Judgment and Decision Processes in Context (JuDPiC)

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Acknowledging

• Bilha Arad-Davidson --- Tel Aviv University

• Ron Avi Astor --- UCLA, USA

• All my great students, colleagues, and teachers
Main (Explicit and Implicit) Messages

Decision Making in Child Welfare

Decision Making in Human Services

Context

Research

Theory

EBP
Goal of the presentation: Sharing a Journey

• Short introduction on decision making in child welfare
• Present the JuDPiC model
• Present briefly some findings from an international study
• Focus on discussing the relevance of the model and findings to the theoretical treatment of Evolving Contexts
• And, of course, suggest future international research collaborations
Background

• Child welfare professionals are making many crucial decisions that have significant impact on their clients.
• One such decision is whether to remove a maltreated child from home to an out of home placement or to keep him/her at home.
• Another example is the decision to reunify children in care with their families.
• These judgments and decisions are important and fallible.
Why are these judgments **important**?

- No need to elaborate,
- but just in case...
- The implications of
  - False Positive
  - False Negative
Why are these judgments Fallible?

• The world is complex and uncertain.
• Human information processing is limited.
• The circumstances for making the best possible decisions are less than ideal:
  – Time pressures
  – Information unavailable
  – Available information may be ambiguous, inaccurate, deliberately misleading
How can we make these decisions better?

• Well, this is not easy.
• The hope: Evidence-based prescriptive model:

In - the details of the case
Out - the best decision for this case

• The reality: A long way to go, and perhaps a goal that will never be achieved.
• How to proceed toward this goal?
A proposed strategy

- Use **descriptive** models to describe current practices and to identify impediments and mistakes
- Use knowledge to help:
  - Avoid mistakes
  - Reduce error

Prescriptive Model(s)
A Descriptive Model

• By explicating the factors that operate today in decision making we hope to identify issues that impact the decision in positive and in negative ways, understand what are the impediments to successful prescriptive models and what are common mistakes, in order to find ways to improve the process gradually.
Judgment and Decision Processes in Context (JuDPiC)

- Worker
- Agency
- Child
- Family

Substantiation

Risk Assessment

Decision
Current Focus: **Context**

- Decisions are made by human beings nested in hierarchical and intersecting contexts:
  - Personal
  - Agency
  - Policy framework
  - Region
  - Country/State
  - Cultural context
  - Historical context

- Contexts are dynamic
Judgment and Decision Processes in Context (JuDPiC)

Judgments (e.g., substantiation, Risk Assessment)

Values & Attitudes

Knowledge & Evidence

Policies

Resources & Constraints

Decisions (placement, services)

Org. Heirarchy

TIME

Worker

Agency

Family

Child

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The study in a nutshell

• Israel, N. Ireland, Spain, Holland, and later Portugal.

• Samples of child welfare practitioners and social work university students in training

• A vignette.

• Factorial design (2X2):
  – Mother against removal or accepting removal
  – Professionals compared with students
Worker characteristics
• Country - Israel, Northern Ireland, Spain, The Netherland
• Professionals vs. Students
• Demographic and background characteristics
• Experience
• Child welfare attitudes

1. Against removal from home of children
2. Favors reunification and optimal duration of care
3. Positive assessment of foster care
4. Positive assessment of residential care
5. Favors children's participation in the decisions
6. Favors parents participation in the decisions
Dependent Variables

• **Substantiation** - Is there abuse or neglect?

• **Risk** - Is there risk if stays at home?

• **Intervention** - Removal from home?
Independent Variables

*Mother's attitude toward removal:*

- '... voiced strong objection to removal to a foster family, stating: "no way will anyone touch my family and I'm ready to go to court on it."';
- 'If you think this is better for the family I am willing to try'.
Intervention recommendations

1. No further action
2. Indirect interventions through other professionals.
3. Not to remove the child and instead, to employ direct social work intervention with the provision of additional services (e.g. after-school care for the child, participation in community family center).
4. Place the child in foster care, voluntarily
5. Place the child in foster care, with court order
Findings

• Mother’s wishes were not associated with any of the dependent variables.

• Note: In Portugal, mother’s wishes were influential in the decision
Decision made by practitioners in different countries

Both Within and Between Country Variability

- Place the child with a foster family following the granting of a court order
- Place the child with a foster family on a voluntary basis
- Additional services at home
- No direct intervention
Practitioners’ Child Welfare Attitudes by Country

- Against removal from home of children at risk
- Favor reunification and short-optimal duration of alternative care
- Favor children’s participation in decisions
- Favor parent’s participation in decisions
- Positive view of foster care
- Positive view of residential care

Countries: Israel, N. Ireland, Spain, Netherlands
Decision made by practitioners with different attitudes

- Against
  - Removal without consent: 58.8%
  - Removal with consent: 19.5%
  - Additional services: 12.8%
  - No additional services: 8.9%

- Pro
  - Removal without consent: 23.7%
  - Removal with consent: 44.6%
  - Additional services: 22.2%
  - No additional services: 9.5%
Some of the Limitations

- Vignette; Only one vignette
- Sampling
- Issues of comparability of instruments and procedures
Study-Related Discussion & Conclusions

• Findings support most, but not all, hypotheses derived from the JuDPIc model.

• Surprisingly, parent stance against child removal had no effect

• Attitudes introduce variance in judgments and decisions

• Variations between countries in attitudes, judgments and decisions. These differences can be traced to structural and historical context of child welfare and child protection in each country.

• There is also substantive variance within countries, suggesting an hierarchical model – involving macro child welfare orientation, with local and personal variations.
What have we learned that is relevant to our discussion today

The ‘same’ case

• Judged differently by professionals with different attitudes in the same country
• Received different decisions by practitioners from different countries
• What do we like in these findings and what is bothersome?
“good” and “bad” sources of variability

• What will determine what sources of variability we try to maintain and what sources we try to eliminate when we move to a prescriptive model?

• Seems reasonable to eliminate between-workers variability.

Provided they work in the ‘same’ context
What about other sources of variability?

• While evidence-based-informed-Practice tends to emphasize “effective programs and practices” devoid of context, I suggest that the context is, and should be, an inseparable part of the equation.

• It would be alarming to find the same decisions on child disposition made in a country/region/locality that does not have effective foster care and in another context with a strong foster care system.

• But, what about variability that is the response to public pressure to remove less/more? Should it be eliminated, or should it be respected?
Toward Prescriptive Models
Adding OUTCOMES to the model

• Prescriptive models rely on two central elements:
  – The probability that a certain outcome would happen
  – The value attached to this outcome.

• My argument:
  – The first is something that needs to be determined empirically – within a context
  – The second is a judgment that is based on values – within a context
MODELING DECISIONS TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES
Judgment and Decision Processes in Context (JuDPiC)

- Worker
- Agency
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- Family

Judgments → Decision → Outcomes
Implications

• We have to study **outcomes** as an integral part of the study of decisions

• We can learn from each other to identify our ‘blind spots’, the issues we never realize are affecting us, the context of which we are not aware.
Methodological Implications

• Multi. Multi everything:
  – Multi-Level
  – Multi-Methods
  – Multi-Sources
  – Multi-Perspectives
  – Multi-National
Main Take Away – Let’s Work Together

• A large scale comparative study that would document the decision processes and the contexts in which they take place, and will examine the long and short outcomes for children and families.

• This will delay our retirement age significantly, but may lead to decisions that are more helpful to children and families.
Thanks a lot!

תודה רבה!

Tusen takk!!!

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The following are slides to add more details
Choices about vignettes

• A choice between ‘impoverished’ vs. ‘rich’.
• Based on authentic files
• Tried in previous studies
• Modified so it is acceptable in all participating countries.
Some information on Dana

• The family described in the vignette consists of a couple and their three young children (ages 7, 4, and 2). The local welfare agency receives a call from a primary school teacher who was worried about the well being of one of the children in her first grade class - Dana (7).

• She reported that Dana had blue marks on her hands and back. In addition, in the past half a year, Dana came with a broken arm and, on another occasion, with a displaced shoulder.

• Her medical file reveals that at age three she was taken to the hospital emergency room with scalds from boiling water that was poured on her at home. There are no further details about this incident.
More about Dana

- Dana is described as quiet in school and doesn't interact much with the other children. The teacher would like to keep her for another year in her current year group (first grade). She reports that Dana's cognitive development is behind that of her peers, that she often hits other children during breaks, and that, on several occasions, she had unexplained outbursts of rage.

The psychologist and classroom assistant in the school tried to form a relationship with her, but she refused to answer their questions. The family has few ties within the community and lacks a supportive extended family network. They are struggling financially due to father's unemployment. (The complete case vignette is available upon request from the senior author.)

Would you recommend to remove her from home?
## Sample

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Risk assessments by countries

- Israel: Physical
- N. Ireland: Physical
- Spain: Physical
- Netherland: Physical

Netherland has the highest emotional risk assessment among the countries listed.
Error and Mistake

• In a probabilistic world errors are inevitable
• We want to reduce the rate of errors.
• **Mistakes are avoidable.**
• We want to avoid mistakes and reduce errors.
Areas of knowledge that influence our modeling efforts

- Children Outcomes in Child Welfare
- Child Abuse and Neglect
- Human Information Processing
- The Role of Context
- Evidence Informed Practice and Policy