Seclusion as a means of restraint in special schools and alternative provision in England: A Study of the lived experience of parents and practitioners

The Problem

There are schools in England where disruptive pupils are forcibly placed in a seclusion room as form of restraint. This is permissible under current Government guidance providing it is used in an emergency. However:

- How do staff determine what is an emergency? (Miller, 2011),
- How do staff reason for its use in the absence of clinical rationales? (Cotton, 1989),
- No longitudinal studies have been carried out on the psychological impact or injury on young minds (Villani, 2012),
- The practice is susceptible to abuse and malpractice even when justified by theoretical models like behaviour modification (Day, 2002),
- The practice is concealed by a wide array of misleading language (Connolly, 2014),
- The practice may contravene various UN Articles such as the right to be free of torture and degrading treatment (Lyons, 2016),
- Current guidance policy protects special needs pupils from seclusion room use as a punishment, but this is not the case for mainstream or alternative provisions (RNRRI, 2019).

Research Questions

RQ1: How are seclusion rooms (SR) used in schools in England?

RQ2: What are staff/parent perceptions of the role of SR in schools?

RQ3: How effective are seclusion rooms in modifying pupil/student behaviour?

Gaps in the Literature

No research has been carried out in schools in England into the practice of seclusion room use.

The voices of parents, young people and frontline practitioners have not been explored.

Insights into the justification, its effectiveness and trauma caused by the practice is largely unknown.

Methodology and Method

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is the preferred methodology approach where the experiences of participants will be given a voice.

To better understand the phenomenon, the researcher will remove themselves (bracketing) from any preconceived ideas and bias (Bryman, 2016). By assuming this position, the experiences of the participants will be recorded and themes categorised to get to richer and deeper narratives (Pollard, 2018) until such time that the essences, contexts, insights and new ways of thinking about the phenomenon is concluded. The data will be analysed for a set of main themes that provide answers and tensions around the research questions (Bryman, 2016). Validation of findings will occur through participant confirmation.

Data

Data will be sourced from in-depth interviews with parents and frontline practitioners using a snowballing approach with participants recommended by several schools and other participants.

Contribution to Professional Practice

Findings will contribute to improved practice and inform future school policy writing.

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