

Welcome to the Webinar!

*We will begin the presentation shortly.
Thank you for your patience.*

Youth Care Workers as First Responders: Making Decisions When Time is Short and the Stakes are High

YVONNE SMITH, PH.D.
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

Overview

- ▶ **Introduction: Why consider youth care workers first responders?**
- ▶ **Interdisciplinary research on first responder decision-making**
 - Traditional models of decision-making
 - Naturalistic decision-making
- ▶ **Results of a naturalistic study of crisis decision-making in residential treatment**
- ▶ **Implications for staff development**
- ▶ **Discussion**

More than a metaphor?

Youth Care Workers

- ▶ Direct care staff, youth development Professionals, dorm counselors, crisis workers
- ▶ Often 1st “on the scene”
- ▶ Confronted with potential danger to self or others (crisis)

First Responders

- ▶ Firefighters, police officers, EMTs, military personnel
- ▶ Often 1st “on the scene”
- ▶ Confronted with potential danger to self or others (crisis)

More than a metaphor?

- ▶ **Decision-making authority/discretion**
 - ▶ **Must respond to person(s) in need, even with...**
 - Limited time
 - Limited knowledge of situation
 - Unclear, flexible, or changing goals
- ▶ **Decision-making authority/discretion**
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High Stakes

- ▶ **Both first responders and youth care workers routinely confront situations with potentially life-changing outcomes, both for themselves and for those they serve.**
- Physical and emotional trauma or death caused by interventions
- Physical and emotional trauma or death related to *failure to properly intervene* in emotional/behavioral crises

Classical Models of Decision-Making

- ▶ **Rational actor model (e.g., Tversky & Kahneman, 1974; Kahneman et al., 1982)**
 - Comparison of multiple, discrete options
 - Good decisions identify and weigh all possible factors, avoid heuristics and biases
 - Normative—“ideal decisions”
 - Based on lab research
 - EBP process (van de Luitgaarten, 2009)
- ▶ **“Fast and frugal” heuristics (Gigerenzer & Goldstein, 1996)**
 - Takes a rosier view of heuristics
 - Heuristics can be useful and efficient shortcuts *when they are well-matched to the context of use*
 - Examples: take-the-first, imitation

Naturalistic Decision-Making (NDM)

- ▶ An empirical (rather than normative) model of *how people actually make decisions in real-world circumstances* (e.g., Klein 1989, 1998, 2008; Klein and Crandall 1996)
- ▶ Early NDM research based on interviews with experienced first responders under conditions of:
 - Time pressure
 - High stakes
 - Incomplete knowledge of the situation
 - Unclear or changing goals
- ▶ **First responders *did not tend to follow classical decisional balance decision processes***
- ▶ Recognition-Primed Decision style (Klein, 1998)
- ▶ Intense situational awareness
- ▶ Often considered only 1 option
- ▶ *They were very often “right”*

Rethinking Decision Making: An Ethnographic Study of Worker Agency in Crisis Intervention (Smith, 2014)

- ▶ How do mental health workers at “UHS,” who are trained in TCI, make decisions during real-time crisis intervention?
- ▶ Is “decision-making” even the best way to describe the way their actions happen during crisis?
- ▶ If it’s not decision-making, then what is it?

Ethnographic Methods

Individual interviews with mental health workers

Participant Observation of day-to-day clinical, organization, and training practices

Document Review :
Locally-produced Texts

Discourse Analysis of Relevant Literatures

Methods

- ▶ **Researcher was at UHS several days per week for 13 months— ≈1500 hours**
- ▶ **Developed tentative theories through participant observation**
- ▶ **Checked and refined theories through semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with key informants**
- ▶ **Iterative process of theory building**
- ▶ **Developing theories continuously checked with participants through informal conversations**

Findings

- ▶ Different kinds of time = different kinds of decisions?



Mundane Time	Crisis Time
Structured by regular/ritual events like dinner or start of the school day, predictable	Unstructured/unstructuring, disrupts the planned, unpredictable
Slow, needs to be filled with activities, such as knitting, games, talking	Fast, demands quick action
Diffuse/expansive	Compressed/Intense
Requires patience, endurance	Requires immediate response
Thinking, planning, step-by-step decisions, weighing options	“Instinct,” automatic reaction, RPD tactics, <i>habitus</i> style of agency

Findings

TCI Workbook:

“Before jumping into a situation and reacting, it is critical to stop and think about what the most appropriate response would be given the factors involved. The four questions we ask ourselves to identify the most appropriate intervention strategy are:

1. What am I feeling now?
2. What does this child feel, need, or want?
3. How is the environment affecting the child?
4. How do I best respond?” (Holden 2009, S19).

- ▶ **A puzzle: Workers employed specific techniques of TCI (e.g., emotional first-aid, de-escalation, removing the audience) but reported very rarely using the step-by-step decision model taught in their TCI trainings.**

“Instinct” in crisis time

Y: How do you go from observing, okay, there's some stuff happening, to then intervening in some way?

R (Dormitory manager with 6 years of experience at UHS.): It's an excellent question, actually. Because I think that part . . . of it that to me is less a decision and almost like an organic just like internal reaction. At least for me, like if I see someone being aggressive or see someone doing something dangerous, I just kind of move to intervene.

R: (dormitory counselor with 1 year of experience): A lot of what you learned in TCI—that helps. Like knowing physically what to do [to restrain a child safely] and use that. . . . I guess you have to hope you know it well enough to be able to just react. Because when I walked in on [a student] scratching [scabs from a recent self-injury], I didn't think. I didn't stop and be like, 'Oh, what should I do?' I was like I need to put my hands on her now.

R [crisis intervention leader]: I really think it's instinctual. So that's another thing that I don't think you can teach someone either. But I feel like most of the people on my crisis intervention team have it. . . . Like when I teach TCI I—like you're not gonna—we give like these acronyms and all this stuff for people to learn, and you're just like okay when you get in there you think you ask yourself this and then you do this. You don't have time sometimes, so you might have that knowledge, and I think you have that knowledge somewhere in your head, but when you get into that situation, it's gotta be bang, bang, bang, bang, bang.

R [dormitory counselor, 4 months experience]: I could have done this or I could have done that, or I was feeling this or I was feeling that. And then just turning that into, again, that *muscle memory* of like that certain reaction of I thought about this, and now this is the reaction I'm going to have. And it's going to happen so fast that I'm not going to know where it's coming from, but it's coming from a place of practice... it is an instinct in a way but we *train* our instinct.

First Responder Thinking

- ▶ Data quite similar to Klein & colleagues' data on firefighters, fighter pilots, and other first responders
- ▶ Rejection of step-by-step decision-making process
- ▶ No evidence of extensive consideration of multiple options
- ▶ Reliance on “instinct”—educated instinct



What's Habitus?

“Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structuring structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating actor or of a conductor” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.72).

Translation:

- ▶ **Habitus is a mode of agency that helps us mobilize what we know quickly and without conscious awareness in order to act in line with the expectations of our culture.**
 - Example: The small things we do all day everyday to perform our gender identity based on the expectations of our culture.
- ▶ ***If we think of a residential program as a culture, then we must consider the ways that that culture shapes the habitus of its workers.***
 - TCI becomes a part of organizational culture
 - Organizations are open systems—new ideas are always coming in, less used/useful ideas fading away

Limitations & Cautions

- ▶ **Study of a single site—important to consider representativeness**
 - Unusually highly-educated staff exceeded education requirements of accreditors
- ▶ **More research is needed—effectiveness unknown**
- ▶ **Habitus-based action NOT appropriate for all situations**
- ▶ **Desirable or undesirable habitus is NOT a natural quality of individuals (“common sense”)—it’s shaped by organizational culture, repetition**

Implications

- ▶ Youth care workers make decisions *much like first responders*.
- ▶ Acknowledging a mode of agency that better accounts for the compressed temporality of crisis may be a useful addition to the linear, step-by-step, self-questioning practices TCI uses to prepare workers to anticipate and manage their emotional reactions to clients
- ▶ Supports the idea that “best” decision-making practices must be sensitive to the unique demands of the context of decision-making
 - Example: EBP decision-making process (Gambrill, 1999; Gibbs 2003) likely not applicable to real-time crisis intervention

- ▶ **Training that draws on the behavioral principle of overlearning through multiple repetitions of preferred responses under conditions that simulate real crisis (see Dixon and Mullan 1990; Dixon and Bamford 1995; Coloma 2010)**
- ▶ **Help workers understand the importance of learning to mobilize crisis intervention knowledge “on their feet” under the pressures of crisis**
- ▶ **Target training interventions at transforming the organizational culture of decision-making**
- ▶ **Help workers understand how cultural knowledge is learned (observation of more experienced workers, informal apprenticeship learning, in addition to formalized didactic training)**

Benefits of First Responder Label: Administrator

- ▶ Acknowledges the challenging nature of the work; in particular with the understanding the complexity of completing dynamic assessments of the situations
- ▶ Acknowledges the success of the response is highly dependent upon the success of the responder, not only the prescribed intervention
- ▶ Highlights the high degree of skill required—this is not unskilled labor!
- ▶ Labels the work with prestige
- ▶ Ensures commensurate resources are provided; in particular with training, support, and self-care

Q&A?

Contact Me:



Yvonne (Eevie) Smith:
ynsmith@syr.edu

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Contact Information

Contact us at
ctac.info@nyu.edu



Upcoming Webinars

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**Presenters: James Rodriguez, LCSW, PhD; Jayson Jones,
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