

A pluralistic, technically eclectic, multimodal approach to delivering trauma-informed children and family services in a social enterprise

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Abstract

Background & Aims: There is growing demand for health, social care and education services to adopt trauma-informed approaches. This study aimed to explore client experience of receipt of Multi-Modal Practitioner (MMP)-delivered, trauma-informed care in a family support service, and of trauma-informed care in a primary school in ethnically diverse, inner-city communities, as part of a broader evaluation.

Methodology: Pragmatic Case Study (PCS) methodology was utilised post-intervention. Specifically, case studies of a client receiving MMP support via family support services and a Special Educational Needs (SEN) primary school pupil accessing trauma-informed support services, are detailed.

Results: Delivery of trauma-informed, multimodal approaches deployed resulted in positive outcomes for clients.

Conclusion: Working in a trauma-sensitive manner based on 'the 4 Rs' resulted in demonstrable positive impact to pupils and, when combined with family support workers trained in the MMP approach, offers a promising proposition to supporting children and families affected by trauma.

Introduction

There is growing interest and need for organisations working in the fields of health and social care, and education, to adopt a trauma-informed approach to the delivery of services (Cutuli, Alderfer, & Marsac, 2019). While many interventions and approaches have been developed and championed in various sectors beyond traditional clinical and mental health settings, to our knowledge, none have adopted a technically eclectic (Lazarus, 2003), multi-modal approach to address well-documented inequalities regarding access, and provision of comprehensive trauma support for individuals from diverse communities, including those of Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds (Fernando, 2017).

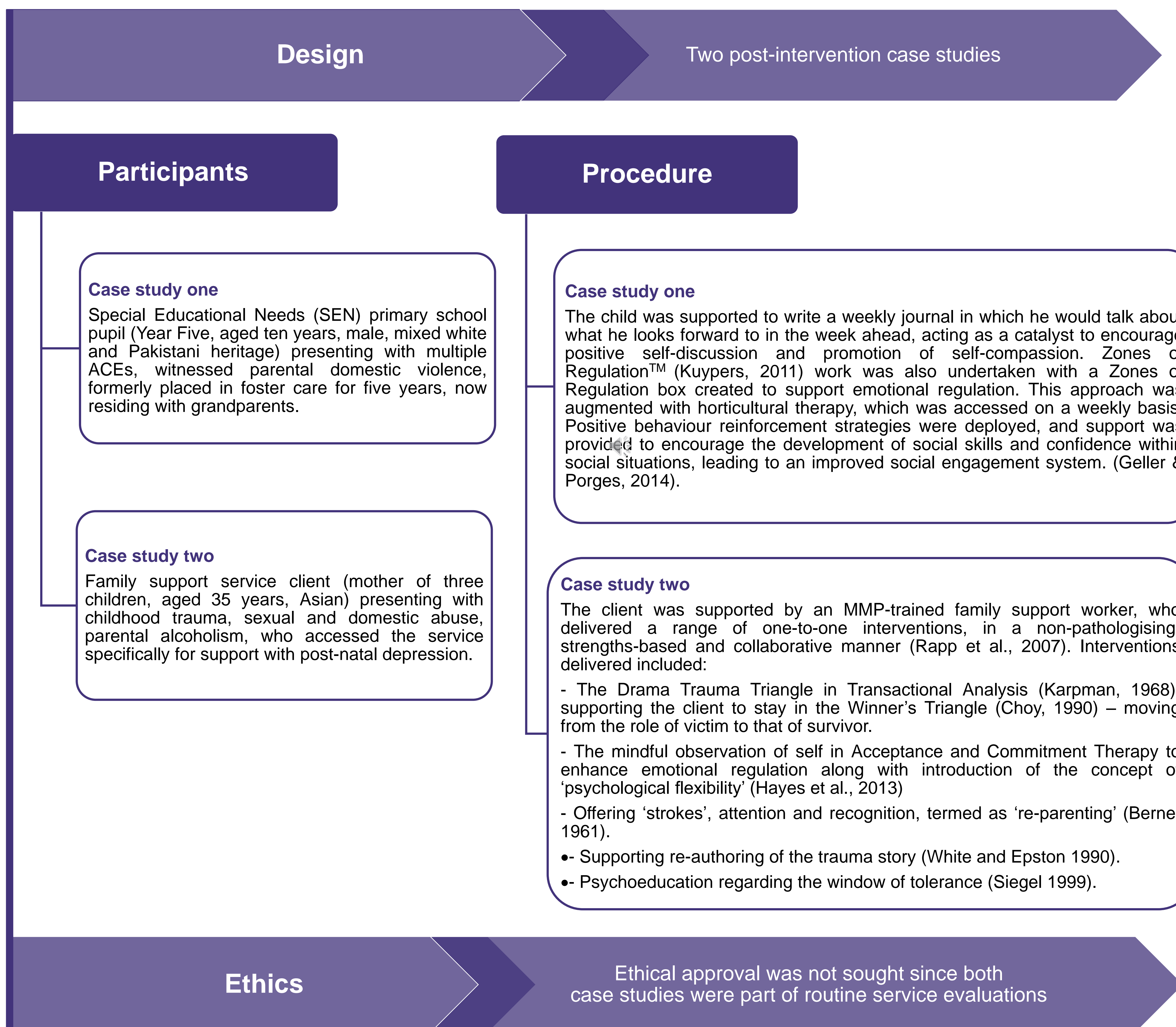
Specifically, it has been reported that statutory services such as the NHS have reduced understanding or awareness in respect of the delivery of culturally appropriate services for individuals affected by trauma (Bignall, Jeraj, Hellsby & Butt, 2019). Social enterprises play a key role in supporting those affected by trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), plugging the gap, and making services more culturally accessible and appropriate.

The Big Life group, a social enterprise operating across the North of England, has conceptualised and developed a comprehensive trauma support offer for children and families presenting with multiple needs. Specifically, this includes the novel Multi-Modality Practitioner (MMP) approach; a pragmatic intervention, theoretically underpinned by social and cognitive learning theory and Multimodal Therapy (Lazarus, 2003), through which interventions that address mental and physical health, long-term conditions, child and family, employment, and financial needs, are delivered in a technically eclectic, multimodal manner.

Study aims

This study profiles, via two pragmatic case studies, the innovative MMP approach and trauma-informed interventions deployed in a school and family support service, as part of a broader evaluation taking place.

Methodology



Results

Delivery of trauma-informed, multimodal approaches deployed by a Family Support Worker trained in the MMP approach resulted in resolution of presenting problems with no further onward referral to clinical trauma services, successful resolution of presenting post-natal depression symptomatology and improved family relationships.

Furthermore, findings revealed deployment of trauma-informed practices in a primary school resulted in visible positive shifts in behaviour, improved emotional literacy and involvement in learning activities in an SEN pupil. Emotional regulation and awareness of emotions, social and communication skills were all improved, along with enhanced positive self-image.

Discussion

Findings

The findings highlight that trauma-informed care when delivered in a multimodal, culturally sensitive manner in community-based settings, can result in improvements in emotional and social literacy in children affected by trauma. Furthermore, the MMP approach gave rise to successful resolution of presenting trauma and postnatal depression in a vulnerable mother of three children.

The multimodal approach contrasts with the mainstream treatment of trauma, which has focused heavily on a singular approach, that of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). In contrast, we advocate the adoption of a multimodal, community-based approach to supporting individuals presenting with trauma, which may represent a solution to meeting the needs of those from BAME backgrounds. Schools offer a unique environment to countering and preventing childhood trauma. Taking a trauma-informed approach can result in improvements in emotional literacy (through increased regulation and understanding of emotions) and increased involvement in learning activities in children with trauma histories.

Implications & future directions

Such findings support the future use of multimodal approaches in the treatment of trauma in both children and adults. The MMP approach is particularly suited to supporting those from diverse ethnic communities who face barriers to accessing support and for whom, when presenting with multiple needs, a singular treatment intervention approach is often ineffective. The MMP approach also offers a pragmatic solution to address skills deficits in health and social care roles and is required to meet the complex and multifaceted needs of those affected by trauma.

Limitations

Only two case studies were included in the study, limiting the generalisability.

For case study one, outcomes were reported on an observational basis and therefore is open to researcher bias. For case study two, outcomes were self-reported, relying on client insight of symptoms. There was an absence of follow-up for both case studies, therefore it is unknown whether positive outcomes were maintained.

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