

Development And Field Testing Of Valued Outcomes Analysis - Vicki Bitsika

Title: DEVELOPMENT AND FIELD TESTING OF VALUED OUTCOMES ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This research evaluated the effects of an extension to the Functional Analysis framework (i.e., Valued Outcomes Analysis) designed to identify and establish the relative impact of specific maintaining variables for the difficult behaviour exhibited by children with ASD. The prime focus of this research was to determine the range of environmental and child-centred reasons for particular difficult behaviours in order to develop individualised behavioural interventions to be used by caregivers (i.e., parents) to address those difficult behaviours in the home environment. This research examined the question of which type of assessment tools and procedures and data analysis techniques would be most relevant to understanding the ASD child's behavioural needs in a three-stage investigation. The first stage of this research (Study I), focused on administering to ten participants the standard psychological test battery required by the Department of Education in Queensland for ASD ascertainment in the school system. The findings of this first stage of the investigation showed that the test data obtained from administering standardised tests to participants, observing their responses in the testing situation and collecting interview data from caregivers (on the behaviour of participants in the home and educational environments) were effective in arriving at a formal DSM-IV (APA, 1994) diagnosis and making generalised recommendations for educational placement and behaviour management. However, it was also found that these test data did not provide a sufficient basis for understanding the reasons for the participant's particular behavioural difficulties or providing caregivers with clear and individualised direction on how to address those difficulties in the natural environment.

The second stage of this research (Study II) investigated the effects of administering an extended battery of standardised tests to a further eight participants. This extended assessment battery included three additional tests designed to provide more detailed data on participants' problem behaviour and autism-based symptoms. The findings of this second stage of the investigation showed that the inclusion of the additional standardised tests was useful in identifying a greater range of behavioural difficulties and symptoms and facilitated the processes of making a DSM-IV (APA, 1994) diagnosis and providing caregivers with "diagnosis-driven" advice on creating behaviour change in the child with ASD. However, the data obtained from those tests did not assist in identifying the maintaining variables for the participant's difficult behaviour, understanding how this behaviour facilitated the participant's day-to-day functioning and devising an individualised programme for caregivers to use in addressing this behaviour in natural environment.

The third stage of this research (Study III) investigated the application of Functional Analysis plus Valued Outcomes Analysis to the eight participants of Study II to understand the general purpose and specific reasons for their difficult behaviour. The data obtained from these analytic frameworks were also applied to the task of training parents to implement an individualised intervention programme designed to create positive changes in the reported difficult behaviour in the home environment. The findings of this third stage of the investigation showed that the Functional Analysis and Valued Outcomes Analysis procedures used to analyse participants' difficult behaviour, assist their parents in understanding the specific reasons for this behaviour and train the parents to change the difficult behaviour to a specified criterion were successful for six of the eight participants of Study III. The implications of study for the development of methods to address the pervasive and persistent behavioural difficulties of children with ASD are discussed along with suggestions for future research.