

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

<p><b>Institution:</b> York St John University</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 4 (Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience)</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Structured peer group supervision for supporting psychologists', counsellors' and allied health professionals' development: A research-based model.</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Research into the process and efficacy of structured peer group supervision (PGS) for trainee and practicing psychologists, led by Akhurst at York St John University, collaborating with partners at the University of Leeds, has impacted on a number of psychology training programmes. The PGS model is also being adopted by various health practitioners to complement individual supervision. The model has been implemented variously in the Republic of Ireland, South Africa and the UK. Optimising use of the internet as a means for materials dissemination has enabled the DVD created by the research team to be used widely in professional development.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Practitioners in psychology, counselling, and other allied health professions often adopt peer group supervision (PGS), favouring its egalitarian approach and valuing peer learning. It provides unique benefits that are different from traditional dyadic supervision (Akhurst &amp; Kelly, 2006). There has been relatively limited systematic research into the structured PGS modality, with very few studies employing data that are directly concerned with experiences and impacts of the process, using transcripts or participant observation.</p> <p>Building on process-focused research conducted with her students in South Africa, 2000-3, Akhurst has developed and adapted a structured PGS model for use in the UK and internationally, for trainee psychologists, newly qualified practitioners and allied health professionals. Appointment at YSJU enabled her to write up and publish the findings of the first project in 2005-6, and then to collaborate with Dr David Green at the University of Leeds, 2006-9, to take the research further. This second project (funded by the Higher Education Academy Psychology Network) evaluated the potential of the PGS model for the UK, in collaboration with groups of students and newly qualified clinical psychologists. The research compared the experiences of groups of trainees using the structured model (at the University of Limerick, Ireland) to those using a less structured model (linked to the University of Leeds). This research established the shared features of both models, and confirmed the relative benefits of structured PGS, as established in Akhurst's earlier research. The findings showed that structured PGS promotes a solution-focussed approach, in a safe space, exploring step by step interventions, and provides an active learning environment where practitioners can link their experiences to previously-learnt theories. In addition, it has utility for newly trained psychologists, who are expected to provide supervision from an early stage of their employment. Trainers and practitioners have continued to explore applications of the model, for example the work of Cross (2011) at London Metropolitan University with counselling psychology trainees, and Farman providing CPD for educational psychologists (2009-10).</p> <p>Consultation with a UK group of trainers in clinical psychology (2008), who expressed a preference for having a case illustration of the structured PGS model for training purposes, led to the decision to produce a training exemplar and to disseminate the findings of the research, through workshops and conference presentations (2008-10), an editorial for health practitioners and a report for the funders. As a result of the research conducted in the UK and Ireland a training DVD was launched in 2009 demonstrating the model and its utility, with 200 copies having being distributed nationally and internationally in addition to making a 'freeware' online version available, which has been widely accessed (2010-3). Working with colleagues in Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy has led to subsequent interdisciplinary workshops being held (2011-3). The research continues, with a further article in preparation and an evaluation of the implementation of structured PGS being undertaken in 2013-14, in South Africa, the UK and Ireland, to explore its utility in providing trainees and practitioners with support and further learning opportunities to enhance service</p>

delivery.

### 3. References to the research

1. Akhurst, J. E. & Kelly, K. (2006). Peer group supervision as an adjunct to individual supervision: Optimising learning processes during psychologists' training. *Psychology Teaching Review (Journal of BPS Division of Psychology Teachers and Researchers)*, 12, 1, 3-15. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ876466>
2. Akhurst, J. E. (2007). Getting help from helping each other. *International Journal for Therapy and Rehabilitation*, 14, 3. 100. ISSN 1741-1645.
3. Green, D., & Akhurst, J. E. (2009). *Structured Peer Group Supervision DVD*. Leeds: University of Leeds and Higher Education Academy Psychology Network. (<http://lutube.leeds.ac.uk/avsmas/videos/347>)
4. Akhurst, J. E. (2010). Onwards and upwards: Teaching postgraduate students. In D. Upton & A. Trapp (Eds), *Teaching psychology in higher education* (pp. 213-239). Oxford: Blackwell/Wiley. ISBN: 978-1-4051-9550-8
5. Higher Education Academy Psychology Network (2010). Promoting good practice in peer group supervision for trainee clinical psychologists: DVD project. Project report at <http://www.pnarchive.org/s.php?p=256&db=72>
6. Cross, A. (2011). Self- and Peer-Assessment: the case of Peer Supervision in Counselling Psychology. *Investigations in University Teaching and Learning*, 7, 73-81. <https://metranet.londonmet.ac.uk/fms/MRSite/psd/hr/capd/investigations/Volume%207/Investigations%20Vol%207%20pdf%20Version%202/Inv%20vii%20009%20Cross.pdf>

Supporting Grant, awarded to Dr D. Green (U. Leeds) and Dr J. Akhurst (YSJU). Mini-project title: *Promoting good practice in peer group supervision for trainee clinical psychologists*, from Higher Education Academy Psychology Network, 2007-9: £5974.

### 4. Details of the impact

Following the production of the DVD (launched, March 2009, University of Leeds) it was uploaded onto the internet (<http://lutube.leeds.ac.uk/avsmas/videos/347>) and 200 copies have been distributed, nationally and internationally. The online version is free to view, and usage figures show over 300 viewings (2009-13). Since the information and research on PGS was first presented, both Akhurst and Green have been invited to facilitate numerous regional workshops in England, in the Republic of Ireland and in South Africa. Many of these events were training and CPD events, where professionals trialled the PGS model, leading to its adoption by groups which had been set up as a result. The DVD has been used to support the following events, providing resources for local trainers continued use:

- At UKZN, South Africa – Akhurst has presented workshops annually for trainee psychologists (2007 – 2013);
- Akhurst provided workshops for Hull York Medical School trainees 2007-8, which then led to a clinical psychology trainer having the confidence to present the training thereafter (both model and 2006 article cited by S. Clement, 2008, University of Hull, training presentation);
- One of Akhurst's former students, S. Cahill, introduced the model in Limerick and Tipperary, Ireland, and Akhurst subsequently ran workshops in Ireland (Limerick and in Cork, 2008), leading to expanded usage of the PGS model;
- Akhurst's workshop with psychologists in North Yorkshire (2008) led to a group being established at a York hospital. A further workshop for Leeds & North Yorkshire clinical psychologists (2009), promoted adoption of the model by a number of psychologists in the Yorkshire and Northumberland services;

- Akhurst's former colleague, R. Farman facilitated CPD workshops (e.g. at a national event in Exeter, 2010) for educational psychologists, and the PGS model was used monthly in Bedfordshire (2009-10);
- From 2011, one of Akhurst's Occupational Therapy colleagues has run workshops about the model in North and West Yorkshire for inter-disciplinary groups. This led to a 'masterclass' workshop in 2013 for diverse practitioners to trial and use the model, with Akhurst presenting her model in collaboration with a European specialist in PGS.

The PGS DVD has thus been used in the UK, Republic of Ireland, and South Africa. The model supports practitioners' work in diverse contexts, and they report its value in supplementing individual supervision and promoting better service delivery as follows:

- In UK Psychology, examples are: Educational Psychology, Bedfordshire County Council; Psychological Therapies Service, Dewsbury & District Hospital; Clinical Psychology, CAMHS, Sheffield; Clinical Psychology Service for Older People, South Tyneside District Hospital.
- The PGS model has also been integrated into a number of UK (and international) postgraduate training programmes in Psychology, for example the Clinical Psychology programme, Hull York Medical School (HYMS); the Clinical Psychology programme, University of East London (2009-10); PGS has been implemented and researched at the London Metropolitan University Counselling Psychology programme (see Cross, 2011). Internationally it has been used in the Clinical Psychology programme, University of Limerick (2007-12); Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology programmes, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (2007-13).
- In the Republic of Ireland, a number of different groups of psychologists are regularly using the model to support reflections on their case-work: it is being used by two groups who work in adult mental health in the Mid-West; in Tipperary, a clinical psychologist has used it for a multidisciplinary group working with children; in Cork, it has been used by counsellors.
- In South Africa, the model has been used for a number of successive years (2008-12) by intern psychologists at the Student Counselling Centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal, and by clinical psychologists at the Midlands Hospital Complex, Pietermaritzburg.
- The model has also been applied beyond the work of psychologists: in Ireland, it has been used in Limerick, with a multidisciplinary team of psychologists, family therapists, play and art therapists; it is also used to support practitioners in a learning disability service, Co. Kildare; another psychologist uses it for consultations with Social Workers, North Tipperary; in the UK, it is being used by interdisciplinary groups of dieticians, occupational and physiotherapists in certain NHS sites in Yorkshire and Lancashire, and it has been used for training in clinical supervision with diverse healthcare professionals, Solent Healthcare NHS Trust.
- In South African counselling settings: PGS has been used for a number of years to develop volunteer counsellors' work, for example at the Open Door Crisis Centre, Pinetown; in addition, it has also been implemented with health care workers and counsellors in an NGO working with those affected by HIV/Aids in Durban for debriefing and to give one another support on an on-going basis.

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- Principal Clinical Psychologist, Health Service Executive Mid-West, 2 Dromin Road, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary, Ireland.

- Director, Open Door Crisis Centre, Pinetown, South Africa  
<http://www.opendoor.org.za/about-us/>
- Director of Clinical Psychology and Head of Education & Professional Studies; University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland;
- Corroborating survey evidence from workshop participants from the UK, Ireland and South Africa;
- Statement about the impact of the model from a Senior Psychologist, KARE, McMahon Centre Support Services, Kilcullen, Co. Kildare, Ireland;
- Commentary on the value of the model for training from a Counselling Psychologist and HIV/Aids counselling trainer at the School of Psychology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban campus;
- Corroborating statement from Senior Clinical Psychologist, Health Service Executive West, North Tipperary, Ireland;
- The Akhurst & Kelly (2006) article was disseminated to all accredited Psychology departments in the UK, in the BPS handbook (2007-8), as an exemplar of research and teaching / training in interaction, in the section about the Division for Teachers & Researchers in Psychology;
- *Psychology Network Newsletter*, issue 52, June, 2009, p.5, 'Structured peer group supervision for trainee clinical psychologists'; newsletter available at [http://www.pnarchive.org/docs/pdf/p20090616\\_Issue52.pdf](http://www.pnarchive.org/docs/pdf/p20090616_Issue52.pdf)
- See pages 8-9 of September 2011 edition of *Europlat (European Psychology Learning and Teaching)*, where DVD advertised to all European partners, along with other resources for training in clinical psychology  
<http://www.europlat.org/cmseuroplat/docs/pdf/Newsletters/EuroplatSeptember2011.pdf>