

## **ABSTRACT**

This study set out to explore decision making and assessment in a project offering theraplay and play therapy to children assessed as experiencing attachment related difficulties. The project is part of a team offering services to Looked After Children set up in response to consistently poor local authority and national statistics. Child presentation and difficulties are routinely assessed within the team using standardised questionnaire tools which are then re-applied throughout intervention as monitoring and outcome measures. The effectiveness of these tools was considered in the context of this very specific client population and these particular therapeutic modalities. Professionals and parents of the six children identified were then interviewed to ascertain their views of services offered.

This study concluded that theraplay was a useful intervention in addressing attachment related difficulties as evidenced through the oral reports of interviewees and through the use of video assessment. Play Therapy was also seen to be a useful intervention in addressing trauma and attachment related difficulties as evidenced through oral reports and to a lesser extent existing screening tools. Conventional questionnaire material was thought to be useful in screening for definable child difficulties but the study questions its sensitivity as an outcome measure within this clinical population. Decision making within the project was found to be dynamic and evolving. The study raises the need for ongoing assessment and flexibility in decision making throughout therapeutic intervention. The value of close interagency and interdisciplinary communication was clearly evidenced by all those interviewed. The support, training and consultation offered by project and team were cited as significant factors in placement stability; emphasising the need for specialist mental health provision for looked after children and their families.