

*Assessment, Risk and Decision making in Social Work:
An Introduction*

Campbell Killick and Brian J. Taylor
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Reviewed by Jenny Peddar

This is a new title in the ‘Transforming Social Work Practice’ series from Learning Matters. This series is aimed at pre-qualifying students and the two sections within this book allow for progression during the student experience. The aim of Learning Matters has been to create affordable books: in achieving this, it is noticeable that the font size is now considerably smaller than in earlier books which may make it less accessible for some.

The material has been linked to the social work curriculum and the PCF for Social Work in England. Despite this focus on the standards for England there are references within the book to practice and policy from other UK countries such as the Child Safeguarding frameworks from Scotland and Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Single Assessment Tool for adult care.

Part one of the book (the first 5 chapters) provides an overview and describes the basics of assessment and decision making. Part two provides considerably more depth and unpicks some of the complexities and dilemmas within practice. In this way it follows the student experience with the second part encouraging deeper analysis and understanding as they develop their skills in practice.

Within part one, some chapters introduce elements of values, exploring the expectations of Service Users that Social Workers should be honest and dependable. The use of questions from the Strength Based Approach in all assessments and the potential for resistance to Social Work involvement are important elements in preparing students for the contradictions and complexities they will face in practice.

The final chapter in this section promotes consideration of how the voice of the child or an individual with a disability will be heard rather

than relying on information from the parents or care givers. This is an important issue and it is good to see this introduced early as evidence shows these voices are still not heard in practice and research (Atkinson et al., 2015).

The second part of the book challenges thinking.

Chapter six reviews the legislative framework and key points of case law, which whilst they may not apply to all four UK countries, awareness of these will develop good practice. Ethics are explored further in chapter seven with types of personal and professional bias introduced. This chapter also includes material regarding research which seemed slightly out of place at this level. Within chapter eight, thresholds for safeguarding and access to care are considered against actuarial or clinical predictions of risk. This is furthered within chapter nine which includes analysis of the balance between Health and Safety legislation against the positive aspects of risk taking, the rights of the individual to determine their lifestyle and independence. This will be useful to students as this legislation is not always taught within the curriculum. The final chapter considers the balance of the organisational context and good supervision beyond task accountability.

In some ways this book presents two levels of learning, part one being suitable for those entering professional training with the latter part being useful as practice learning and reflective practice unfold. Within practice education, I would hope that students starting their initial placement will have developed the knowledge and skills to that standard from part one of the book.

The chapters in part two would be useful within practice education as a means of encouraging the student to reflect on experiences and to start to create frameworks within which to improve their assessment, risk analysis and decision making skills. The references to values and potential biases will be helpful in encouraging learners to review their own experiences and expectations and how these relate to the individuals they are being asked to assess. This is also a useful reminder to those who have been in practice for several years where there is a risk that if something is not as bad as something seen previous, it is acceptable. Preparation for the change in supervision at the point of qualification is encouraged in the final chapter and this can support a Practice Educator as their students approach the end of their final placements.

Overall this book will be helpful to both students and Practice

Educators in developing more critical skills in assessment and the development of positive risk taking in decision making.

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Reference

Atkinson, M., Binns, M., Featherstone, B., Franklin, A., Godar, R., Hay, J., et al. (2015) *Voice of the Child: Evidence review. Meaningful engagement with children and young people*. Totnes: Research in Practice