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Athenaeum Centre
for
Family Studies and
Research

Proposed Symposium: *Family mediation as a resource to deal with conflict and support the transition of divorce*

Organiser and chair:

MARZOTTO COSTANZA , Università Cattolica, Milano

Intervenues:

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Discussant :
LISA PARKINSON

Abstract symposium

Family mediation as a resource to deal with conflict and support the transition of divorce

Mediation is a resource to accompany families in transitions when the conflict between couples or generations can expose to risk the well being of a member and the continuity of family bonds.

The family mediator is conceived as a “third” presence in the “working group” in which the subjects involved in the conflict are engaged to find solutions and try to turn the destructive forces of conflict in “generative” ways of life. In this workshop experts of this field (separation or divorce) who work with families undergoing this unexpected event, will present their researches carried out in order to improve this practice.

It will give a good opportunity in the understanding how a family mediator helps parents to find a suitable solution or improves the communication within families.

Lisa Parkinson focus her presentation about the involving children in to the mediation setting as a resource in the reorganisation after divorce. This paper stands in the international debate on the opportunity to allow children to enter “in the mediation room” and shows the benefits reported by parents and children who took part in the family mediation process.

The group of the Service for couples and families at the Catholic University in Milan (Sara Molgora, Sonia Ranieri and Costanza Marzotto) will present a qualitative study about efficacy and effectiveness in the mediation process, as related to professional skills and partners’ abilities.

Mauro Mariotti will present results coming from the application of a instrument that measures couples style of negotiation. This study is carried out within a systemic perspective

Leticia Garcia Villaluenga close the symposium, sharing the results of a global investigation on the family mediation in Spain and suggest to involve the participants in a international European survey.

PAPERS

1. Lisa Parkinson

“Listening to children during family transitions and reorganisation”

British researchers (Dunn J. and Deater-Deckard K., 2001) in a study of around 10,000 families met with 467 children aged between 5 and 16 living in diverse family situations. 25% of children of separated parents said no one had talked to them about the separation. In another British study, only 5% of children under 10 could remember being told anything by their parents about their separation (Murch M., 2005).

International Conventions uphold children’s rights to have their views heard on matters that directly affect the child ‘with these views being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child’ (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, Article 12).

However, research findings show that children are rarely consulted, although most want to talk about their feelings and be consulted when their parents split up (Smart and B. Neale, 2000).

Family mediators meet mainly with adults and rarely involve children directly (Hayes S., 2002). Research in Australia (McIntosh J. Child-Inclusive, 2000) supports British research findings that children are more competent to take part in family decision-making than adults generally believe, and less vulnerable than adults imagine (Smart C., Neale B. and Wade A., *The Changing Experience of Childhood: Families and Divorce* (Polity Press, 2001).

Keywords: children, divorce, mediation's setting, emotions

2. Sara Molgora, Sonia Ranieri, Costanza Marzotto

“Transition of divorce and shared parenthood: an explorative study on family mediation”

In the first family mediation studies attention was focused on the outcomes of this practice. More recently, clinical and psychosocial research has concentrated on the analysis of the process. In other words, currently the main concern is not whether mediation is useful, but rather how it contributes to nourish and re-launch family relationships beyond their rupture, and in particular parent-child relationships.

In this perspective, the aim of such a qualitative study, that is part of a broader research project, was to assess the efficacy and effectiveness of family mediation in promoting and supporting shared parenthood, throughout an investigation of parents' (mothers' and fathers') perceptions of the family mediation process. The focus was on crucial variables such as the expectations towards the intervention and the mediator, the perception of resources and risk factors and the evaluation of the instruments used. Parents' perceptions related to the beginning and the end of the mediation were compared and the changes that followed the intervention were considered at different levels: intrapsychic, interpersonal, intra-group and relational.

Fifteen parents, separated since 6 months or more, with at least one child in joint legal custody, having attended family mediation one or two years earlier, were interviewed using an ad hoc semi-structured interview. Interviews were transcribed, coded with a specific coding system and analyzed using both the qualitative software T-LAB and a content analysis procedure.

Data analyses are still in progress; results will be discussed also in terms of their implication for both the family mediation practice and training.

Keywords: transition of divorce, shared parenthood, family relationships, family mediation, parents' perceptions

3. Mauro Mariotti

“Relational style”: A way to mediate the relationships.

The research is designed to evaluate the validity of the Questionnaire Relational Styles RS as a mean to promote relational resilience in Family Mediation.

Methodology

The research design is standardizing the RS and training a group of 20 students, to learn how to administer RS, testing the resiliency -FES GHQ Satp- to 2 groups- control and target RS. Administering RS to 25 students, 25 clients, 25 families of Students and re-administering RS after 3 months to evaluate the reliability testing the resiliency soon after 3 session on RS themes for target group.

RS is a standardized conversation based on circular questions applied to dichotomies and context.

RS is designed to promote reflexivity using reflexive questioning to increase the understanding of the difference as information for an health relational style.

The research assumptions: The personality is structured by the coupling among Subject, Father and Mother through triadic generative relationships.

The personality is transformed by performative relationships with peers and partner.

The personality remains in balance between stability and change if it owns reflexivity.

RS basic questions are: "Have I the ability to see how others see me and how I think to them?"

"Have I the ability to know how someone describes the relationship between two other people?"

"Am I able to value to the connected emotions?" If yes, I own reflexivity and coupling.

Possession of reflexivity is a key factor for the resilience: the ability to withstand stressors

The research's hypothesis is a proceduralized conversation that allows people to access systematically to the complexity of reflective thinking increases the relational resilience?

RS define 3 profiles for both

Parents	mediator,	autonomous,	combined
and partner	approving	criticizing	balancing

Keywords: resilience, coupling, relation style, performative & generative relationship.

4. Leticia García Villaluenga

Situation of family mediation in Spain: Challenges and Proposals for an investigation.

This paper aims to show the methodology and results of the investigation conducted 2007-09 by the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, commissioned by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Spain, on the situation of family mediation in Spain. This is the first, and so far the only global study about the public and private services for family mediation throughout Spain, in order to "make diagnosis" of them and make the necessary proposals for their better performance.

Our study design included the use of two complementary techniques: a quantitative survey – a questionnaire, and qualitative in-depth interviews.

The themes that structured the questionnaire - sent to family mediation services - were: type of family mediation services; typology of users of family mediation services, policy areas of family mediation services; performance criteria for using this practice, results obtained during the mediation process and procedures for the evaluation of these results, monitoring results of the mediation, professional description of the equipment belonging to family mediation.

The in-depth interviews, raised very large semantic fields, allowing the interviewee to introduce the issues considered important and could have left out the questionnaire. The purpose was to obtain the most extensive information on the situation of family mediation in Spain, through the services offered in that country and, therefore, to develop proposals for more efficient performance. This research method could be applied to other countries in order to compare the efficacy of this practice.

Keywords: mediation services, policy areas, mediation procedures, assessment.