse the photographs and as a result of their work, this project makes future recommendations for how autistic young people should be supported during any further pandemic and associated restrictions. Using aspects of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the impact of lockdown on the mental health of autistic young people during is also interrogated. Participant voice is pedestalled throughout this research.

The findings make particular reference to the educational and other supports normally engaged for autistic young people and how these services could be adapted and adjusted when planning any future lockdown restrictions. The research also concludes with recommendations for the future organisation of home-schooling and curricular needs of autistic young people.

_____

The Impacts of Autism Awareness Interventions on Secondary School Students' Attitudes towards Students with Autism

Elaine O'Keeffe, Mary Immaculate College

A school environment is truly inclusive when schools make a conscious effort to educate teachers and students about individual differences and celebrate the diversity in the school community (Villa, 2005). The social difficulties students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) experience, combined with the lack of understanding their peers have of autism, can unintentionally create a negative social experiences for children with ASD (Humphrey & Symes, 2011). In a review of inclusion of students with ASD in Irish schools, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) found in general, Primary School is a positive experience, however, Secondary Schools must improve their support for students with ASD (2016b). Autism awareness interventions are implemented in schools with the aim of improving students understanding of ASD, while also increasing peers' acceptance of students with autism (Campbell et al., 2004). A systematic review was completed in 2020 to evaluate the effectiveness of autism awareness interventions in changing secondary school student's knowledge, attitudes and behavioural intentions towards students with ASD (O'Keeffe). Six studies met the inclusion criteria. Findings propose each intervention improved at least one of the following outcomes; knowledge, attitudes or behavioural intentions. However, sample sizes were relatively small, the validity of studies varied and students with autism were not represented. The thesis aims to fill the gaps in the research, by listening to the voices of students with ASD. A rigorous, large-scale study, measuring the impacts of AsIAm's autism awareness intervention, on teenagers' knowledge, attitudes and behavioural intentions towards students with ASD.

_____

The Age of Worry: The effectiveness of school-based CBT interventions to treat adolescents with social anxiety

Ciara Raleigh, Mary Immaculate College

Objectives: This paper carries out a systematic review of school-based CBT interventions for adolescents with social anxiety.

Design: One in three young people in Ireland will experience mental health issues by the age of 13. International studies suggest that social anxiety disorder is the most prevalent mental health issue facing adolescents and has a huge impact on both their personal and academic life, leading to lower academic achievement and in many cases school refusal behaviour. There is limited research in this area in Ireland. School is a prime location to provide interventions for this group as it can target a large number of adolescents in one location and it can remove other barriers such as cost, transport and stigma. CBT has been found to be very effective in treating anxiety disorders.

Method: A search was carried out of three data bases; ERIC, Web of Science and PsychInfo. 105 articles were found. Studies were screened by title, abstract and finally full-text using the authors pre-established inclusion and exclusion criteria. Six studies were chosen for the systematic review.

Results: These studies demonstrated the significant improvements experienced by adolescents who receive school-based CBT interventions for social anxiety.

Conclusion: Areas highlighted for future consideration are; whether to include only participants with a diagnosis of social anxiety or adopt a universal approach and also whether school-based interventions should be delivered by teachers only for practical reasons. Further research required in this area in Ireland.

_____

Understanding and addressing Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in residential care: The residential social care worker perspective

Michael Roache & Dominic McSherry
Ulster University

Objective: Children in state care are one of the most vulnerable group of young people for sexual exploitation in today's society, with those in residential care being particularly vulnerable. The links between being in residential care and sexual exploitation are well recognised but are not well understood. This study aimed to reflect the perspective of residential social care workers regarding the challenge of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in residential care and to identify strategies to protect these children.

Method: Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with residential social care workers (via video-conferencing software), audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step methodology for reflexive thematic analysis.

Results: Six themes were identified: (i) risk; (ii) reasons to engage / agency; (iii) vulnerability; (iv) identifying child sexual exploitation; (v) responding to child sexual exploitation; (vi) the residential social care workers experience.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that sexual exploitation is common amongst children in residential care and residential social care workers often feel unable to successfully intervene. Current safeguarding procedures are becoming obsolete as the internet generally and social media in particular have increased predatory access to children in residential care. Furthermore, safeguarding is considered to be an incomplete response. The study highlights an urgent need for easier access to psychological support for children in residential care, outreach support services, and more clinical psychological input for residential social care workers. Purposely assembled support teams for children in residential care may be necessary.

———————————————————————————————

Developing Attachment-Focused Interventions for Children in Care in Primary Schools: A Design and Implementation Study of 'The Attach Project'

Hannah Russell, Queen's University Belfast

Through the lens of implementation science and informed by attachment theory, the main objective of the current study was to explore the design, implementation, and evidence of promise of 'The Attach Project' (TAP). TAP is a school-based intervention which aims to improve the social and emotional well-being, and academic outcomes of primary-aged children in care in Northern Ireland. The research utilised a mixed-methods design, consisting of quantitative and qualitative measures. Participants included teachers and support staff working in TAP schools, as well as professionals working in the Education Authority, Children Looked After team. Results indicated that TAP 'whole school training' significantly improved school staff's knowledge and awareness, and confidence in working with children in care (t(55)= 8.68, p<.001 and t(75)=2.17, p<.034, respectively). Ongoing observations and training feedback questionnaires facilitated differentiation of 'key adult' training, throughout the training phase. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups identified that there was good uptake of TAP in participating schools and that ongoing support from the TAP team was key to successful implementation. Findings also indicated that good leadership, and information sharing was critical to ensuring effective and sustainable implementation. Furthermore, qualitative findings indicated that care experienced children were able to form reciprocal, 'attachment-like' bonds with trained TAP personnel in their school. It was concluded that TAP shows sufficient evidence of promise for effectiveness and should be 'scaled-up' and evaluated through Randomised Controlled Trials and longitudinal research. Furthermore, it is argued that TAP could benefit all children experiencing challenges associated with insecure attachments and complex trauma.

———————————————————————————————

Does the coronavirus pandemic have a gendered impact? Assessing the predictive role of the (im)balance between caregiving responsibilities and working from home for women vs. men

Vasilena Stefanova, Lynn Farrell &, Ioana Latu
Queen's University Belfast

Objectives: This study aimed to investigate whether there is a gender imbalance in the division of household labour within families during the lockdown, and whether this predicts gender differences in personal outcomes (work-family conflict, burnout) and professional outcomes (career self-efficacy and aspirations).

Design: This study had a 2 (caregiver status) x 2 (gender) design. 240 heterosexual individuals with or without caregiving responsibilities who lived with a partner and worked from home during the pandemic completed self-report questionnaires.

Methods: Participants completed an online survey and indicated the division of domestic tasks within their household during the lockdown, their experiences of work-family conflict and burnout, and their career self-efficacy and aspirations. We assessed whether the distribution of time allocated to different tasks depended on gender and caregiver status and also built a structural equation model to explore whether potential imbalances in the division of domestic labour predicted personal and career outcomes for women and men.

Results: The findings showed a significant direct effect of caregiving on career outcomes for women, where the more caregiving women performed during the lockdown relative to other tasks, the lower career outcomes they had. Among men, caregiving did not significantly impact on career outcomes. Additionally, however, experiences of greater work-family conflict led to more burnout for both male and female caregivers, though the effect was greater for women.

Conclusions: Our study showed that the gender imbalance in distributions of caregiving duties during the pandemic could lead to negative personal and career outcomes for women who are caregivers.

_____

Differences in Psychiatric Symptoms between the UK and Greece prior to and during COVID-19: the roles of Subclinical Narcissism and Mental Toughness

Tayler Truhan, Foteini-Maria Gianniou & Kostas Papageorgiou
Queen's University Belfast

Objectives: In early 2020, the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) a world-wide pandemic. Countries reported elevated rates of psychiatric symptoms at the onset of the pandemic. Personality traits may serve as protective factors against poor mental health outcomes. Previous cross-sectional and longitudinal research indicates that subclinical narcissism may reduce depression and stress through mental toughness.

Methods: The researchers collected cross-cultural data from the United Kingdom (UK) and Greece (GR) on self-reported depression, anxiety, stress, COVID-19 related worry, subclinical narcissism, and mental toughness. Two samples, one cross-sectional (N = 1,846) and one longitudinal (N = 184), were used to compare rates of psychiatric symptoms cross-culturally pre and during COVID-19, and to test a path model in which subclinical narcissism reduced psychiatric symptoms through mental toughness.

Results: From pre to during COVID-19, UK participants exhibited increased depression, lower anxiety, and no change in stress, whereas GR participants showed a decrease in anxiety and stress and consistently low symptoms of depression. Subclinical narcissism exerted a negative indirect effect on psychiatric symptoms through mental toughness in both samples, but a negative total effect on anxiety and stress only in the UK sample.

Conclusions: Differential levels of COVID-19 related worry and mortality rate of COVID-19 in the UK and GR may have led to increased risk of psychiatric symptoms for British individuals. Findings indicate that exploring links between narcissism and prosocial traits can provide novel insights into cultural differences in the adaptive use of personality traits in relation to mental health.

_____

Educator and Student Perspectives of Nurture Group Provision in a Mainstream Secondary School in Ireland

Niamh Walsh, University college Dublin

Objectives: Nurture Groups (NGs) are a short-term, focused intervention to address social and emotional barriers to learning arising from unmet attachment needs (Boxall, 2002). To date, the majority of published research on Nurture Groups has focused on primary schools and been conducted in the UK context (e.g. Sloan et al., 2020; Seth-Smith et al., 2010, Hughes & Schlösser, 2014; Reynolds et al., 2009). The current study aimed to explore educator and student perspectives of a NG within an Irish mainstream secondary school.

Design: Within a case study design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with educators (n=7) and focus groups with NG students (n=10). Data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Results: Educators perceived the NG as providing necessary support for vulnerable or 'at-risk' students. Educators reported perceived improvements in socio-emotional competencies including emotional and behavioural self-regulation, self-esteem and confidence, which participants perceived as supporting the development of academic skills and increased engagement with the curriculum both in the NG and in mainstream classes. This was also reflected in students' experiences. The importance of embedding the NG within a whole-school nurturing ethos was emphasised.

Conclusion: NGs can be successfully developed and delivered across a mainstream secondary school and whole-school support for this is important. Implications for school practice in relation to supporting the operation of NGs at secondary level in Irish schools are considered.

_____