

OUTCOMES OF SOCIAL CARE FOR ADULTS (OSCA)

PSSRU

Outline of a research project funded by Health Technology Assessment (HTA) NIHR

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BACKGROUND

There is an increasing emphasis on outcomes in the field of social care in terms of practice, policy, regulation and monitoring performance. At all levels there is a need to measure more effectively the impact of interventions on service users and the value of that impact. In the field of health economics, health outcomes are usually measured using quality adjusted life years, which are based on the principle that measures of health outcome should reflect the relative importance of the domains of outcome, reflected in population (or for some purposes patient) preferences. In the field of social care, there is a dearth of well-validated measures of outcome, particularly measures that are applicable across user groups and that reflect population or service user preferences.

This study builds on previous and other ongoing work on measuring outputs and outcomes of social care. This includes user experience surveys (UES), the evaluation of the Individual Budget pilots and the ONS-led Quality Measurement Framework (QMF) project to create mechanisms for more effective and efficient measurement and monitoring of output. The PSSRU element of the QMF project is currently developing the Capacity for Benefit approach to measuring outputs of care homes, low-level social care and information and advice services. The measure developed as part of this study will form part of the Adult Social Care Outcome Toolkit (ASCOT) that is a core output of the QMF work.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study is to generate a gold standard preference weighted measure of social care outcomes that can be used in a variety of circumstances including social care evaluations, cost-utility analyses, weighted output of government funded social care for National Accounts and policy analyses. The objectives are to:

- Develop a measure of social care outcome that captures all relevant domains, has credibility in the social care community, has been cognitively tested and demonstrates good psychometric properties
- Test a variety of approaches to establishing preferences for methodological soundness and practical application with the general population
- Investigate how applicable these methods are to a service user population
- Conduct a large-scale population preference study
- Develop a set of weights for calculating social care and weighting measures of social care output
- Explore how service user views differ from the general population and establish alternative preference weights if appropriate
- Identify what affects preferences among the general population and service users

METHODS

The project comprises two phases: the first covering development and feasibility work to inform the design for a main phase where the fieldwork would collect preference data for a validated measure for both the general population and service users.

There are two strands to the development and feasibility work:

- the development and psychometric testing of the measure itself
- exploration of the feasibility of different approaches to establishing preferences

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The aim is to stage the work to refine the measure being developed as part of the Adult Social Care Outcome Toolkit (ASCOT) through a series of ongoing studies, whilst testing a number of preference elicitation approaches with the general population. The results of these exercises will feed into testing the measure and piloting preference elicitation with service users. This will allow us to evaluate both the measure itself and which of the preference elicitation approaches being explored is best suited to this particular segment of the population.

The psychometric properties of the current measure will be examined using data that have been collected from previous studies. The datasets will be used to explore validity from a theoretical and statistical perspective. The conclusions of this work and proposals for development of the measure will be circulated to a reference group comprising service users, local authority representatives, policy makers and experts in the field. Their comments and views will feed into the final decision about the number and nature of domains. To ensure that all new and amended items are being interpreted by service users in the way we hope, they will be cognitively tested using a small purposive sample of approximately 30 service users.

Concurrently, a feasibility study on elicitation techniques will be conducted through face-to-face interviews with a population sample. A number of different preference elicitation techniques and approaches to anchoring the scale will be explored.

Drawing on the results of these two strands of work, 300 service users will be interviewed to allow psychometric testing of the measure and test out with this group examples of those approaches to preference elicitation that have been identified as most promising in the population feasibility study.

The design of the mainstage fieldwork in phase 2 will be based on the results of phase 1 and will comprise a preference study conducted with a population and, assuming successful testing in phase 1, a service user sample of 1000 and 500 respectively. The analyses will generate weights to be used to score the outcome measure.

TIMETABLE AND MILESTONES

The project will run from August 2008 to January 2011. An interim report on the initial work on the development of the measure and feasibility study of elicitation techniques will be available in the summer of 2009 and report of phase 1 in late spring 2010.

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