Quality Measurement Framework: Measuring the outcomes of low-level services

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Measurement of the quantity and intensity of publicly-funded service provision is routine. However, on its own this information cannot tell us about the value of those services. People benefit from the consequences of service use, not from services per se. Assessing how well public resources are used therefore requires us to measure the impact of services.

The central contention of this work is that the impact of social care services is measured in terms of how they improve the quality of life or wellbeing of service users. The definition of a good service then depends on the degree to which it improves wellbeing.

The Adult Social Care Outcomes Toolkit (ASCOT) breaks down the concept of wellbeing into nine quality of life domains, with an emphasis on measuring people’s capability to achieve good experiences in each domain. The aim of the work was to assess whether the ASCOT methodology is valid and reliable as well as being practical and minimally burdensome, compared to alternative approaches that could be taken.

The study fieldwork consisted of a self-completion survey of 961 people using day care and a follow-up interview with 224 of these people. The principal aim of the research was to develop and validate a low-burden approach to measuring the impact of low-level services, specifically day care centres.

Overall, the ASCOT outcome measure performed well against validity and reliability tests. We found that ASCOT did detect wellbeing improvements as resulting from the use of home care, day care and informal care, as expected. The ASCOT also showed convergent validity in that it was correlated with independent measures that ought in theory to be related, which in this case were satisfaction ratings, ADL need levels, and service quality indicators.

There are many applications of ASCOT and the outcomes data it generates.

- It can be used to inform cost-effectiveness considerations by examining which types of services improve outcomes within each domain.
- It can aid outcomes-based commissioning by allowing commissioners to measure outcomes.
- It can be used by regulators and commissioners to monitor service performance in addition to current quality ratings.
- The data can be used to adjust adult social care in the national accounts.
- It can help service users to determine what it is they want to gain from service use and which services are, therefore, best suited to them.