

“An Evaluation of the CLEAR Service: Therapy Effectiveness and Exploration of Therapists’ Experiences of Using Routine Outcome Measures”

Authors

The service evaluation was prepared by Kevin Beckles, Chelsea Church and Joshua Williams, who were Clinical Psychology Trainees of the Clinical Psychology programme at Plymouth University. The evaluation and report was completed with supervision by the clinical psychology programme supervisor and Clinical Psychologist, Helen Lloyd and CLEAR supervisor and Clinical Psychologist Nicola Henderson.

When, how and whom the data was collected for review

The data collected and reviewed was for a 12-month period from September 2018 to August 2019. This data was inclusive of the all the referrals to the children and young people service who engaged with therapy and completed pre- and post-therapy outcome measures as part of CLEAR’s Routine Outcome Measures (ROMs) programme. The authors undertook a service evaluation with the following aims:

- 1) to evaluate treatment efficacy using quantitative and qualitative data from routine outcome measures (ROMs),
- 2) develop a coding framework to enhance collection of qualitative feedback from children, and
- 3) explore therapist experiences of using ROMs.

ROM data was both quantitative and qualitative with a mixed methods of analysis. The service evaluation was designed to investigate intervention effectiveness as they are practised; a real world evaluation as opposed to standardised trials of therapy

effectiveness. Therapist experiences were gathered via focus group discussion and thematic analysis was used.

Data was collected from 111 Children and Young People (CYP) who completed therapy between September 2018 and August 2019; 59% were female, 40% male and 1% identified as gender fluid; ages ranged from two to 18 years old; 89% of CYP reported their ethnicity as white, with the remainder made up of children who are Cornish, European, from the traveller community or of multiple ethnicities; 9% reported to have a disability.

Key observations in general

Across all ROMs, there were fewer cases that met a level of clinical significance post-therapy, which further supports the claim that CLEAR therapy is effective.

Routinely collected qualitative service user feedback supports the claim that CLEAR therapy is effective. The core themes which emerged from analysis of this data revealed the importance to service users of the diversity of therapeutic offerings at CLEAR, the importance of the therapeutic relationship and the positive changes they have experienced as a result of working with CLEAR.

Observations of effectiveness in more detail

Parents observations of emotional literacy showed improvements after therapy.

On average, parents reported higher scores on the ELC post-therapy ($M = 66.42$, $SD = 12.20$) compared to pre-therapy ($M = 60$, $SD = 13.12$). This difference, 6.42, was significant $t(47) = 4.18$, $p < .001$ and represented a medium-sized effect, $d = .51$.

Child and Young Person observations of emotional literacy showed improvements after therapy.

On average were greater post-therapy ($M = 68.31$, $SD = 12.01$) than pre- ($M = 64.06$, $SD = 13.24$). This difference was significant $t(34) = 2.55$, $p = .015$ and

the effect size was small, $d = .34$. When separated into age groups for Child (7 – 11 years old) there was a difference a small effect size, $d = .33$, and for Young People (11 – 18 years old) there was a medium-sized effect, $d = .50$.

Observations by Parents/carer on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) showed that parents reporting an improvement in the overall difficulties their child and young person was experiencing. A decrease in the average total score on the parent reported SDQ following their child's therapy ($M = 15.21$, $SD = 8.19$) compared to pre-therapy average scores ($M = 19.15$, $SD = 8.31$). This difference, -3.94 , was significant $t(65) = -5.27$, $p < .001$ and represented a medium-sized effect, $d = .48$.

Children and Young People reported marginal improvements in their experiences within family, school, themselves and overall, with younger children 6 – 12 years reporting more improvements with a small-sized positive effect, $d = .25$.

All parents/carers, children and young people who engage with CLEAR for therapy are given the opportunity to share their experiences through feedback. A measure of satisfaction (Commission for Health Improvement – Experience of Service Questionnaire; CHI-ESQ) and a specific feedback tool designed by CLEAR Ideas, the child and young people consultation group, called Hard To Put Into Words (HTPIW) were used to capture this. Within both measures are open-ended questions eliciting young person's views about what was good about the care they received, what could have been improved and if there was anything else they would like to say.

Parent/carers and CYP responses on both suggested overall there were high levels of satisfaction for the care they experienced.

As a means of better understanding this service satisfaction, from the parent/carer and child and young person's perspective, a coded framework was developed which identified key themes. The positive themes which emerged;

- Positive relationship with therapist,
- Therapist attributes including supportiveness
- Good communication by therapists
- Positive experience and Gratitude
- The process and enjoyment of Creative Expression
- Positive changes seen in child
- Increased confidence
- Professionalism
- Providing respite from family and school
- Involvement and contributing: being able to be involved with the charity and improving service for CYP after therapy ended

The areas for improvement which were identified;

- Desiring more specific communication as to ways of supporting child
- Having more sessions and time for the therapy
- Out of Hours access to therapist and support

Thematic analysis of therapist focus group

CLEAR therapists were invited to join a focus group to share their experiences of using outcome measures in therapy. A thematic analysis was undertaken on the group discussion, identifying four themes: Conflict, Family, Practicality and Complexity.

- **Conflict** was a theme which arose in context of therapists balancing building of the therapeutic relationship against completing the ROMs in the initial and review sessions. It also arose in the recognition of the need to have outcome

measures balanced with uncertainty that the measures were able to capture the progress or change observed by the therapist.

- **Family** Therapists described some difficulties when working with a family, including working with sibling groups and the presence of parents due to the increased amount of time to complete measures, the increased demand on parents to complete measures for several children and being conscious of children knowing they were being 'compared'.

Often the therapists acknowledge that parents may choose not to engage with completing the post-measures as therapy completed and they do not hold the same investment as the therapist in completing them.

- **Practicality.** A number of practical factors to implementing measures were discussed, including technology, timing, literacy and very young children.
- **Complexity.** The high level of complexity in both family lives and interpreting scores was identified by all therapists. This includes recognition of potential for children and young people's report to be positive to please either family or therapist – this can show different effects on the measures to clinical observations in the progress of therapy.

Learning from CLEAR's perspective

- The development of a coding framework for both service feedback measures gives a richer and deeper understanding of the CYP and families experiences of therapy which was able to highlight CLEARs strengths and where improvements could be made.
- The balance of measuring outcomes and engaging in therapy is continuously under consideration with the aim to possibility improve this through better use of technology and re-structuring of assessment and review sessions to allow for parents to complete observations in advance.

- There is recognition of the vulnerabilities in measuring outcomes for younger children, specifically hearing the child's voice and in general the sensitivity of our ROMs in measuring complexity of trauma. This has prompted a review of the ROMs and developing strategy to adjust the programme accordingly.

If you are interested in the full evaluation report, you are welcome to request this from CLEAR, contacting Nicola Henderson, Clinical Lead on 01872 261 147 or email n.henderson@clearsupport.net

Further references to published articles of relevance

Perry, S., & Frampton, I. (2018). Measuring the effectiveness of individual therapy on the wellbeing of children and young people who have experienced abusive relationships, particularly domestic violence: A case study. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research, 18*, 356–368.

Perry, S., Carpenter, S., & CLEAR IDEAS (2016). Preliminary development and piloting of a user-generated routine outcome measure in a children and young people's counselling service. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research, 16*(3), 171–182.