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THE DEVELOPMENT OF A QUESTIONNAIRE
FOR USE BY THE
CLACKAMAS COUNTY CHILDREN'S SERVICES DIVISION

by
NANCY LEE CABLE

A report submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF
SOCIAL WORK

Portland State University
1974

Approved

Faculty Research Advisor

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INTRODUCTION

In seeking a research topic for my practicum, it came to my attention that Clackamas County Children's Services Division was interested in measuring the effectiveness of their services. Since my second year field placement was as a caseworker there and I thus had a personal interest in the agency, I decided to develop a research project around the agency's desire to evaluate their services. I began with a questionnaire from a university counseling agency as a model, with the hopes of revising it and administering it to past CSD clients. It soon became apparent to me that the counseling questionnaire was almost entirely inappropriate for the clientele of CSD, as for the most part CSD clients do not voluntarily seek a counseling kind of experience for themselves, as would be the case in a university counseling center. The problem became one of developing a suitable questionnaire. In order to learn what questions would be appropriate, I decided to interview in depth a small sample of past CSD clients.

OBTAINING THE SAMPLE

In order to obtain a sample of past clients, I needed the help of CSD staff, including caseworkers, secretaries, clerks and case aides. I explained the nature of my project to the staff via a memo endorsed by the Director of the agency, so that they would understand the nature of my project and would know I had the Director's support. The memo is included in this report as Appendix A. The memo gave rise to discussions with caseworkers concerned with the nature of my research project and led to important clarifications about what I was doing. As a result of these discussions, of my familiarity with many of the agency staff members as a result of having been placed there as a field student, and of the genuine concern for people I feel the staff as a whole demonstrates in their work with each other and with clients, I received cooperation and support from every staff person I contacted in connection with the project.

At CSD monthly statistics sheets are kept by each caseworker, and are turned into one person at the end of each month for tabulation. On the statistics sheet (see Appendix B), there is a column headed, "SERVICE COMPLETED." A mark is put in that column in line with a client's name, if that client's case has been closed in the particular

month noted on the sheet. With a great deal of help from the woman who tabulates the statistics, I collected the statistics sheets from each caseworker for the months of December, 1973, January, 1974 and February, 1974. From these I listed those persons whose cases were closed during those three months, and from these lists drew the sample for interviewing.

At this point it would be helpful to describe briefly the structure of the agency, in terms of the kinds of caseloads handled by caseworkers, for the structure had an effect on how I decided to handle one aspect of the sampling procedure. CSD has a director, five supervisors, each of whom heads up a unit of an average of five caseworkers, and case aides, clerks and secretaries who are assigned to each unit. Within each unit, individual caseworkers may or may not carry a mixed caseload and as a unit carry various categories of cases, which include the following: foster care placements, services to 'children in their own homes', juvenile court liason cases, protective services, cases closed at intake and cases involved in the WIN (Work Incentive) program. Initially I wanted to draw a sample according to the type of caseload; i.e., I would choose two or three clients' cases from each of the above listed categories of cases. However, there was no practical way to do this, since closed cases are not listed or filed according to the category they are considered to be in when they are opened. In

4.

addition, the statistics sheet does not provide for the identification of a case according to its category of service. Thus, for example, four or five caseworkers, each in a different unit, might have as a portion of their individual caseloads, clients considered under the category, 'children in their own homes'. The only way to determine whether a particular closed case from the statistic sheets fell under this particular category of service would be to ask the caseworker about every case closed during the three month period. The CSD caseload as a whole is such that workers often have only brief contact with a large number of people and cannot often remember the case. It would be necessary to review each case file with the caseworker, and this was not practical in view of the time consideration. Even if it were practically possible to have taken the sample according to caseload category, there would be no guarantee that the sample would have included cases from every category. And, for the purposes of developing a questionnaire, as opposed to the purposes of administering an already devised questionnaire, it seemed sufficient to take the sample in a more practical way, that of drawing two or three clients from the caseloads of each unit of caseworkers. There is one exception to the rule that each unit handles a variety of categories of caseloads. One of the units handles, exclusively, people who are involved in the WIN program. In the end, only one WIN client responded for an interview, so the sample was not

adversely affected by this exception.

I compiled the statistics sheets by units, and from each unit, then, drew four names of clients who had received CSD services either in December, 1973 or January or February of 1974. The total number of names was 20; I hoped to get responses from 10.

Out of the original 20 letters I sent out (see Appendix C) as a first contact to introduce myself, six were returned in the mail, marked "addressee unknown." Since some of the people I chose were likely to be receiving financial assistance through the Public Welfare Department and I had access to the PWD file, I found a new address for two of the six; however, the letters came back again. I sent more letters to six different people. Of these, one was returned in the mail, and I sent a letter to a different person in its place. Thus, out of 27 letters sent to different people, seven were returned in the mail. Out of the 20 who apparently received their letters, I interviewed 10, seven in their homes and three by telephone, at the interviewee's request.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Though the size of the sample is small and the characteristics of the sample group are of no statistical significance, it seems appropriate to note some characteristics of the group which I felt had a possible influence on the outcome of my

interviews. Whether a person had a telephone seemed to have an effect on whether I eventually made contact with him or her. A significant number of clients using CSD services do not have telephones. To those in my sample who did not have telephones, I changed paragraph four in the letter, stating a particular time I could visit them in their homes. If they could not talk with me at that time, I asked them to call and arrange a more convenient time; otherwise I would call on them at the appointed time. Out of the ten people who apparently received letters but whom I did not interview, all were without telephones; all had either moved or were not at home when I visited them at the times prescribed in the letters. Those ten whom I did interview were comprised of nine who had telephones and agreed to see me after I contacted them first by letter and then by phone, and one person who had no phone and contacted me.

Obtaining the four original names from each unit was a tedious task in itself, for many of the clients had moved out of town or had no current address. Of the nine people who had no phones and whom I did not interview, five I found not at home and with no names listed on their mailboxes. The mailboxes of the other four had different names than those of the people I was seeking. The sample of people I talked with, then, did not include the highly transient CSD clients, which comprise a large portion of the total clientele.

The length of contact with CSD seems significant in the

sample. For the most part, those who responded had relatively brief contact with the agency. Only two respondents had contact for more than three months, one family for three years and one for about six months.

The following is a listing of the number of cases in the sample interviewed according to category of service:

- Children in their own homes - 3
- Foster care - 2
- Intake - 1
- Juvenile court liason - 2
- Protective services - 1
- WIN - 1

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

During the interviewing process, I learned ways of interviewing that were effective in terms of getting information. I felt more at ease and could put the person I was seeing more at ease by focusing on our person to person encounter at the moment. In other words, a period of acquaintance making was necessary before getting into a discussion about the research project. Once some kind of exchange on a personal level was made, it was easier to talk about why I was there. Usually some mention of my status as a student needing to complete a research project as part of degree requirements led into talking about the project itself and gave me an opportunity to reiterate my purpose in being there. It may have been better to have written the initial letters on

8.

something other than CSD stationery, for that plus the fact of my inexperience as an interviewer and the nature of some of the clients' involvement with CSD may have contributed to what I felt was some reluctance on the part of the clients to be entirely open with me about their experience with CSD. Nevertheless, making a kind of acquaintance with the person, reiterating my purpose in being there - both to meet my needs and to help CSD improve its services if necessary - stating again my appreciation for the person's help and making an inquiry statement about his or her experience with CSD all were important processes in gaining enough trust from the client so that he or she shared information and feelings with me. Incidentally, when I talked with each of these people on the telephone in order to arrange an appointment and asked if my letter made clear what I was doing, all responded to the fact that I was doing the project because I was a student. No one stated his or her understanding in terms of the purpose the research had for CSD.

I found that the way in which I phrased inquiries about the person's experience was also important. Questions tended to put people on the defensive, and it seemed more effective to make open ended inquiries, such as, "I'd like to understand what kind of feelings you had when talking with your caseworker," rather than, "Did your caseworker make you feel comfortable?" Open ended questions of a general nature allowed the person to talk about what had been of concern to

her or him; this is what I was trying to get at in order to develop a questionnaire based on client concerns.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE (See Appendix D)

In the memo I sent to CSD staff, I enumerated the following four areas I would be exploring with those interviewed: 1.) how the client views the agency, 2.) the client's attitude toward his or her caseworker, 3.) the client's relationship with his or her children before and after contact with CSD, and 4.) the client's feelings toward him/herself before and after such contact. The memo was written hurriedly, and admittedly could have been stated in a more informal and less curt fashion. Perhaps the way I presented the project had an effect on the concern some caseworkers felt about my interviewing their past clients, for some were uneasy about what clients might say to me about them. However, that area - the client's focus on the relationship with the caseworker - was the only area of the above-mentioned four that caseworkers commented upon. Of equal or perhaps more importance, was the clients' focus on the relationship with the caseworker. Because both caseworkers and clients expressed questions about and interest in the client-caseworker relationship, I chose to make this area the focus of the questionnaire. I will use information obtained during the interviews to further illustrate why I made this area the

10.
focus and to illustrate why I formulated some of the questions included in the questionnaire.

Items 1 through 3 on the questionnaire constitute the necessary demographic information necessary for making correlations and drawing conclusions. Items 4 through 9 are an attempt to isolate additional variables that seem important for a survey of CSD clients, for even in the small population of clients I interviewed, there was a tremendous variety in the length of contact, the number of times a client had been involved with the agency, the type of contact- by telephone or visit- and the nature of the initial contact. In addition, while CSD is involved with a case, often other agencies such as the juvenile court or medical agencies are simultaneously involved. For example, one client I interviewed was the mother of several teenage children, one of whom had been placed temporarily in a foster home. The child had first been apprehended by the county police and was brought to the attention of the juvenile court. He was assigned to a juvenile court counselor who continues to work with him and with his family. At the court counselor's suggestion, the child was to be placed in a foster home for a short period of time, and since CSD is the agency responsible for such placement, a caseworker from CSD arranged the placement. The mother would have preferred to have had the juvenile court counselor place her son, since she had developed a relationship with that counselor. Her involvement with

the juvenile court, then, would most likely have an effect on her attitude toward the caseworker, and this is the reason for including questions 5, 5a and 5b. In addition, a listing of agencies and the frequency with which they were listed by clients filling out the questionnaire might be useful for CSD in terms of liason work with such agencies.

Items 9a through 25 on the questionnaire are an attempt at measuring two areas of concern with the caseworker-client relationship. The first area has to do with the role of the caseworker; questions 9a, 22 and 17 through 20 deal with this area. Most of the clients I talked with did not initiate contact with CSD themselves; it was either done by the juvenile court or some other referral agent. It seems appropriate to me that if the agency initiates the first contact, it is necessary to make the reason for that contact clear; hence, question 9a. Some of the clients I interviewed seemed to have been unclear about why CSD was involved with them, particularly people who were working with another agency, as in the example given above of the mother with several teenage children. Another person I interviewed was a single parent of two young children who saw her caseworker once and thought the caseworker was probably visiting her in her home to determine whether the home was suitable for the children. She was not certain of the reason for the visit.

Item 22 is included because nearly all the clients I interviewed made a comment about how they were or were not

on welfare. One single parent of three young children was involved more with the Public Welfare Department (PWD) than with CSD and experienced them as the same agency, for both were responding to her needs. I'm sure that people still confuse the two agencies, as their separation is a relatively recent development. In reality, the two are still closely connected in many instances, and in Clackamas County the two are located in the same building. A separate building is planned for CSD, to be ready in the fall of 1974. It will be interesting to see if this has an effect on the public view of CSD services. One family I interviewed offers an example of how the two agencies are closely connected.

Mr. X came in to the combined offices to request medical aid in the form of financial assistance for himself, his wife and one of his five children. He had had to stop working because of a debilitating disease which his wife had also contracted. He first saw a welfare worker to get financial assistance and in addition was referred to a caseworker, whose major activity with this family was to provide transportation to medical agencies and to recommend to the welfare worker ways of providing financial assistance.

Question 17 gets at whether a client felt he or she had a part in the process of working with the caseworker, i.e., whether the role of the worker included a relationship with the client. Mrs. Y was a vibrant young woman in her thirties with two toddler children. She welcomed the chance to have

an opportunity to say what she wanted from the caseworker. Her caseworker contacted her once to ask about her children's health and safety in order to determine her capacity to care for the children whose custody she wanted. She felt the caseworker was not thorough enough in her investigation. Though the worker was satisfied, presumably, with the conditions of the home, for the mother did gain custody, the mother's need for further talks with the caseworker were not met. It is difficult to assess, of course, whether additional contact would have been appropriate. But that is not the issue. The issue is whether or not the client feels he or she has had input, and in this case and others, my feeling was that whether or not the client had the opportunity to make some input was of importance to them. Mr. X, in the example cited above, emphasized his satisfaction with his caseworker in terms of how she responded to his needs, whether or not she was able to meet them.

Question 18 is similar to question 9a, but is applicable to the entire period of contact between client and caseworker. Answers to question 18 could demonstrate whether the caseworker is clear about his/her role and whether that is communicated to the client.

Two of the people with whom I talked did not know that their cases were closed; they expected to continue seeing the caseworker. Another confused the CSD worker with a court worker. She and her husband were still involved with the

court; she thought it would be inappropriate to talk with me since she knew I wanted to talk with people whose cases were closed. Question 19 asks whether the length of contact was made clear to the client.

The second general area of concern I discerned from the interviews was that of the caseworker's attitude toward the client. Questions 11 through 16 deal with this area.

Question 10 prefaces this group of questions, for it would seem necessary to view the responses to the other questions in terms of how much the respondent remembered about his experience. Question 21 is included for similar reasons.

Questions 12 through 14 and question 16 get at whether the client felt respected by the caseworker and whether or not he or she felt the caseworker was interested in helping him or her. Question 15 represents an attempt at determining whether the client felt "invaded" by the caseworker. Since so many of the clients are involved with CSD not of their own choosing, client privacy and the handling of personal information are matters to be dealt with carefully.

Questions 23 and 24 reflect how most clients I interviewed volunteered the information that they might again use CSD services or that they would never again want to have contact with CSD. One woman who had several children to raise by herself felt she would need help with each child as he or she reached adolescence. Another respondent felt that he would like to continue contact with CSD, in the event he needed

further help. He emphasized that he would prefer the same caseworker. A divorced woman felt a follow-up on her difficulties with her children in their relationship with her ex-husband would be helpful. Question 25 offers the opportunity to give feedback uncalled for in the rest of the questionnaire and provides an opportunity for individual expression.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I would like to recommend that if used, the questionnaire be administered immediately after the client's last meeting with the caseworker, if this is possible. The transiency of the population would require this, as even in the process of choosing my small sample, I had to eliminate many people who had no addresses listed or who had moved several times. Many clients never contact the caseworker when they move, however; it would be impossible to have any control over this factor.

In order to use an evaluative tool such as this questionnaire, it would be expedient to make up a card file which contained only closed cases, preferably organized according to their date of closure. In addition, if evaluation were made on the basis of category of service, a filing system based on these categories would be useful.

Finally, my impression is that just the use of a tool such as a questionnaire would facilitate communication between clients and CSD.

APPENDICES

Appendix AMemorandum

Appendix B Statistics Sheet

Appendix C Letter of Introduction

Appendix D Questionnaire

MEMORANDUM

From: Bob Smith, Director

To: CSD Staff

In order to fulfill part of the requirements for my degree from Portland State, I will be carrying out a research project involving CSD cases.

My goal is to develop a questionnaire for the use of CSD in evaluating services. In order to develop such a questionnaire, I will need to take a random sample of 10-15 people from cases that have been closed in recent months. Through in-depth interviews with these people, I'll try to develop questions that get at clients' attitudes toward services they received from CSD. The four areas I will be exploring with those interviewed are: 1.) how the client views the agency, 2.) the client's attitude towards his or her worker, 3.) the client's relationship with his or her children before and after intervention by a caseworker, and 4.) the client's feelings towards him/herself.

All information will be kept confidential.

I'll be happy to answer any questions about the project and would be most appreciative of your cooperation.

Appendix B

CHILDREN'S SERVICES DIVISION

CLACKAMAS OFFICE

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

320 WARNER-MILNE ROAD • • OREGON CITY, OREGON • • 97045

TOM McCALL

GOVERNOR

DON MILLER

~~JOHN J. CALVIN~~
Administrator

• • •

DEPARTMENT OF
HUMAN RESOURCES

JACOB TANZER
Director

DIVISIONS

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Corrections
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I am a graduate student at Portland State University involved in a research project that will help to fulfill my degree requirements.

The Director of Children's Services Division (CSD) has given me permission to interview a small group of people who have received CSD services, in order to carry out my project. I have selected your name randomly and would like to talk with you, at your convenience, about your experience with CSD. In doing so, I hope to learn what questions would be good ones to include in a questionnaire that CSD could use for evaluating their services.

Our discussion will be kept confidential and your name will not be used in any way.

Within the next week, I will contact you by phone to discuss this further with you and to respond to any questions you may have.

I would be most appreciative of your help, and your cooperation would help to insure that CSD will have a way to measure the effectiveness of their services.

Sincerely,

Nancy L. Cable

(To the client)

The people at CSD are interested in improving their work with people. One way to do this is to ask those who have used CSD services what they think of the agency. By answering the questions in this questionnaire, you will help to let us know what changes need to be made. You do not need to put your name on the questionnaire.

We would be most appreciative of your help.

Date _____

In this questionnaire, "CSD" means Children's Services Division of Clackamas County, located on Warner-Milne Road in Oregon City. "Caseworker" means the person you talked with who works for CSD.

1. Date of birth _____

2. Sex: (circle one) M F

3. Education: (circle one)

7 and below 8 9 10 11 12

college 1 2 3 4

graduate

other (please describe) _____

4. Did you ever talk with another CSD caseworker besides the one you've just seen? (circle one)

yes no

4a. If you answered "yes" to question 4, please give the length of time you saw the other caseworkers.

from _____ to _____

from _____ to _____

from _____ to _____

When answering the questions below, please talk about the caseworker you last worked with.

5. When you were working with your CSD caseworker, were you also working with people from other agencies (such as the juvenile court)? (circle one)

yes no

- 5a. If you answered "yes" to question 5, what agencies did the other people work for? _____

- 5b. If you answered "yes" to question 5, did you see the CSD caseworker more than you saw the people from other agencies? (circle one)

yes no

6. How long did you work with your caseworker?

Number of years _____

Number of weeks _____

Number of months _____

Check if less than one week _____

7. About how many telephone calls did you have with the caseworker

per week _____?

per month _____?

8. About how many visits did you have with the caseworker

per week _____?

per month _____?

9. In the beginning, did you call CSD or did a CSD caseworker call you? (check one)

_____ you

_____ caseworker

- 9a. If your caseworker called you in the beginning, did he or she tell you why? (circle one)

yes no

The following directions apply to questions 10 - 20.

If you strongly agree that the statement describes how you felt, circle +2.

If you mildly agree that the statement describes how you felt, circle +1.

If you mildly disagree that the statement describes how you felt, circle -1.

If you strongly disagree that the statement describes how you felt, circle -2.

If you are undecided, circle 0.

10. I remember very little about my experience with the caseworker.	+2	+1	0	-1	-2
11. The caseworker respected me as a person.	+2	+1	0	-1	-2
12. My opinions were listened to by the caseworker.	+2	+1	0	-1	-2
13. The caseworker often didn't understand my feelings.	+2	+1	0	-1	-2
14. The caseworker seemed cold and unfriendly.	+2	+1	0	-1	-2
15. The caseworker asked me too many personal questions.	+2	+1	0	-1	-2
16. My opinions made a difference to the caseworker.	+2	+1	0	-1	-2
17. The caseworker and I decided on goals for his or her work with me.	+2	+1	0	-1	-2
18. The caseworker made clear to me why he or she was seeing me.	+2	+1	0	-1	-2
19. When I worked with the caseworker, I never knew how much longer I'd be seeing him or her.	+2	+1	0	-1	-2
20. I didn't see the caseworker as often as I wanted to.	+2	+1	0	-1	-2

21. Did you want help from the caseworker? (circle one)
yes no
22. Do you think people who work for CSD and people who work for the Public Welfare Department do the same kinds of work? (circle one)
yes no
23. If you needed help in the future, would you contact CSD? (circle one)
yes no
24. Would you like your caseworker to contact you in the future? (circle one)
yes no
25. Please use the rest of this page to make any additional comments or suggestions, if you wish.