



BASPCAN Congress 2015



Parental engagement in child and family social work: Assessment from parent, social worker and observer perspectives

Charlotte Waits, Mike Killian and Donald Forrester

Part of the *Engaging Parents and Protecting Children* study led by Donald Forrester



Frontline social work?



Brainsfucker.com

TREADMILL:

For those who
think that walking
and running while
staying in one place
is much more fun...

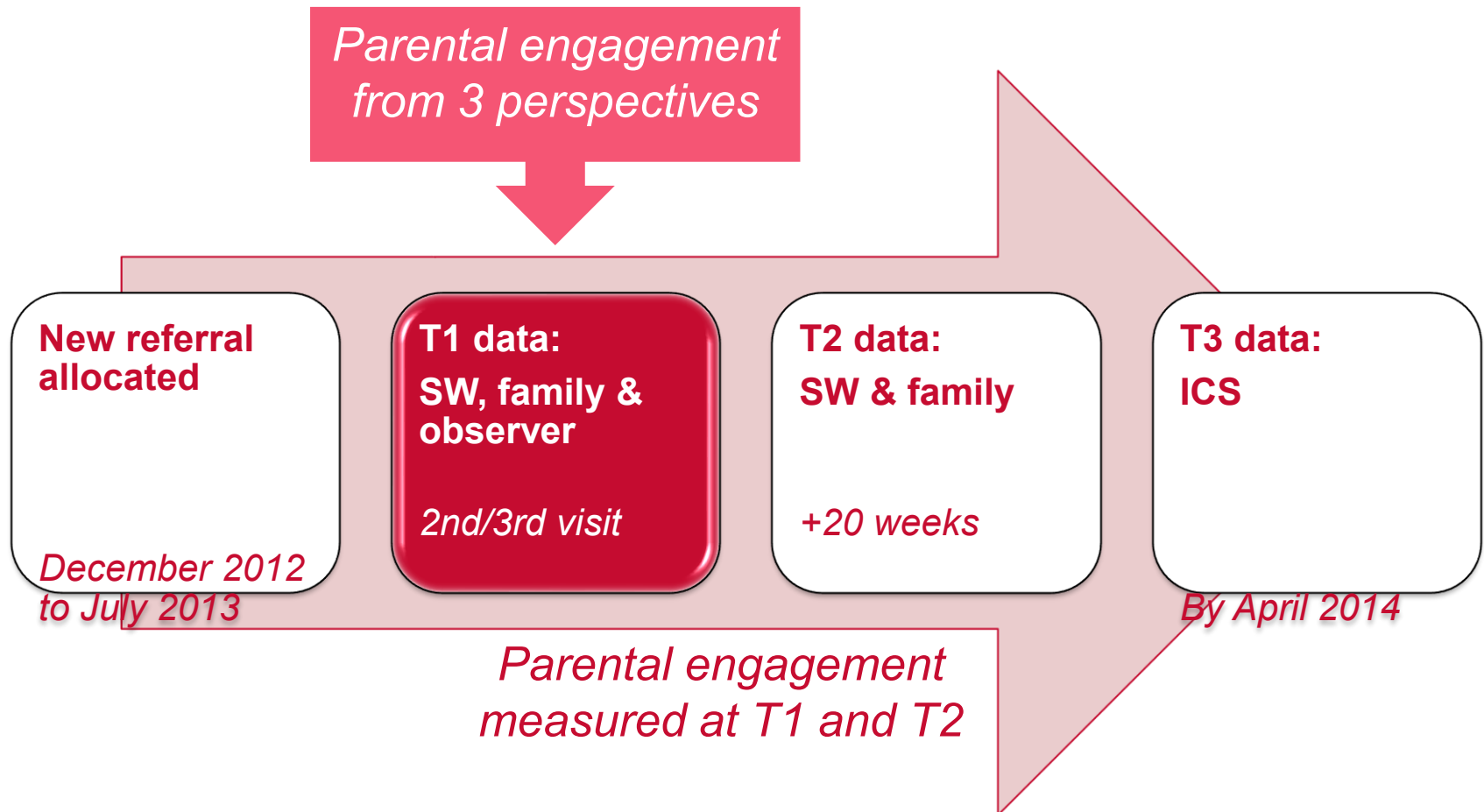
This presentation

- Overview of the ‘Engaging parents and protecting children’ research study
- Parental engagement as a concept
- Assessment of parental engagement from multiple perspectives – parent, social worker, observer
- Exploring areas of agreement and disagreement
- What does this mean for child protection practice?

Study overview

- Exploring ‘what works’ where there are concerns about abuse and neglect of children
- If social workers are trained in Motivational Interviewing does parental engagement improve?
- 610 referrals to social care for assessment/intervention
- 284 were allocated to social worker for >2 visits
- 166 observed family visits, 131 research interviews at T1

Data collection timeline

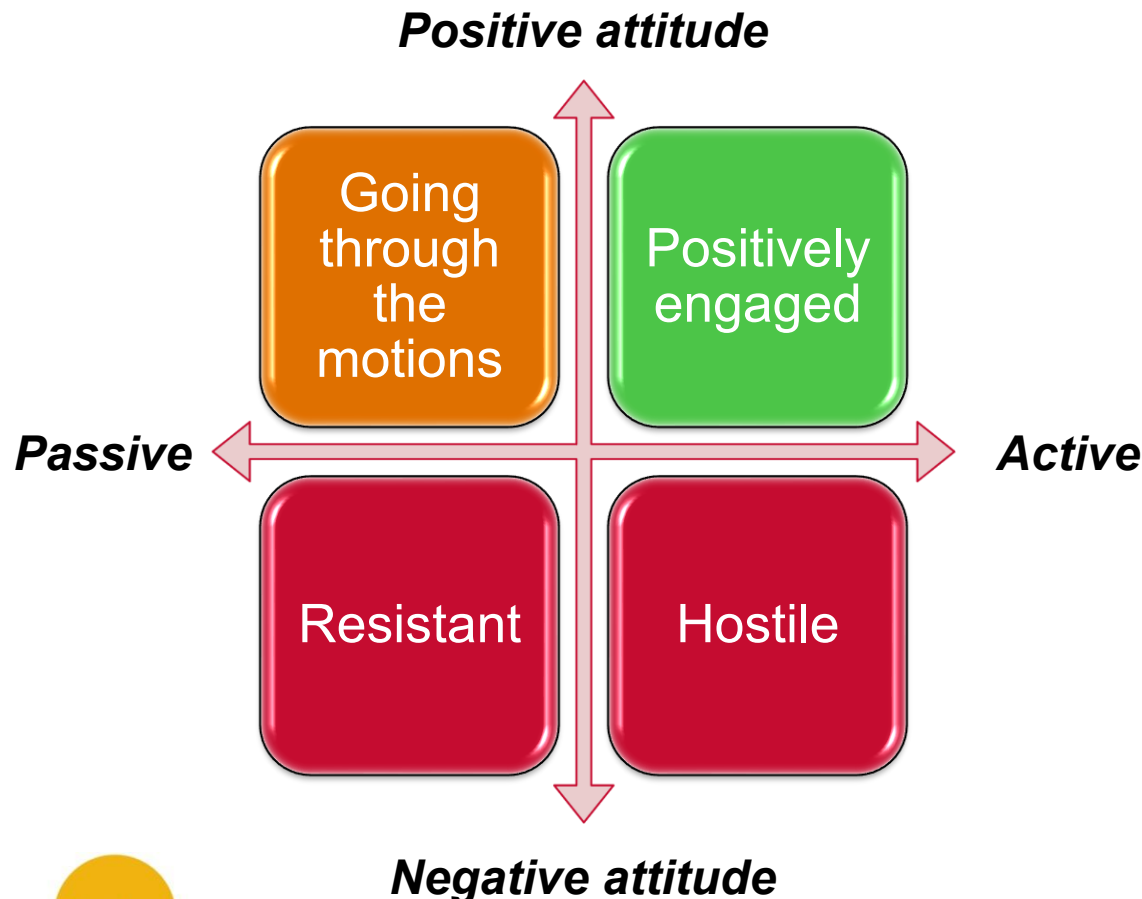


What is parental engagement?

- *'It'* is not just about attendance or compliance
- *'It'* includes 'buy-in' or being 'on board'

“The mutual, purposeful, behavioural and interactional participation of parent(s) and/or carers in services and interventions provided by social work and other relevant agencies with the aim of achieving positive outcomes” in child welfare (Platt, 2012, p.142)

Parental engagement is about activity AND attitude



Primary engagement measure in our study

- Working Alliance Inventory – client, therapist, observer
- Well researched and utilised in psychotherapy and other fields (Bordin, 1979)
- 3 subscales underpinning conceptual model:
 - Goals
 - Tasks
 - Bond
- Short version - 12 questions, 7 point scale for response (WAI-S range 12 to 84)

WAI completed independently after observed visit (T1)

Observer



Parent



Social
Worker



Engagement (WAI) scores

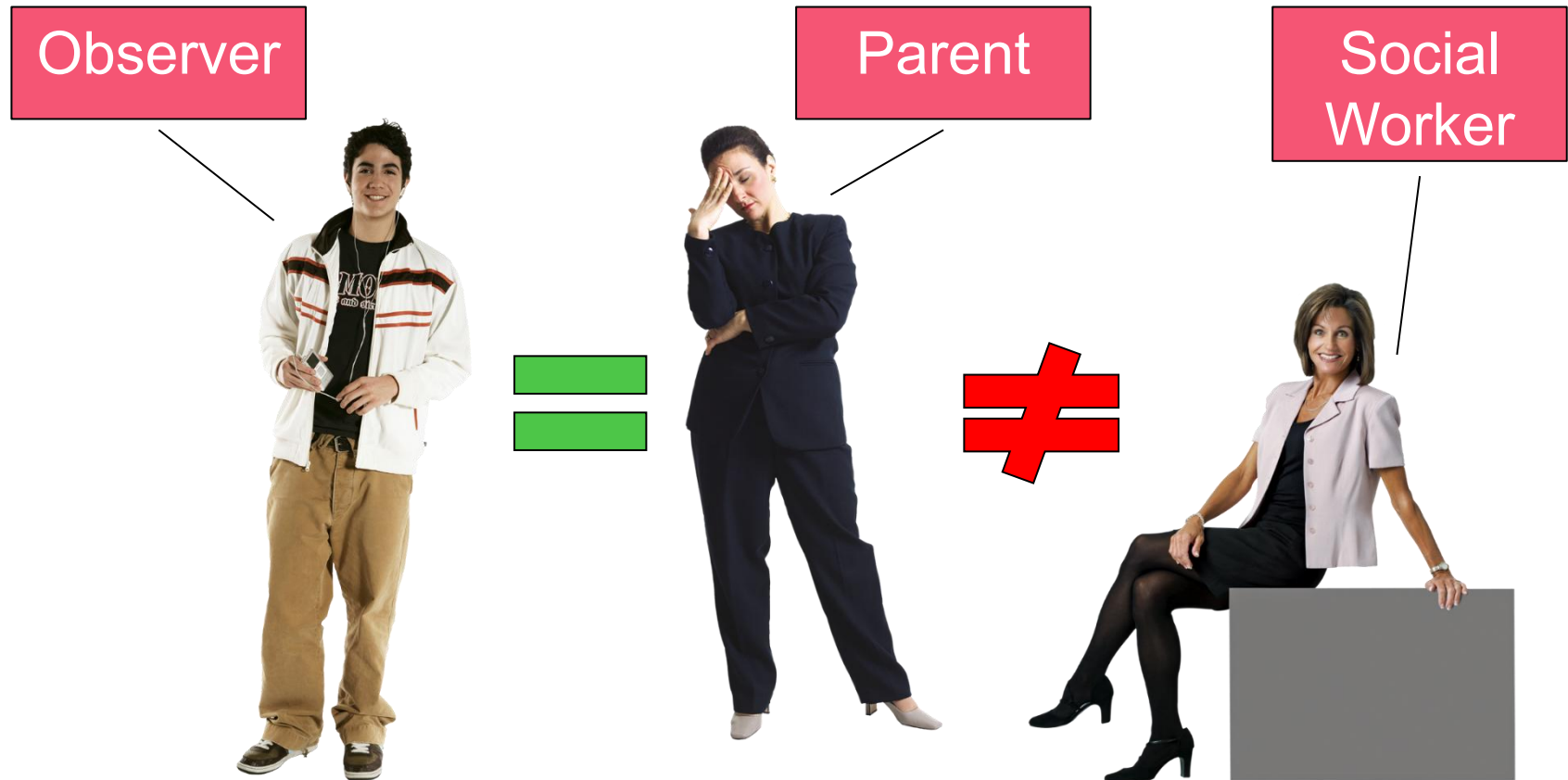
Informant	Mean (sd) WAI-S total
Parent	61.67 (18.29)
Social Worker	58.12 (13.74)
Observer	57.82 (15.72)



Did the 3 informants agree?

- Strong positive relationship between parent and observer scores ($r=0.466$ to 0.625 , $p<0.01$)
- Surprisingly weak relationship between parent and social worker scores ($r=0.290$ to 0.429 , $p<0.01$)
- Moderate positive relationship between social worker and observer scores ($r=0.323$ to 0.443 , $p<0.01$)

Did the 3 informants agree?



What did they agree on?

- 'Tasks' was the only subscale where difference between level of agreement was not significant
- Similar positive correlations:
 - Parent and social worker ($r=0.429$, $p<0.01$)
 - Parent and observer ($r=0.466$, $p<0.01$)
 - Observer and social worker ($r=0.443$, $p<0.01$)

What about agreement on the relationship?

- Significant differences in level of agreement ($p < 0.01$) on 'bond' subscale paired scores
- Range of correlation coefficients:
 - Parent and social worker ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$)
 - Parent and observer ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$)
 - Observer and social worker ($r = 0.323$, $p < 0.01$)

What about agreement on the goals?

- Significant differences in level of agreement ($p < 0.01$) on 'goals' subscale paired scores
- Range of correlation coefficients:
 - Parent and social worker ($r = 0.365$, $p < 0.01$)
 - Parent and observer ($r = 0.625$, $p < 0.01$)
 - Observer and social worker assessment ($r = 0.327$, $p < 0.01$)

Provisional WAI ‘categories’: Is misalignment consistent?

SW assessment:	“HIGH”	“MEDIUM”	“LOW”
Parent reports “HIGH” (n=75)	56%	40%	4%
Parent reports “MEDIUM” (n=18)	39%	22%	39%
Parent reports “LOW” (n=22)	18%	45%	36%



- Observers showed high levels of agreement with parents on all 3 'engagement' dimensions
- Social workers showed low levels of agreement with parents on 'bond' and 'goals'
- Social workers showed moderate agreement with parents on 'tasks'
- Provisional category analysis indicates greater misalignment where parent reports low engagement - consistent with Yatchmenoff (2008) finding

Assessing engagement is not as easy as it sounds ...

- Challenges specific to child and family social work:
 - Parents are ‘non-voluntary’ clients
 - Expecting parent to make changes to improve outcomes for the child
- Complicating family and ‘system’ level factors:
 - Influence of ‘significant others’
 - Fragmented families
 - External events e.g. housing issues

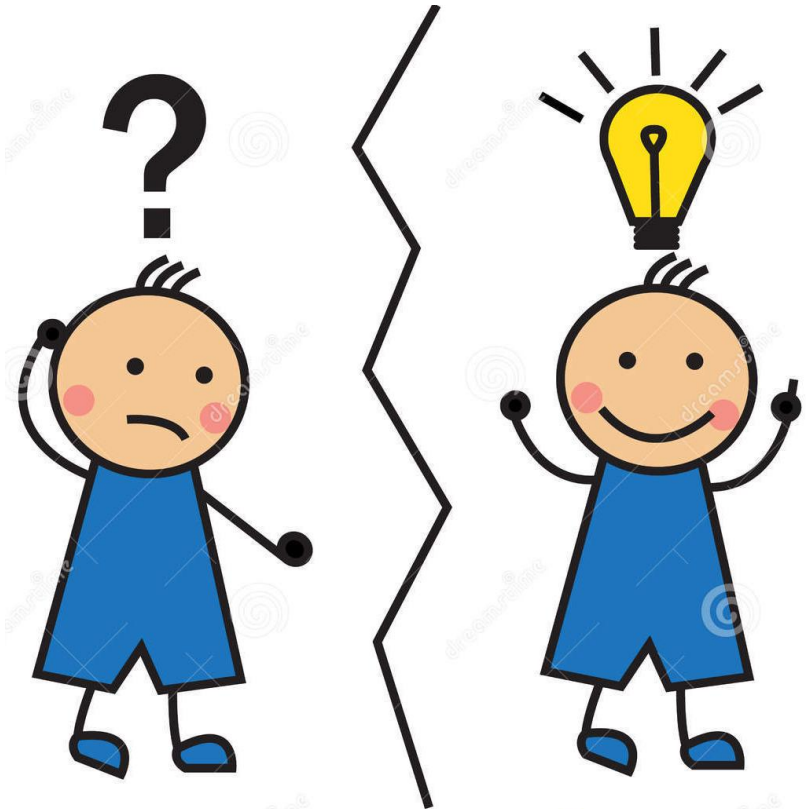
But trained observers assessed more accurately ...

- Social workers are not specifically trained?
- Social workers don't have the skills?
- Not an organisational priority?
- Should managers be relying on the judgment of a single social worker?



Next steps

- Further analyses – are certain cases problematic?
- DfE Innovation Programme projects to develop practice *with* practitioners



Contact details



Tilda Goldberg Centre for Social Work and Social
Care, University of Bedfordshire, UK

Charlotte Waits charlotte.waits@beds.ac.uk

Donald Forrester donald.forrester@beds.ac.uk