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Troubled Families Programme in Local Authority 3 and 6: notes re. accompanying a Keyworker on their day's work

Dates of fieldwork:	July to September 2016
Country:	United Kingdom
Geography:	Greater Manchester
Method of data collection:	Observations and interviews
Language	English
Kind of data:	Field notes
Population:	Families involved in the Troubled Families programme.
Sampling	Purposive
Number of units	10 families cases
Key words	Dynamics with public services, mental health, key worker, family,

Local Authority 3

Family 1: Household with 1 child. Services were alerted when the mother self-admitted herself in psychiatric hospital – after having dropped her daughter at her mother's house. She suffers from depression and anxiety, and is grieving her father with whom she had complex relationships. Child attendance at school was low following mother's more recent hospitalisation for some surgery. Mother has two other children, for whom she lost custody. She is struggling financially and received help from a debt advisor. Key worker also gave her some advice on how to manage her daughter's behaviour (aged 4). Mother wants to move house to be closer to her mother and partner. Mother and daughter visited the dentist during the intervention. Mother is very pro-active. Case was successfully closed after family moved to new area, school attendance was good, mother felt she had mental health issues under control, and had just been offered a job.

Family 2: Household with 5 children and one grandchild. Mother has another daughter with whom relationships are difficult as she ran away with mother's former partner. This event made the mother go deeper into depression and this is when social services were involved this time. She has previous experience of social services when it was suspected that two of her children were sexually abused (youngest aged 4) whilst living with their grand-mother as mother was homeless at the time. She was referred to the TF programme 3 years ago, but didn't meet the threshold back then. It is her daughter's family support worker (as she was pregnant aged 15) who referred the family to the programme again. When key worker engaged with the family, mother was severely depressed and social workers considered the children to be emotionally neglected. Mother is still depressed but accessed self-help and takes medication. Children have low level of school attendance and some of them are regularly excluded because of behaviour. Mother was particularly concerned by her son

(aged 8) who had constant diarrhoea and was recently diagnosed with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and sensory disorder. She now has contact with several health professionals and her son is getting required support in school. Family also engaged with CAMHS –Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and dentist. The house doesn't have any wardrobes so clothes are piled up in the living room. Key worker arranged for wardrobes and rooms to be painted. Case is about to be closed after two years of interventions.

Family 3: Household with 2 children. Mother has 5 other children that live away. Son of 17 has been diagnosed with ADHD, on the lower end of the autism spectrum, and has hearing problems. He also needs a dental appointment. At first social services were contacted for a case of 'child neglect', but realised that the issue was the father. The father is no longer present. Son is out of school, was receiving financial support for his condition, but it stopped. He has outbursts of violence and broke two of his mother's teeth's during one of his crisis. Mother is missing most of her teethes now and feels embarrassed about it. She can't go get back into employment until a solution has been found for her son. She wants to move house as was violently assaulted in hers during a burglary and believes the neighbourhood has a negative effect on her family. She also wants her son to have a new diagnosis as she believes he is schizophrenic. Mother is currently undergoing a mental health diagnosis herself as she appears to have very fluctuant mood swings. Ongoing case.

Family 4: Household with 3 children. Mother is depressed and was difficult to engage. The family moved from the Caribbean a few years ago. Mother is educated and speaks 4 different languages. She has a history of not engaging with social services who were contacted as she uses physical punishment to raise her children. Children's school attendance is low and the oldest daughter seem to get into fights on a regular basis. Mother wants to move house, as this one is damp. There is little furniture and clothes are stored in suitcases. They live on very little income, but appear to manage through food bank and church support. The mother has since disengaged with the service, which means that her case will have to go to social services (child protection) despite the family probably not meeting the criteria. Case closed because of disengagement.

Family 5: Household with 3 children. Mother has 3 other children living away. Her daughter is about to move back in with her own children. House is quite spacious, but in very poor condition and the animals look sick. Mother would like to move to somewhere smaller and cheaper, but needs to sort out her financial situation first. Mother suffers from depression. Service got involved because of her youngest son (16), who also suffers from depression and has attempted suicide. He is experiencing bullying in school and refuses to go. He also is very overweight and suffers from low self-esteem. Most of the work undertaken by the key worker was with him. Ongoing case that should be closed soon as family is going the right direction.

Local Authority 6

Family 1: Mum of three (aged 3, 7, 10). School referred because the kids are often late and are taking themselves to school. Previously had a family support worker, and had counselling via the jobcentre. Biggest concerns came after a family breakup and problems with debt and inability to move to a big enough house (issues re. partner paying for house). School referred for this programme, and she thought it was a social worker, and thought she was being judged. Now sees the keyworker once a week, with many more points of contact. Always thought that a worker would see her as a 'bad mum'. Mum stays up late drinking and is often unable to get up, so the children were taking themselves to school – so school attendance and lateness were an issue. There is some kind of custody arrangement with the father, and the mum believes the father is trying to turn the 10-year-old against her. It also seems that both parties are using the issue of drink/ drugs as ammunition in this dispute, with her accusing him of drink driving with the children in the car. She has called the police in the past (called in re. where the children should be re. custody dispute), and said that 'they didn't seem to care as it's a civil matter'. She is now getting more sorted, with the debts being cleared and she is now bidding on other houses. The KW said that he would close the case if it wasn't for the parents' dispute, which could make things worse again.

Family 2: N is mum to one, and lives with her mother, H. On the way there I was warned that the house smells extremely badly, and that H is a hoarder. For a while they didn't throw anything out, so the rubbish was behind the sofa. I was also warned that N would talk honestly, about her drug use, about rough sex and so on. When we arrived, it wasn't as bad as all that – it still smelled, but much of the rubbish had gone. H and N were there, the TV was on. The first time social workers were involved was when T, N's daughter was one, and it was the father who called them in. N is a habitual user of cocaine, cannabis, and alcohol, but at the meeting she'd not had coke for 3 weeks (weed and vodka every day, coke at the weekends, and she's done this since she was 14. H had been out to fetch the weed.). She is bipolar. She also had an abusive father, who's no longer allowed to see her. The first social worker intervention was seen as an invasion of privacy

N talks a lot, and will tell all. She's also quite loud, which could be viewed as aggressive, but I didn't think so. That said, she said on multiple occasions that she'd have punched someone if they'd not treated her well. She talked of one family support worker who was a 'lifesaver'. She sorted out money and made her feel good about herself. The current keyworker seems to be viewed similarly. He gives 'a kick up the backside' but didn't judge us but motivated us. Plans are to a) go a whole day without smoking weed, b) get own place, c) job? 'don't like being told what to do'.

At some point N was surviving with no income at all. Found the Jobcentre degrading, 'the way they looked at me' and they wouldn't help her.

At the time of the interview, she was trying to get in touch with the police with regard to another child threatening T with a knife. Calling 101 wasn't getting anywhere – it was ringing for 10 minutes and no-one answered.

Family 3: T is a single mum, with two children. She's had a lot of clashes with her son (from age 8 onwards), and him pushing her is counted as a DV incident. She's been taking antidepressants and suffers from anxiety, and loses her temper a lot. The second time social services were involved was when T lost both her nan and her mum, and grief was her 'biggest concern'. Social workers make her feel small. Social services involved again because her son wasn't going to school. She described two family support workers. Comparisons were that the FSWs listen, and give different options to try. They have a good rapport. Showing T the best way to avoid an argument/ good tips for the son.

Her daughter has just spent a whole year not going to school after an accident at school that meant she was in hospital for many weeks, and then unable to walk. She had recently returned to school, but was having to go there and back in a taxi while her brother got the bus.

Treated as if you were stupid and below. KW is here once a week, and is T's 'safety net'.

Plans are to get back to normal and no need for FSW. They are putting things into place to move away from Greater Manchester (she intimated that she never fitted in, never liked it here in [neighbourhood]) and back to the town T was from originally.

Family 4: J, is a single mum of two (with two older children from previous relationship). Wearing a Slipknot t-shirt, she's pretty unassuming. She can't read, so the KW reads out the information, joking that some of it sounds daft to her. Suffers from depression and anxiety, and has had involvement of professionals for many years (with earlier children). 'Hated social workers' – 'if I could have got away with murder, I would' and was accused of 'neglect'. Previous experience of DV/abuse (from her biological mother), and felt the police weren't supportive at all. Recent engagement of HF came after multiple head lice problems and the school making a referral. The child has difficulties, with a mental age of 3 at age 7. The KW has been visiting and phoning over the past 4 months, helping her with sorting out her debts and budgeting (realising that she has more money than she thought and has been subsidising her adult son). The KW also attends the TAC meetings (Team Around the Child), supporting her at these. J describes herself as stubborn, so often won't accept help. KW worked with her to 'get things done' and does it in a way that is 'a laugh' not boring. It seems J isn't keeping hold of some of the letters sent to her re. debt – credit card debt I think – that KW wants to see in order to get this sorted too. J seems to want to do something about 'maths and English' but it needs to be the right time, and the right approach. She's probably going to start a beauty course first. One day she'd like a better house, and even to work. But on this latter point she needs to find an employer who is understanding – for this child after-school care is no good. The intermediate outcomes are that J is not losing her temper as often.

Family 5: T is a mum of four, who has recently been referred to the FH service. She's all dressed up – immaculate clothes/ make up – and the house is beautiful. She's had no previous contact with any social services, and this time it seems that the school didn't tell her what it was about when they started to talk of referring to an early intervention service. She only had 20 minutes to talk as she had to go off to do multiple school runs. The nursery she uses is in the next borough. Her son has had behaviour problems for the past 2 yrs: she says he's doing it for attention as he's being bullied at school, and the school didn't listen. She maintains that she's got three other kids with no problems, and that this case is because the school didn't listen to her son. She's planning to get married to a new man. She's also doing a degree at [University], borrowing money with the plan of beginning work when the youngest child starts school. She seems pretty sorted, to be fair, although she is taking the children out of school for a one week holiday in term time.