Series 2 Episode 6

Summary and Key Messages

[00:00:00] **Lesley:** Hello and welcome to the Portal Podcast, linking research and practice for social work. I'm your host and my name is Dr Lesley Deacon.

[00:00:13] **Sarah:** And I'm your other host and I'm Dr Sarah Lonbay. So we hope you enjoy today's episode.

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[00:00:26] **Sarah:** Hi, you are listening to the Portal Podcast, linking research and practice for social work. I'm Dr Sarah Lonbay.

[00:00:33] **Lesley:** And I'm Dr Lesley Deacon.

[00:00:35] **Sarah:** And, as usual, we are your hosts for this podcast. And hopefully you're joining us having listened through our second series, which was focused on domestic abuse. Five episodes in that series that we introduced in the opening episode. And Leslie and I have just come back together in the studio to have a little chat about the series and some of the messages that we think came out from across the different research that's being done. Because although the research, it all focused on different aspects of domestic abuse, the approaches and the population groups were quite different, but we feel that there are some overarching messages for social work practitioners that we wanted to try and draw out and share in this final episode.

[00:01:20] **Lesley:** Yes, that is true.

[00:01:22] **Sarah:** It is true. So, key messages.

[00:01:27] **Lesley:** So one of the things, I'm thinking almost this is more at a strategic level to some extent, but one of the things that emerged across these conversations was that services are not necessarily structured around meeting these particular needs that we had a lot of, because we obviously looked at a diverse population, as you were saying, this meant that they weren't quite fitting with the services available, there was something different or something new that meant that when it came to accessing services, the services were so structured and static that meant that people weren't meeting the requirements to access them. And that's a real concern at the moment, and something I've thought about because I feel anecdotally that I'm experiencing this a lot myself as well, when I'm trying to access services, that actually there is a constant thing of, "ah, but yes, you don't quite meet this threshold", or "you don't quite meet that". And there's obviously lots of reasons for that, potentially which is another research project in itself. But it does concern me that this is increasingly seeming to happen. That it means that you've got people who are *in need*, who are then not being able to access the support that they need at that time. Which means that they're potentially going to head into crisis and need more either intrusive or heavy service, *more* involvement at the point, because it's going to get worse, potentially.

[00:02:58] **Sarah:** Yeah, absolutely. I think that was definitely something that came up across all of the episodes, and I think it's a double edged sword as well, isn't it? Because if those services are too rigid and people don't meet the criteria to access them then it also gives the illusion that perhaps this particular group of people don't need that service because they're not accessing it. It feeds into it because then they're hidden, their needs are hidden, It looks like they don't need it, then the service doesn't respond to it and it doesn't open itself to them. So it kind of becomes a vicious cycle, where it looks like the need isn't there when actually it is, and people just are not able to access it for whatever reason.

[00:03:37] **Lesley:** Yeah, and it's concerning to me that with that perception of need not being there, a lot of research that I've done over the years has then identified that there was something happening. And that would be great for the people providing money if they thought "actually then it means that there's no service needed", but actually that's not true and the evidence suggests otherwise, that actually what happens is there's an escalation and they need *more* services. So it seems counterintuitive to not acknowledge these needs that are there.

[00:04:08] **Sarah:** Absolutely, I think that's the message across the board, at a strategic level strategic level as well in terms of actually how decisions being made at the commissioning and procurement level about services and what services to fund.

[00:04:23] **Lesley:** Yeah, it's just made me think that actually if social workers in practice are noticing that "I can't refer this person on because they don't meet the need, the thresholds for this service provision", do they know where to send that information? Do they know where to alert, within their organisations, that actually this is happening increasingly. And I wonder if our listeners know what to do with that. Because obviously you can take it externally and go to activism and networks outside of your organisation, but do people know *within* their organisations? Because I wonder, do we know? If we're noticing things like that. I mean, we get asked questions like is there anything we want to raise? But there does feel like, in bureaucratic structures, they don't seem particularly keen to have that fed back. They're not as open about where does that go? You don't really have access to the top person very easily do you?

[00:05:16] **Sarah:** Yeah, there's a lot of different issues.

[00:05:19] **Lesley:** I could just go on...

[00:05:23] **Sarah:** Yeah, other themes that we picked up on in terms of messages for social workers in particular, I think one of them was also about professional curiosity, and that came up and I think that does tie back into that first one in terms of awareness raising. But for the importance of professional curiosity and the importance of digging a little bit deeper or asking those extra questions and not assuming that what you see on the surface is everything that's happening in that situation, which I know is something that social workers are aware of and something that they seek to do in practice, so I suppose it's reiterating the importance of that and how strongly that came up within this research that that is needed.

[00:06:06] **Lesley:** Yeah, because I wonder, I think sometimes, like anyone, when you've done a job for a while you can stop seeing things, you can become a bit more routine with what you're doing, can't you? And it's really helpful to step back, and including using our podcasts as part of social workers' need to do continuing professional development, because they could reflect on one of these podcasts for their re-registration to Social Work England. Did

you like my little advert there? Did you like my plug? But I was thinking about the fact that it is really, as much as everybody's really, really busy, we do need time to just step outside of things, don't we? And have a think about why that's happened, or did I miss something, or is there something new there?

[00:06:50] **Sarah:** So did we have some other messages?

[00:06:52] **Lesley:** Yeah, we did because again it's all interlinked, but we then were talking about preventative services, linking back again to that issue that these are issues that are emerging that don't fit, how actually if services are set up to address early intervention, so *before* things escalate, that is actually more cost effective in the long run and also more helpful to the individuals. And unfortunately that requires things that we have no control over ourselves, which is about the resources that are allocated to the services. It is concerning though that we have early help services, but how is that actually working to help people with these quite complex issues? So even if the issues themselves aren't escalated yet, they are *complicated*, which means that they're potentially not quite being seen yet. So that again links back with professional curiosity.

[00:07:53] **Sarah:** Yes, I think they all link together, because the next thing I think we were going to talk about that we were discussing before was about language and the language that's used. And in our conversations people raised issues with the term 'perpetrators', we talked about the use of the terms 'victims' and 'survivors', and also just in terms of talking about coercive and controlling behavior as being part of domestic abuse. And I think across all of these different terms that we use, there's a lot of different understandings of what they mean and different impacts that they have, particularly in relation to coercive and controlling behavior that we had a lot of conversations about. A lack of understanding of what that means from a range of different areas and potentially the role of social workers in actually educating people about what that means, what it can look like, how to access support, things like that. From a young age, actually, one of the conversations we had, I think it was with Sarah, about actually the education in the schools and who's best placed to offer that.

[00:08:55] **Lesley:** Yeah, because they don't understand that. Because that's the question, isn't it? Because there can be information and awareness raising, but if it's not done in a way that actually by someone with that knowledge, you can potentially perpetuate all of these issues and make them a lot worse. So it

is about knowing who's the right person to come in and share this information, share this knowledge, which I think is really important. And yeah, that was my really eloquent way of saying it's just really important.

[00:09:24] **Sarah:** It is really important, yeah. There's a lot of really important messages in these episodes and I think there's probably many more messages for practice that we talked about in each episode that Lesley and I have not pulled out today, but I think, ultimately, a lot of what came out from across the conversations was about how hidden some of these issues are, and the lack of recognition that goes alongside that. So again, just reinforcing that curiosity, being aware that just because it's not a group that perhaps you've read about that are likely to experience domestic abuse, it doesn't mean that's not happening, that sometimes our own assumptions or limited knowledge means that we don't pick up on things that we need to pick up on. I don't know if that makes sense.

[00:10:08] **Sarah:** I think that probably covers some of the key things, but as always we're really open to hearing from people about what they thought of this series, and also we're really, really pleased to share that we are going to be recording a third series.

[00:10:21] **Lesley:** Hurrah!

[00:10:22] **Sarah:** We'll start the recording January, February next year, that'll be 2024. And the next series is going to focus on gerontological social work, so we are going to be speaking to social work researchers who specifically look at social work with older people in their research, and learn from them about the range of different work that that entails and some of the interesting things that they're doing. So stay tuned for that.

[00:10:49] **Lesley:** Yes, and also there will be some one-off episodes that we're going to do as well.

[00:10:56] **Sarah:** Yes that's right.

[00:10:59] **Lesley:** We haven't decided on a snappy name, we've just come up with the the idea of doing some individual episodes as well

[00:11:06] **Sarah:** Some one-off, quick conversations about key issues. Mini Portals.

[00:11:11] **Lesley:** Thank you for that. I'm going to be talking a bit about my area of interest, which is actually practice research. So it's about getting practitioners to lead in practice-based research. So I'm going to talk a little bit about that and some of the exciting research that we have been doing, and we've now got reports ready to go out as well in the experiences of newly qualified social workers, and also what our partner professionals perspectives are of safeguarding practices, so what they think about social work and social workers. So I'm going to be showing that and hopefully there might be opportunities for some conversations, mini conversations, with some of the practitioners that have been involved. So we'll just see, this is a play-it-by-ear, depends how much money I've got in the 'funding pot'.

[00:12:00] **Sarah:** Generally it often comes back down to resourcing and money. I suppose that's a good chance for us to plug any listeners who have done any research in social work that they would like to share, you might want to be a guest on one of our Mini Portal episodes, I'm just going to start calling them that now.

[00:12:17] **Lesley:** Yes, love it.

[00:12:18] **Sarah:** We'd definitely welcome anyone who'd like to come and just have a quick chat with us about the work that they've been doing and what that might mean for social workers.

[00:12:27] **Sarah:** So yes, I think we can probably stop.

[00:12:29] **Lesley:** I think we've done enough plugging, yeah we've plugged quite a lot. And yeah, we just hope you get a lot out of this. And obviously this series has been a lot more focused, the previous one was quite a range of different things, we've done it based on domestic abuse, we hope that's been really useful, and if people do want to get in touch because there are ideas, and we'll listen to anything, any ideas for the future.

[00:12:54] **Sarah:** Absolutely, yes. Thank you very much for listening and we hope you join us again for our next series next year and yeah, bye!

[00:13:03] **Lesley:** Thank you, bye!

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[00:13:07] **Sarah:** You have been listening to the Portal Podcast, linking research and practice for social work with me, Dr Sarah Lonbay.

[00:13:15] **Lesley:** And Dr Lesley Deacon. And this was funded by the University of Sunderland, edited by Paperghosts, and our theme music is called, *Together We're Stronger* by All Music Seven.

[00:13:25] **Sarah:** And don't forget that you can find a full transcript of today's podcast and links and extra information in our show notes. So anything you want to follow up from what you've heard today, check out there and you should find some useful extra resources.

[00:13:39] **Sarah:** See you all next time.

[00:13:40] **Lesley:** Bye.