How and Why to Code Direct Social Work Practice

Donald Forrester

Professor of Child and Family Social Work

Director of CASCADE

Overview: Under the Hood

Quick historical overview of a bunch of studies – why we observed practice, what we learnt, mistakes made... then how to do it

Covering:
- Why to code practice
- How to code practice
- What next?

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Research observing 800 practice meetings – 577 real, 216 simulated

Study	Real or simulated	n	Reference
Does an MI workshop improve practice?	Simulated	35	1
Do worker skills change responses of simulated clients?	Simulated	24	2
Evaluation of Reclaiming Social Work and MI training	Simulated	33	3
Relationship between worker skills and outcomes	Real	137	4
Evaluation of MI training in LA in South West England	Simulated	124	5
Evaluation of roll-out of Reclaiming Social Work	Real	84	6
Evaluation of Family Safeguarding	Real	126	7
Can we improve practice by feeding back on direct observations?	Real	c.200	8
Can we reliably grade skills on the Frontline programme	Real	30	9

Study 1: How did we measure skills?

My first study – before this one - found that social workers did not know how to work with alcohol or drug problems and outcomes were really bad

I decided my studies needed to stop describing problems and try to DO something about them – that was really why I ended up associated with EBP

MI seemed a good fit for CFSW – with evidence it worked

Researched impact of a workshop – and randomized follow-up supervision

Simulated interviews measured skills

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Study 1: Does an MI workshop improve practice?

35 simulated interviews – student actors on phone

Motivational Interviewing Treatment Integrity
coding handbook (3.1):
- Behaviour counts eg open or closed questions
- Scales (1-5)
1. Evocation
2. Collaboration
3. Autonomy
4. Direction
5. Empathy

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Study 1: What we found...

Workers liked the training – and some evidence of maybe some changes

But the simulated interviews were really shocking – social workers really did not talk well to people IMO

Even after training few had any MI skill

But...

Simulated interviews sounded realistic...

How DO social workers talk to people?

How can we change practice?

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Study 2: Do worker skills change responses of simulated clients?

The prequel!

24 simulated interviews in person

Separately coded worker behaviours and client responses

Still using broadly MI thinking eg resistance, talking about problems

What was relationship?

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Study 2: What did we learn?

The headlines:

- There was a strong relationship between worker skills and simulated client reactions in each 5 minute segment
- Empathy reduced resistance and increased disclosure

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My favourite graph…
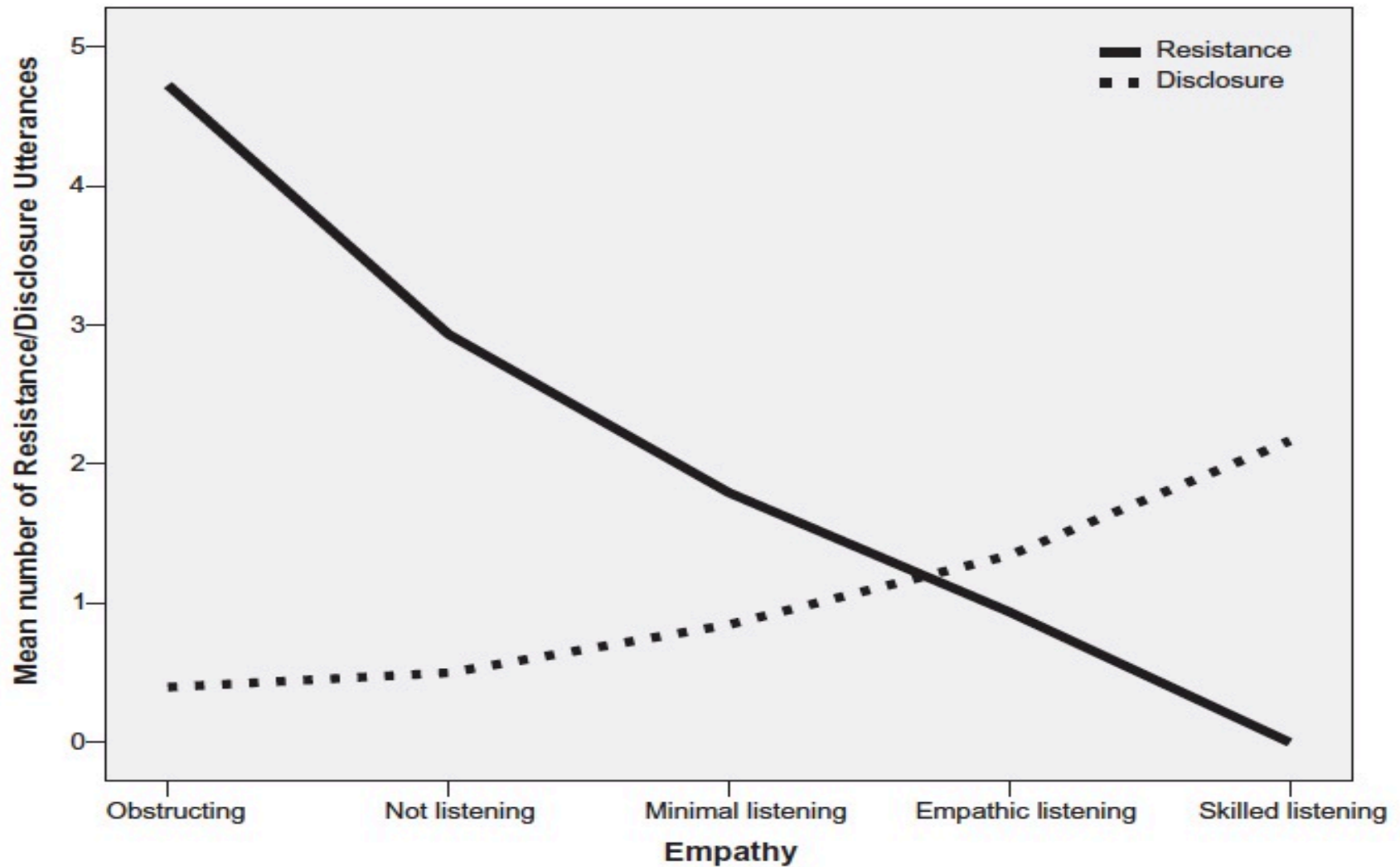
Study 2: What did we learn?

The headlines:

- Strong relationship between worker skills and simulated client reactions in each 5min segment
- Empathy reduced resistance, increased disclosure

But also practice was pretty terrible – loads of closed questions, low empathy

But also…

You can do good research for peanuts!

So what happens in real meetings?

And what can we DO about it??

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Study 4: Relationship between worker skills and outcomes

RCT of MI development intervention – 5 days of workshops + fortnightly individual/small group input

Randomized 600 families (most closed quickly)

Recorded 137 interviews:
- Used MITI plus CFSW specific codes
- Purposefulness, clarity about concerns, focus on child

Plus found some outcomes for (100+) at 20 weeks – Goal Attainment Scaling, rating of family life, Working Alliance Inventory

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Study 4: What did we find?

There was a statistically significant difference in MI skills in practice (0.49/5)
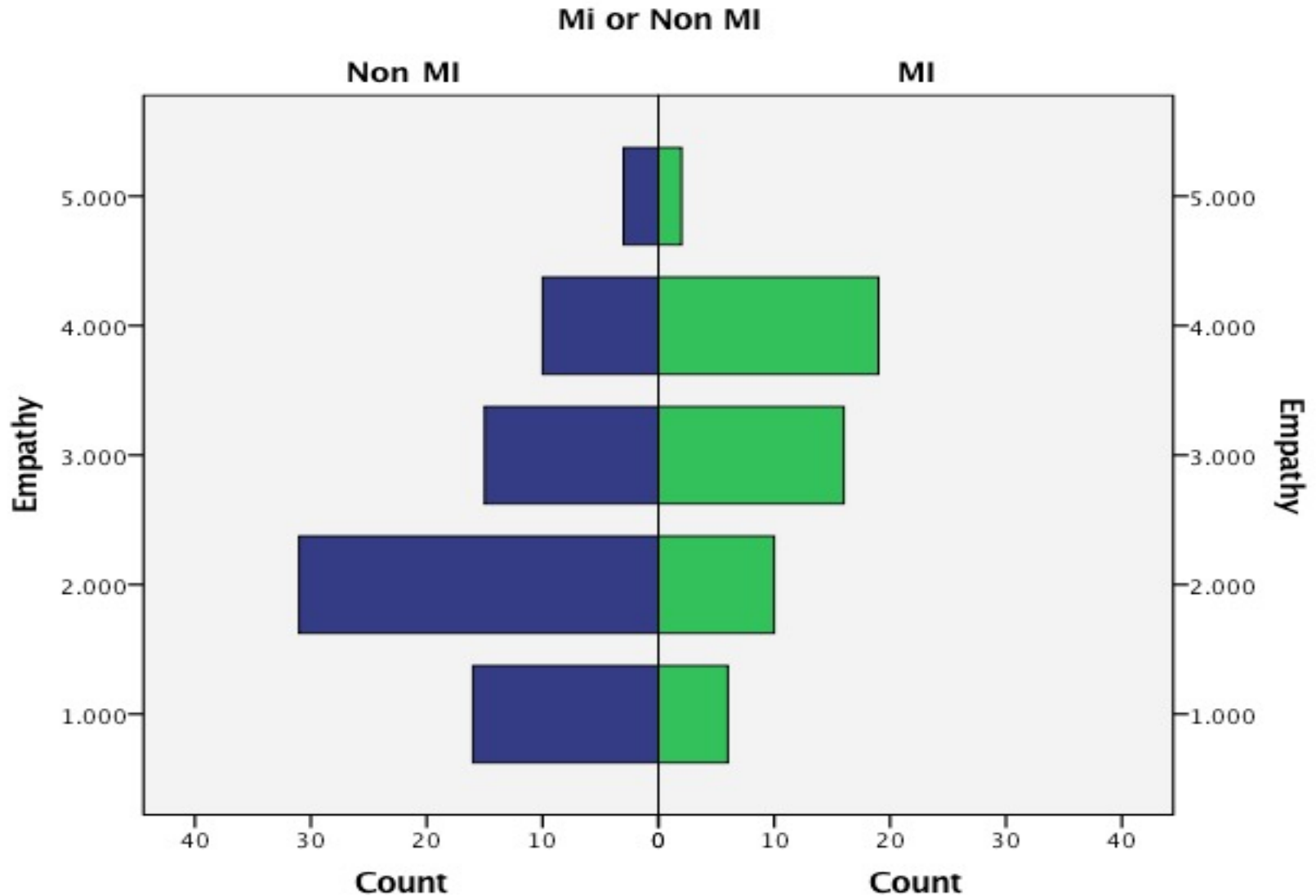But <u>no difference in outcomes</u>

WHY?!?!?

Also – normal practice still not very good

1. Changing practice is REALLY hard…

Study 4: what is the link between skills and outcomes?

Maybe skills are not related to outcomes…?

Tested and found – statistically significant but pretty weak relationships between the skills we measured and outcomes…

- Important – only evidence?
- But what workers are doing is really complicated
  - Often have limited contact and
  - Not sure what they are trying to achieve…

Not enough for the very modest change in skills to make any difference..

Study 4: Raised big questions for me…

1. What IS good practice in social work?
- Is it justified by outcomes?
- Or are there intrinsic good practices – and how do we understand or justify them?

2. How can we improve practice?

3. How can we research this sort of stuff?

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Studies 6, 7 & 8: Impact of whole system change

Maybe whole system change will work better at changing practice?
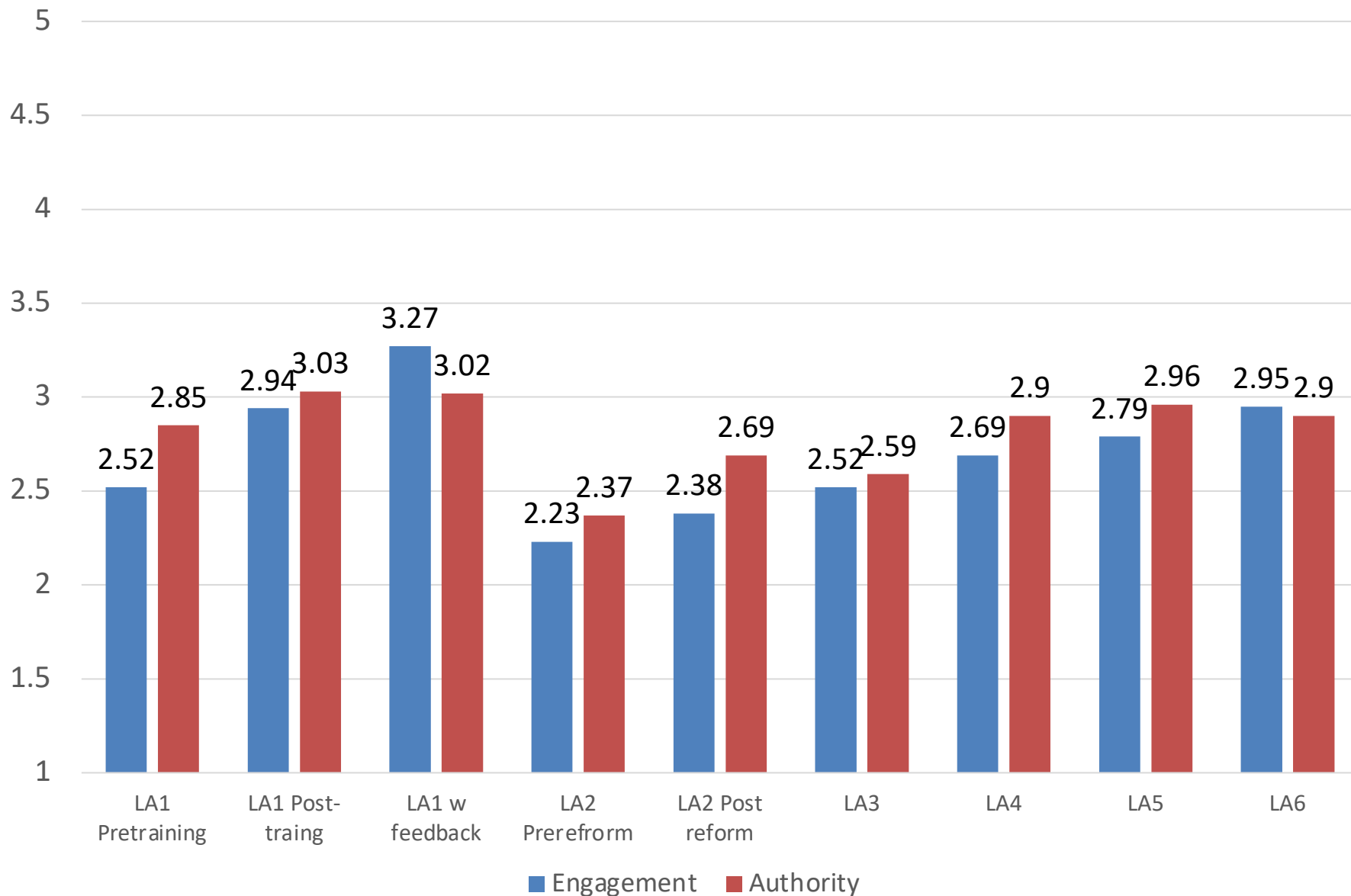
Are the measures valid given MI background?

6 – Reclaiming Social Work for 5 LAs (systemic practice)
7 – Hertfordshire Family Safeguarding (MI)
8 – MI in Islington

Each part of bigger evaluations

Engagement and Authority Skills

|	Engagement	Authority
LA1 Pretraining	2.52	2.85
LA1 Post-traing	2.94	3.03
LA1 w feedback	3.27	3.02
LA2 Prereform	2.23	2.37
LA2 Post reform	2.38	2.69
LA3	2.52	2.59
LA4	2.69	2.9
LA5	2.79	2.96
LA6	2.95	2.9

Study of systemic group supervision

Figure 3: Level of Social Worker Skill in Relationship-building skills and Authority-based Skills by type of supervision received
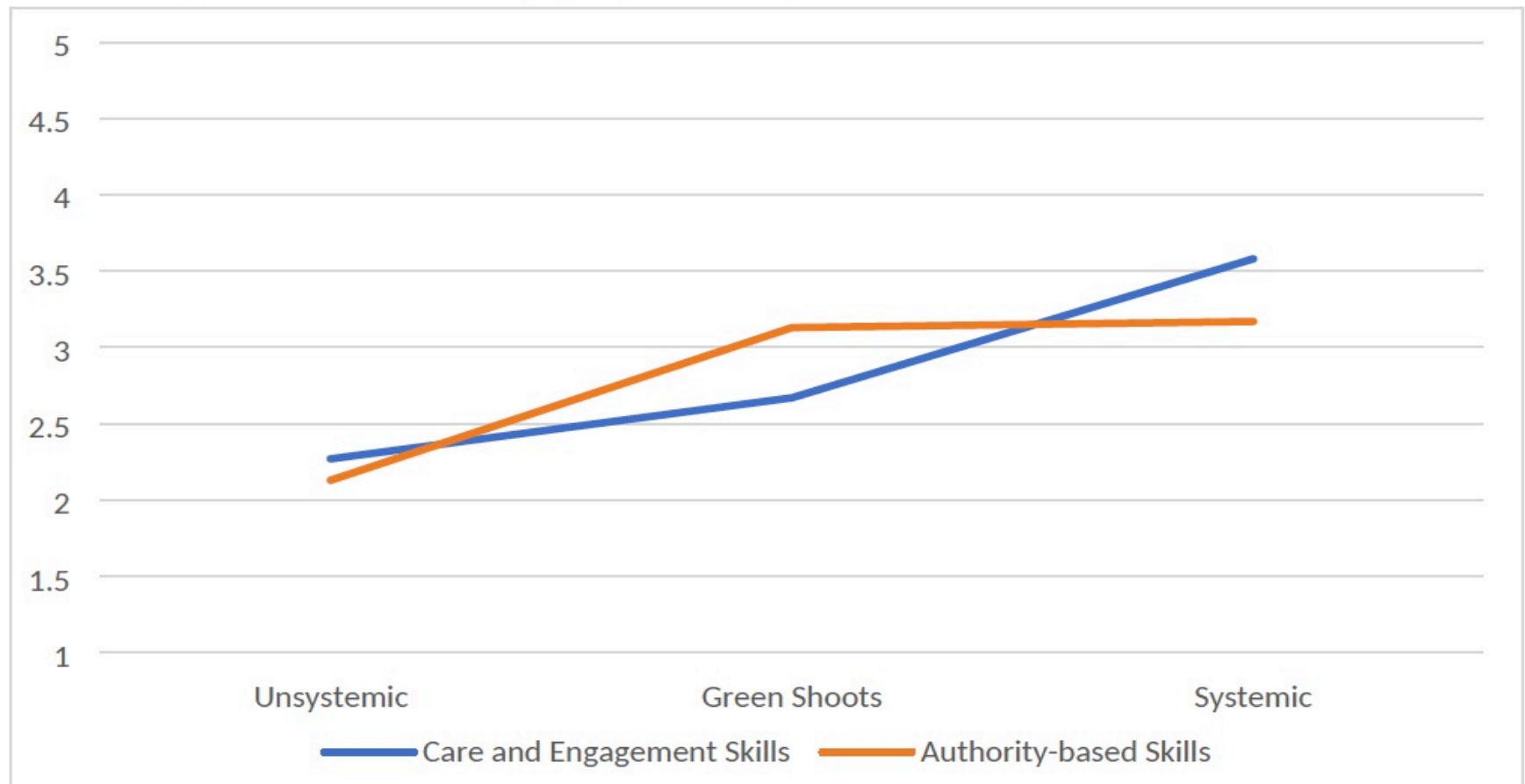
Change in Good Authority Study 7
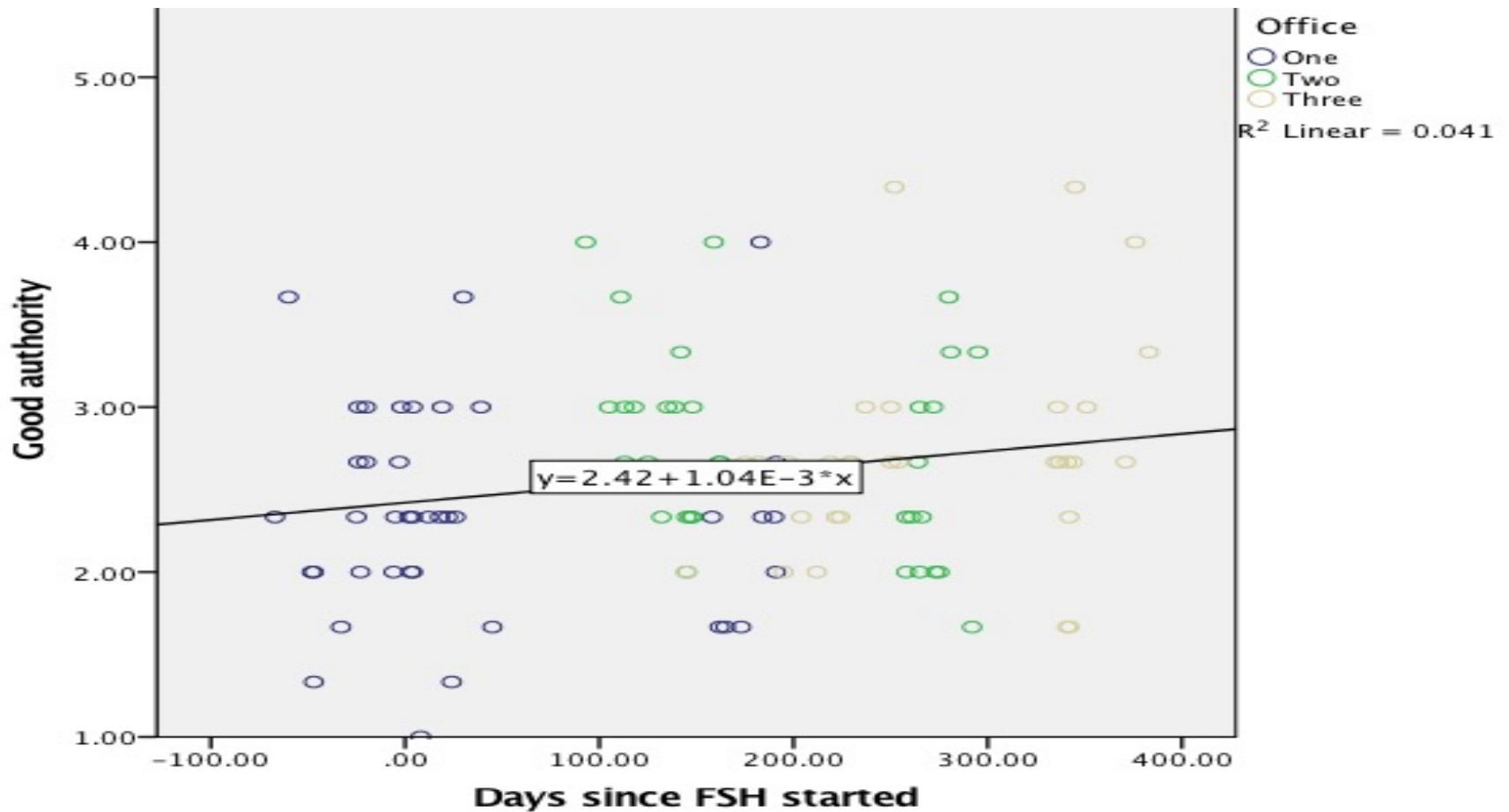
Studies 6, 7 & 8: what did we find…

Practice still very hard to change…

Some validation of the measures

Seems to capture more than just "MI"

Now going to look at how we coded and what good social work is…

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Example of coding – empathy (MITI)

Empathy (*care and engagement*)

Low   **High**

1	2	3	4	5
Social worker has no apparent interest in parent / carer's worldview. Gives little or no attention to parent / carer's perspective	Social worker makes sporadic efforts to explore parent / carer's perspective. Social worker's understanding may be inaccurate or detract from parent / carer's intended meaning	Social worker is actively trying to understand parent / carer's perspective, with modest success	Social worker shows evidence of accurate understanding of parent / carer's worldview. Makes active and repeated efforts to understand parent / carer's view. Understanding mostly limited to explicit content	Social worker shows evidence of deep understanding of parent / carer's worldview, not just information explicitly stated

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Example of coding – purposefulness

Purposefulness (*good authority*)

Low				**High**
1	2	3	4	5
There is no clear aim to the discussion and it is not obvious what the social worker is trying to achieve	There is some sense of purpose, but the discussion has substantial chunks where the purpose is unclear or where the discussion is formulaic	The discussion has an overall sense of purpose. However, this is imposed by the social worker without significant negotiation	The discussion has a clear sense of purpose, evident throughout, yet the social worker remains flexible in response to the parent / carer	The discussion has a clear sense of purpose, negotiation and understood by everyone involved. Social worker shows evidence of planning yet also flexibility in response to the parent / carer

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Developing Reliability

- Initially coded simulated interviews - large number coded by external experts in MITI
- Once achieved high rate of reliability with them we started to code ourselves
- Team working to code together
- Individual coaching – only coding actual interviews once high rate of reliability achieved
- Weekly team meetings
- 10% double coded
- It was very hard, intensive work

How we coded for "Social Work Skills"

1. Empathy
2. Collaboration
3. Autonomy
4. Evocation
5. Purposefulness
6. Clarity about concerns
7. Focus on child

How skills relate to one another...

1. Empathy
2. Collaboration
3. Autonomy

Relationship Skills

Behaviour Change Skills

1. Evocation

1. Purposefulness
2. Clarity about concerns
3. Focus on child

Good Authority

How we coded for "Social Work Skills"

1. Empathy
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Relationship Skills

Behaviour Change Skills

1. Evocation

1. Purposefulness
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Good Authority

Is this a good starting model for good practice?

Reflections on Coding Practice in Social Work

1. Requires a description of what good practice should be:

- This is a challenge – do we know? On what basis? What is missed? eg sense of humour – agape What about children, young people, other settings?

- But it also a key strength – surely we should be able to describe what good practice is? Otherwise how do we teach or assess for it? How do we lead or supervise?

Reflections on Coding Practice in Social Work

2. Practice Implications

- Informs teaching and assessment on FL, interviews for Swers, direct observation

- But – very hard to operationalise, difficult to do to high standard

How to make it useful?

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Reflections on Coding Practice in Social Work

3. Next Steps for Research... Started:

- Finegrained analysis of parental response (Charlie)

- Applying coding to work with children (Dave et al)

- Using in Denmark, maybe Finland

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Reflections on Coding Practice in Social Work

3. Next Steps for Research… New Directions:

- *Secondary analysis* of existing recordings:
    - CA, ethnography etc
    - Focussing on specific issues or groups eg DA, poverty
    - Great way to bring a bunch of people together
- *Action research* – can we put it into practice working with team/s, LAs?
    - Could we make it part of the SW MA?
- *Views of parents and SWs* – this is very expert approach
- *Theory development* work – what are the practice implications of a rights based perspective?
- What else? Links to care rates??

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