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The Social Work Interview: Structure.
Content and Verbal Behaviour.

A model for understanding and teaching interview skills
based on an analysis of tape recorded interviews.

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Part IV

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Open Questions

Introduction

Questioning was a key activity in all the research interviews and represented the largest group of worker behaviours over the sample as a whole.

The model proposed here divides this form of intervention into open and closed questions. [Closed questions are discussed in Chapter 15]. Open questions allow the client a greater degree of freedom of response. Closed questions define the subject matter more rigidly and limit the range of possible answers. Clearly, closed questions such as "What is your name?" or "Where are you from?", provide an economical way of obtaining accurate factual information. They are, arguably, less effective in encouraging the client to express ideas and feelings. Questions such as "Do you like work?" or "Do you like school?", which can be answered "Yes", or "No", may produce less useful information than more open questions such as "How is it going at work?" or "How's school these days?".

The degree of openness may vary. Some open questions are general enquiries such as "How are things?". Other questions define the subject matter but not the response - "How are things at work?". In some cases, the subject may be still more narrowly defined - "How do you get along

with people at work?".

Some advantages and disadvantages of open questions are summarised below:

Advantages

1. They encourage the client to talk.
2. They give the client a chance to express opinions, attitudes and ideas.
3. They give the client greater control over what is discussed.
4. The worker can learn about topics with which he is not familiar.
5. Information may be revealed that the worker has not anticipated.

Disadvantages

1. The client may not know what is expected of him/her. Feelings of anxiety and insecurity may be increased.
2. Open questions may favour the more articulate client,
3. The client's intellectual capacity to respond has to be taken into account. Open questions make heavy demands on the organisation and selection of response material.
4. The client may be encouraged to talk too much and

stray from the point.

In the American counselling literature, open questions are seen as highly desirable. From research based on a series of recorded interviews, Ivey [1971] identified open questions as one of the key variables that help to promote the warm, enabling atmosphere of the client-centred approach. In this school of thought, direct questions are to be avoided. Indeed, Ivey and Authier [1978. Chap 4] see a series of closed questions as the mark of the inexperienced interviewer.

This client-centred approach has been influential in the development of British social work, although important differences remain. The British social worker often has to gather large quantities of factual data as well as that concerning feelings and attitudes. Many British social work clients are not very articulate and some categories of client may be of limited intellectual capacity. In these circumstances, open questions may not be the appropriate form of verbal intervention. Even allowing for these differences however, it can be seen that social workers in the present sample were extremely reluctant to use open questions.

1. Frequency

Questions as a whole accounted for over half of all verbal interventions by social workers in the sample, [1677 out

of 4129 interventions]. Questions as a whole accounted for over 40% of all verbal interventions by social workers in the sample.

Open questions accounted for less than a quarter of these, [373 out of 1677].

The incidence per interview was generally low. It ranged from nil [interview 8] to 36 [interview 37], but only 5 interviews contained more than 15 open questions. Half of all interviews contained 6 or less.

Open questions are relatively economical. They are designed to elicit more information than closed questions which may require only short, simple answers. Even allowing for this, the number of open questions over the sample as a whole seems surprisingly low given the emphasis on this style of questioning in the literature.

2. Relationship with Other Variables

Open questions were found to be positively correlated with interpretations and reflections of feeling. [The correlation was particularly strong with interpretations]. Both these types of worker interventions are typically associated with a more client-centred approach. The following extract from interview 14 shows how these three behaviours are used in combination to encourage the client to talk more about her feelings. The worker is discussing the immature behaviour of the client's 13 year old

daughter.

Worker: "...and I just wondered if you get most of her child side and that other people get a good deal of the rest. I know that school has had that silliness. And what is it about the interaction that makes her bring that child side out?" [open question].

Client: "I don't know and I don't know whether its just her either. I'm not sure that it isn't a common feature that children come home and relax and think 'I'm at home now. I don't have to make any real efforts and I can just let anything happen. I can be as childish and as silly as I like because I'm at home'".

Worker: "No. That's right. But it does irritate you" [reflection of feeling].

Client: "Oh yes. When you know she is capable of being so sensible. She always seems to be at her most difficult on days when you know you are going to be under a lot of pressure and you really have got a lot on".

Worker: "Do you think that her wish for your attention, her very childlike need for you, feels more threatened because you are busy with lots of other things and may be that side comes up more strongly" [interpretation].

A subjective appraisal of the sample leads to the conclusion that active listening skills were a fourth major component of this group of behaviours. Active

listening comprises paralinguistic and non-verbal signals to the client which indicate that the worker is listening, following and attending - ["Mm. Yes. Oh really"]. Unfortunately, it was not possible to gain an accurate measure of these behaviours. Many are non-verbal and those that are uttered are often difficult to pick up on audio-tape. [See Chapter 25].

Rutter et al. [1981] in work on the psychiatric assessment interview, also found that asking open questions was just one of a range of techniques designed to elicit patients' attitudes and feelings. Other skills comprised a low level of worker talk, few interruptions, expressions of sympathy, interpretations and direct questions about feelings.

3. Open Questions and Interview Content

Although asking open questions may be seen as a way of encouraging clients to talk, in the present sample it was not necessarily the intervention chosen to encourage them to talk about their feelings.

There were 32 interviews in which the client's feelings were discussed. Open questions occurred in only 20 of these. Taking the sample as a whole, in topics related to feelings and attitudes, 29.2% of all verbal interventions were closed questions, 13.7% were reflections of content and only 10.7% were open questions. [See Appendix 40].

A similar picture emerged for a discussion of relationships with a third party. There were 29 interviews containing this topic of which 22 contained open questions. Closed questions accounted for 34.5% of worker interventions in this category while open questions accounted for only 8%.

Discussion of practical matters formed another major topic group. Eighteen out of 24 interviews in this category contained open questions but taking the sample as a whole, there was a lower proportion of open questions than in either of the "feelings" categories [6.7%].

The evidence from the sample indicates that open questions were more likely to be used in a discussion of client feelings and attitudes than in a discussion of practical matters. At the same time it was clear that open questions were not necessarily the method of choice for encouraging clients to talk about these matters.

4. Types of Open Question

Open questions are commonly thought of as being effective in eliciting feelings, attitudes and opinions. In the sample interviews they were also used to encourage the client to talk about factual matters and events. Two special types of open question were identified; the general enquiry used at the beginnings or ends of interviews and "why" questions which were aimed at

promoting client insight.

Six types of open question are described below with examples of each.

a] Open Questions to Elicit Feelings

These occurred in 32 out of the 40 interviews. They were the most frequent form of open question accounting for 138 out of a total of 373 over the sample as a whole.

Workers sometimes asked about feelings directly. In interview 21, the worker asks a client who is recovering from breast cancer:

"How are you feeling now?".

Later in the same interview she probes for further information while still keeping the form open ended:

"I felt you were a bit agitated in the clinic - I know you always feel - was there anything in particular?".

Workers may ask about client feelings on a variety of subjects. In interview 3, the client is encouraged to talk about her work:

"So tell me about your job. How's it working out?".

In interview 12, the worker is finding out how the client feels about moving into a hostel:

"How do you feel about what's available and what's going on? Do you think there will be enough there?".

b] Open Questions to Elicit Opinions/Attitudes

There is a thin dividing line between feelings and opinions. In expressing an opinion, a client also reveals how he/she feels. In the present context, this category refers to opinions about a third party, a spouse, child, relative or friend. It may also refer to a matter not directly related to the client's concerns such as social or political events.

In interview 31, the worker asks the client about her daughter's art work:

"What's your opinion of it?".

In interview 39, the worker asks the wife of a patient:

"How have the children been about him being in hospital?".

In interview 15, the worker enquires after the client's friend:

"How's Kevin? How's he getting on?".

In all these cases, the worker is not seeking to explore the client's emotions, but asking him/her to

make some sort of judgement.

Questions of this type occurred in 28 out of the 40 sample interviews but accounted for only 74 out of the 373 open questions over the sample as a whole.

c] Open Questions to Elicit Facts

Open questions were used in over half the sample interviews [21] to obtain factual data. There were 60 questions in all, amounting to less than half the number used to elicit feelings.

Questions of this type could be about financial matters. For example:

"Would you like to tell me about your financial situation so we can put it to the committee?" [interview 19].

Some concerned practical matters as in interview 21 in which the client has experienced problems over getting a telephone installed:

"How about the telephone, Joan?".

Open questions could also elicit factual data about the client's family. In interview 18, the client is a West Indian. The worker is trying to assess the possibility of his being able to return home some day:

"Tell me something about who you have got back home".

d] Open Questions to Elicit Events

Sometimes in an interview it is necessary for the worker to find out what has been happening to the client or what he/she has been doing since the last meeting. Enquiries of this kind using an open question occurred in 15 out of the 40 sample interviews. Most interviews contained only one or two cases. Interviews 13 and 32 were exceptions, having seven and six cases, respectively.

In interview 32, the worker is encouraging a young mother to describe the sequence of events that commonly leads up to her losing control with her toddler son. He asks a series of open questions in order to pinpoint the exact sequence of events:

"What happens?".

"What happens then?".

"So what have you done then? Can you tell me a bit more about it?".

In interview 13, a thirteen year old boy is recounting an incident at school in which he has struck a teacher. The boy's narrative is punctuated by requests for further information from the social worker:

"So then what happened?".

"Tell me what she did again?".

"Finish the story and then we'll go back over it again".

[Not all of these interventions are grammatical questions but all serve the purpose of asking the client to reveal additional data].

e] Open Questions to Elicit Reasons

Questions which ask "why" are a slightly different order of open question. Although the client has some freedom of response, they may be used by workers to pinpoint key issues and challenge the client to answer.

"Why" questions may in effect, ask the client to provide his/her own insights. As Kadushin [1972 p.163] points out, people find it difficult to explain why. The reasons for human behaviour are complex and if clients understood them, perhaps they would not need a social worker.

In the present sample, questions of this type were found in 12 out of the 40 interviews. The incidence was not above three per interview except for interview 37 which contained 14 "why" questions.

[This interview is discussed in detail in 6C below].

In interview 13, the worker is trying to get her thirteen year old client to reflect more deeply on his relationship with his mother:

"Why does your mum scare you quite so much?".

In interview 10, the workers asks a "why" question in order to open up a general discussion:

"Why didn't you get married?".

In interview 2, the client is a mentally handicapped young man who has recently moved out into a hostel in the community. He is fascinated by the fire brigade and his obsession with this subject has caused some problems with other people staying in the house. In this extract, the worker is testing out the client's insight on this matter:

Worker: "Why are they calling you names?".

Client: "Because one of my ears is bigger than the other".

Worker: "Is it? I've never really noticed. Its not because you talk about fire engines a lot?".

f] General Enquiries

This type of open question encourages the client to talk rather than requests a specific type of

information. They occur most often at the beginning or near the end of interviews:

"Its a long time since I've seen you. I was wondering how you were getting on?" [beginning of interview 26].

"So all I wanted to do was to find out how things were going at the house at the moment. Are they going OK?" [beginning of interview 2].

"Is that OK? Anything else you want to raise with me while I'm here?" [end of interview 16].

"Anything else you would like me to do?" [end of interview 26].

Over half the sample interviews contained general enquiries [25 out of 40]. There were generally only one or two per interview. Where there were more, they tended to be repetitions of the same question as in interview 2:

"Have we covered everything?".

"Anything else you would like to ask me about?".

"Nothing you want to ask about?".

Summary

Table 15 shows the six types of open questions together

with the number of interviews containing each category and the total number of questions in each category over the sample as a whole.

Table 15 - Categories of Open Question

<u>Type of Question</u>	<u>No of Interviews</u>	<u>No in Sample</u>
1. To elicit feelings	32	138
2. To elicit opinions	28	74
3. To elicit facts	21	60
4. To elicit events	15	32
5. To elicit reasons [why]	12	29
6. General enquiries	25	40
	N = 40	N = 373

The table shows that open questions were used most commonly to encourage clients to talk about feelings and opinions but also, to a lesser extent to talk about facts and events. General enquiries occurred in over half the sample. "Why" questions were the least used category.

5. Ways of Using Open Questions

a] Beginning a Topic

Open questions may be used to introduce new topics. In the present sample, this was not the preferred method. Of the 292 topics introduced by workers over the 40 interviews, less than one-third [86] began with an open question. Seventeen of these topics

occurred at the beginnings of interviews and comprised general enquiries such as "How are you?" and "How have you been?".

There were only 8 interviews in which half or more of all topics initiated by the worker began with an open question. [Interviews 1, 12, 22, 24, 25, 26, 32 and 39].

b] Open Questions in Sequence

The verbal behaviours immediately following open questions were examined to discover whether an open style of questioning was likely to initiate a non-directive sequence of worker behaviours. Table 16 sets out the results.

Table 16 - Verbal Behaviours Immediately Following Open Questions

Open Questions Followed by:

Another open question.....	63
A reflection of feeling.....	27
A reflection of content.....	50
A closed question.....	113
Other behaviour.....	120

—————
N = 373

The table shows that in the majority of cases, an

open style of questioning became quickly narrowed down. Over one-third [140 out of 373] of all questions were followed by a non-directive worker behaviour such as a further open question or a reflective comment. Just over two-thirds were followed by some other behaviour. The largest group of these comprised closed questions which accounted for 113 out of 373 cases. [See Appendix 42].

A general enquiry at the beginning of an interview did not necessarily mean that the client was to be encouraged to talk about anything he liked. In interview 2, for example, the worker loses no time in getting down to business:

Worker: "So all I wanted to do was to find out how things were going at the house at the moment. Are they going OK?"

Client: "Yeah".

Worker: "Did you sort out your problem with your money on Friday?"

Even where one open question was followed by another, the tendency was to narrow down the focus quite soon. Interview 26 begins with two open questions which succeed in generating both a feeling and a factual response. The worker chooses to take up the material problem:

Worker: "It's a long time since I've seen you isn't it? I was wondering how you were getting on?".

Client: "Oh, I've been awful".

Worker: "Have you? What sort of way?".

Client: "Depressed and not wanting to be on my own again, you know. That's been on my mind a lot. And then I've got the worry of the flat. The town hall haven't sent the Housing Benefit and I've had to pay £77 out of my own money last month".

Worker: "That's to the Housing Association?".

Client: "Yes, the Housing....".

Worker: "Has anybody been in touch with Housing Benefit to find out when they are going to sort it out for you?".

It is not suggested that the worker in this case is at fault in responding to the client's housing problem immediately. The example is given to illustrate how open questions were commonly used in the sample to encourage clients to express problems which were then taken up and dealt with in a practical way.

Huxley [1985, p.39-40] suggests that this technique of gradually narrowing down the focus may be very

useful in "the search for behavioural evidence". Writing in the context of the psychiatric assessment interview, he suggests a format for moving from open to closed questions in order to establish crucial pieces of information:

"What can you tell me about your husband?"

"How do you get on together?"

"How often do you have arguments?"

"What was the last one about?"

"Did he hit you during the argument?"

"Did he say why he hit you?"

"Did he blame the voices?".

The evidence from the present sample suggests that this type of sequence may be relatively common amongst social workers.

6. Open Questions and the Client

a] The Amount of Client Talk

Open questions are often assumed to encourage the client to talk more, especially about attitudes and feelings. In the present sample no correlation could be found between the use of open questions and the amount of client talk.

The results were totally inconsistent. For example, in interview 24 which contained more open than closed questions, the client talked for 39 minutes while the

worker talked for only 21 minutes. In interview 8 which contained no open questions, the client talked twice as much as the worker [28 and 14 minutes respectively]. In interview 12 which contained a high proportion of open questions, client and worker talked for the same length of time [12 minutes each].

b] Encouraging the Client to Talk

Non-directive questioning was not always successful in encouraging clients to talk. In interview 15, the social worker is trying to encourage her young client [referred for truanting] to tell her a little about his new school. The client remains unforthcoming:

Worker: "How did you get on the rest of the week?" [open question].

Client: "I got on alright. I went in all week".

Worker: "What did you enjoy about it?" [open question].

Client: "It's a good school".

Worker: "Its just....." [open invitation to continue].

Client: "A good school".

Worker: "Yes. And what's Mr S like? I wrote to him" [open question].

Client: "Mr S?".

Worker: "He's your tutor. I wrote to him"
[clarification].

Client: "Yes. He's my tutor but I don't see much of
him".

Worker: "No. He's quite nice or..... [open
invitation to continue].

Client: "Yeah. He's alright".

Worker: "Mm. Not specially or....." [open
invitation to continue].

In contrast to this, the worker in interview 1 is far more successful in getting the client to express her feelings. She uses a variety of directive and non-directive behaviours including open and closed questions and reflective comments.

They are discussing the problem of dealing with the client's elderly father. The worker begins with an open question but quickly focuses the exchange with a direct question. She follows this up with a statement to indicate some understanding of the family situation. When the client spills out her feelings, she responds to the emotional cue with a reflective statement indicating empathy. Her next

statement follows the client's shift in focus to her worries about her father and encourages her to talk more about this:

Worker: "So he's alright in spirits then?" [open question].

Client: "Not really. We keep being told off! I mean, we try to see the funny side of it but....".

Worker: "Do you get on better with him than your sister then?" [direct question].

Client: "No".

Worker: "Because your sister said that none of you get on all that well with him" [reflection of feeling].

Client: "No. We don't. And really, really truthfully, it's terrible".

Worker: "It's a difficult situation when relationships are good but when they have been bad all these years...." [reflection of feeling].

Client: "It's so hard and we feel now he's with my mother you see, that's another side of it".

Worker: "But she tolerates it" [reflection of feeling].

Client: "The point is, she could cope when she was

well, but she can't.....up to the point he came in it was nearly killing her".

There may be many reasons why the worker in interview 1 is more successful than the worker in interview 15 in encouraging the client to talk. The schoolboy in the first extract may have good reason for feeling unco-operative and hostile towards the social worker. He has not been instrumental in seeking help himself and may have been unenthusiastic about having to change schools. The client in interview 1 has been helped in the matter of services and material aid and has good reason to feel warmly towards the worker. Added to this, there may be innate differences in the clients' ability to express themselves.

Nevertheless, the examples illustrate that a series of open questions alone is not a successful device for overcoming a client's reluctance to talk. It seems likely that open questions form just one component of a complex series of behaviours which involve a sensitive response to emotional cues and a willingness to address feelings directly. A more active interview style is not inconsistent with this.

Work in the psychiatric field corroborates some of these findings. Hopkinson et al. [1981] made a study of the psychiatric assessment interview. They found that a variety of techniques seemed to facilitate

emotional expression in the patient. These included a low level of worker talk, few interruptions, direct requests for feelings, interpretations and expressions of sympathy, as well as a high rate of open questions.

In a further paper in the same series, Cox et al. [1981] suggest that an interview style that starts with open questions and a ready response to emotional cues creates an appropriate set towards expression of feelings later in the interview. Interestingly, the subsequent amount of direct, factual probing had no significant effect. However, where the dominant style was closed, factual questions, they found non-directive techniques less effective in eliciting emotions. They conclude that the overall interview style probably creates a set which influences how much feeling is expressed. This implies that the context of open questions may be the most important determinant of their effectiveness. Clients will not necessarily respond to open questions by talking more about themselves unless there are other cues present to encourage them to do so.

Many clients in the sample were able to speak freely about their feelings with very little prompting. This argues for the creation of an interview "set" in which client self-revelation may be one of the

expectations.

Open questions appear to have been underused in the sample but this may have been because workers were using other means to encourage the client to talk.

c] Asking Why, A Special Case

"I think I'm over-taxing my brain or something. Perhaps I'm not very bright. I think, and I try and think of why I do certain things and I just can't come up with an answer".

[Client in interview 37].

The difficulties inherent in this type of insight oriented behaviour are well illustrated in this interview which contains 14 "why" questions. Worker and client are discussing the problem of the client being unable to control her teenage daughter who has a severe obsessional disorder. Whenever the worker asks why, the client is forced to admit that she does not know the answer:

Client: "Most of the time I am in the wrong. I agree with my husband when he says, 'when she did that you should have done this'. I agree with him. I should have done. Why didn't I?".

Worker: "Why didn't you?".

Client: "I don't know".

Client: "I gave her the power to control me years and years ago. Now its hard to get it back".

Worker: "Why? Why did you do that?".

Client: "Because I wanted her to be happy and if she wanted that she could have it - if it made her happy".

Worker: "Why should she have power over you to be happy?".

Client: "I don't know. I keep saying I don't know, don't I?".

Later in the interview, the client begins to verbalise her frustration at this line of questioning:

Client: "I didn't like her crying. I didn't want her crying and upset".

Worker: "Why?".

Client: "Well, you say why as if it's something unusual. Mothers don't like their children to cry, surely".

In another passage, worker and client discuss the matter directly:

Client: "Sometimes I get the impression that you

don't understand why I can't cope. Why I can't be consistent and handle her as if it's something that every mother should be able to do".

Worker: "And I don't understand that sufficiently sometimes? What is it that I don't understand?".

Client: "I get the impression that you don't understand why I can't cope. It should be a natural thing. The parent controls the child. I can't control mine and you can't understand why".

Worker: "Can you understand why?".

Client: "No".

Worker: "Well, that's what we're working on".

These extracts from interview 37 illustrate how "why" questions can induce feelings of inadequacy and frustration in the client and lead to a breakdown of understanding between client and worker.

Summary and Conclusion

Open questions are generally seen as highly desirable in the literature, especially the counselling literature [see Introduction], but a relatively low incidence was found in the present sample.

Open questions were correlated with the use of interpretation and the use of reflection of feeling which are both behaviours associated with a more client-centred interview style. However, there was no evidence that a higher number of open questions increased the overall amount of client talk within interviews although individual open questions could be successful in encouraging clients to talk.

As expected, open questions were more likely to be found in a discussion of clients' feelings and attitudes than in a discussion of practical matters. They were used to make more general type of enquiries but to some extent, they were also used to elicit facts, events and reasons.

In nearly one-third of all cases, open questions were used to begin new topics but the tendency was for an open style of questioning to be quickly narrowed down and for closed questions to predominate.

It was noted that asking "why" almost never produced a satisfactory answer.

Chapter 15

Closed Questions

Introduction

"Interaction based on a persistent question and answer format tends to confirm a kind of relationship between interviewer and interviewee which contradicts the cooperative, collaborative, mutually participative atmosphere which is often helpful".

[Kadushin, 1972, p.147].

Asking questions was the dominant verbal behaviour in all the research interviews. Open questions are discussed in Chapter 14. In the sample, closed questions outnumbered open questions by more than three to one, [1304 to 373].

Despite their dominance in the present sample, the frequent use of closed questions is not recommended by any of the writers on the subject. Those in the client-centred counselling tradition tend to eschew closed questions altogether. For Ivey and Authier [1978, Chap.4] asking closed questions was the hallmark of the novice interviewer. Egan [1975, p.101] writes,

"I feel certain that we ask too many questions, often meaningless ones. When clients are asked too many questions they can feel 'grilled'. This interferes with rapport between worker and helper".

The main objection to closed questions is that they centre the interview on the worker's concerns rather than on the client's frame of reference,

"You will find that it is very difficult to ask questions

that clearly place the focus upon your client. Fairly often it happens that counsellors ask questions that allow the client to respond with "yes" or "no". The result is that the client assumes no responsibility for the content of the interview".

[Hackney and Cormier, 1979, p.52].

For Heron [1975, p.5], questions are included in "catalytic" interventions which are designed to elicit information in order to encourage self-directed problem solving. He warns against the worker becoming a "ferret rather than a facilitator".

Other commentators are prepared to accept closed questions as an important component of the social work interview. Kadushin [1972, p.147] points out that questions do not have to be asked in a demanding manner or in a way which denies the interviewee the right to refuse a response. He does not consider closed questions to be good or bad in themselves but only appropriate or inappropriate to the situation. Questions should be in keeping with the emotional tone of the interview or they may be softened by an explanation of why the question is being asked.

Gambrill [1983] also acknowledges the importance of closed questions but points out the necessity of avoiding common errors such as asking leading questions or long, involved questions or more than one question at a time. Almost all commentators are agreed that the most common error is to ask too many questions.

The main advantages and disadvantages of closed questions,

extrapolated from the literature, are summarised below:

Advantages

1. Closed questions are usually simple and easy to understand.
2. They do not generally place great demands on the respondent.
3. They may be used to narrow down the focus of the interview or draw attention to a particular aspect of the client's discourse.
4. They can demonstrate the interest of the worker by asking the client to say more about a particular topic [probing].
5. They can help the worker to clarify points and clear up misunderstandings which arise during the interview.
6. Closed questions help the worker to keep or regain control of the interview by emphasising what it is he/she wants to know rather than what the client may want to say.

Disadvantages

1. Closed questions curtail the freedom of the client to define what it is that he/she wishes to say.

2. By limiting possible responses the worker may miss important information.
3. A rapid sequence of closed questions can sound like an interrogation or a "grilling". It can hinder the development of rapport.
4. Too many closed questions can shift the focus of the interview to the worker's needs rather than the client's needs. Interviews may become too worker centred.

The following sections describe how closed questions were used by social workers in the sample.

1. Frequency

Social workers in the sample asked a great many closed questions. It was by far the most frequent form of verbal intervention. There were 1304 closed questions in the sample as a whole compared with 799 information statements which were the next most frequent form of intervention.

All social workers used closed questions. The number per interview ranged from 7 to 109 but the majority of interviews [31 out of 40] contained more than 20. Six interviews each contained over 60 closed questions.

Asking closed questions was the most frequent behaviour in 22 of the 40 sample interviews and it was the second most frequent behaviour in a further 12. [See Appendix 30].

Two possible reasons for the predominance of closed questions are the amount of assessment which takes place in social work interviews and the need for workers to retain control of the interview:

a] Assessment

It seems likely that the frequency with which social workers use closed questions is related to the amount of assessment. Goldberg and Warburton [1979] found assessment to be a major social work activity in every type of case. The frequency in their sample ranged from 99% for clients with mental/emotional problems to 62% for clients with accommodation problems.

Goldberg and Warburton tend to see assessment as an essential part of intake work rather than as an ongoing activity, but Baldock and Prior [1981a] in a field study of social workers talking to their clients see assessment [or monitoring the situation] as the main objective of most of the interviews in their sample:

"The workers were using the interviews to collect information about the pattern of the client's daily lives in order to calculate the danger of their problems getting any worse".

In the current sample it was estimated that 32 of the 40 interviews contained assessment as a major

component. In 23 of them, the workers themselves mentioned assessment when asked to describe the aims of the interview. In a further nine cases the researcher considered that assessment took place although it was not specifically mentioned. Workers used a variety of terms to describe the process: specifically, "monitoring" [interview 33], "review" [interview 16], and "to keep an eye on him" [interview 36], which indicated that they say this as an ongoing activity rather than simply a beginning activity.

Even accepting that assessment work is an important and ongoing part of the social work task, it clearly consists of more than asking lots of questions. As Davies [1981, p.67] points out,

"It isn't just a question of gathering facts: it is more a matter of trying to make sense of a particular person's problems or behaviour in relation to his unique social environment".

It would seem that social workers in the sample exhibited an over-reliance on questioning as a means of gathering information about their clients. Although closed questions were used in other ways and for other purposes [see following sections], workers seemed reluctant to abandon a straight question and answer format when it came to assessment. This possibly accounts for the predominance of this form of verbal intervention in the sample as a whole.

b] Control of the Interview

Another possible explanation for the dominance of closed questions in the sample interview may lie in the workers' need to control the interview process.

The question is a powerful tool, and closed questions are especially so. The questioner holds the initiative, defines the subject matter and is able to limit the range of possible responses. Even the way a question is worded can alter the response. An American study by Harris [1973] illustrates the importance of using certain key words:

"Subjects were asked either 'How tall was the basket ball player?' or 'How short was the basket ball player?' On average, the subjects guessed about 79 inches and 69 inches respectively, indicating the influence of the words 'short' and 'tall'".

A later study by Loftus and Zanni [1975] showed how even the use of the definite as opposed to the indefinite article may affect the response. Subjects were shown a short film of a car crash:

"It was found that questions which contained the definite article [e.g. Did you see the broken headlight] produced fewer uncertain or 'don't know' responses and more false recognition of events which never in fact occurred than did questions which contained an indefinite article [e.g. Did you see a broken headlight?]".

However, to illustrate how questions help the worker to control the interview is to beg the question. Why

do workers need to exercise such control over the interview process? Some possible reasons are suggested below:

1. The worker is responsible for setting up the interview and conducting it successfully.
2. The worker may need to reinforce his/her statutory authority, especially in cases of child abuse or compulsory mental health admissions.
3. The worker may find he/she is able to conduct the interview more quickly and efficiently using a question and answer format.
4. The worker may feel threatened if he/she relinquishes too much control to the client. Ignorance may be laid bare if the client asks a question. If open debate is allowed, there is a danger that the worker might lose the argument.

The issue of worker control of the interview is also discussed in Chapter 16 [Giving Information], Section 6.b.

2. The Relationship of Closed Questions to Other Variables

There was a negative correlation between workers' use of supportive statements and closed questions, and workers' use of interpretations and closed questions. This is

understandable: support and interpretations are associated with more client centred counselling techniques while closed questions are generally associated with a more directive approach.

No correlation could be found between open and closed questions.

There was a negative correlation between closed questions and information giving, which suggests that interviews tend to be predominantly either information giving or information seeking - although there seems no logical reason why they cannot be both and many interviews in the sample contain elements of both activities.

In terms of the total number of interventions per interview, the only behaviour which positively correlated with closed questions was reflection of content. These two types of worker activity formed a pair which provided the backbone of the interview in many cases.

Baldock and Prior [1981a] have suggested that client and worker play the roles of "story-teller and listener" in the social work interview. They note that most worker interventions consist of a series of trigger questions backed up by techniques which encourage the client to talk. Although they do not specifically mention reflection of content, this must constitute one means of encouraging client talk together with the "uhm"s and "ah"s

and non-verbal signals to continue.

In the following extract the worker is discussing his client's financial position. The client is housebound following an operation:

Client: "J, who gets my money from Barclays Bank, she came on Thursday night with my money and she'd had problems at Barclays. I mean, she's always at the bank, you know....".

Worker: "Does errands for you - and other people" [reflection].

Client: "Oh, no. She only does it for me. I mean, she's one of the seniors! Like she said, they know her at the bank....".

Worker: "Was it because it was a large amount?" [closed question].

Client: "No. It's just this one stropky clerk. I mean, she's been getting my money for me from June. All I do is to write her a little note saying 'I authorise Mrs T' - but this one girl is stropky and she was stropky with her again. So she said 'to be truthful, I drew money out myself to give you'. Because she didn't think she would give it to her".

Worker: "She took it from her own account?" [reflection].

Client: "Yes. Anyway it doesn't matter because she is going on her holidays this week and.....".

Worker: "You don't have a cheque book, do you?" [closed question].

In this example, the worker uses reflections to encourage the client to keep talking and then uses closed questions to bring her back to the point when she begins to drift. The advantage of this method of information gathering is that it allows the client to tell her story in her own way and to feel that she is being listened to with sympathy and understanding. Clearly, the client here enjoys recounting the dramatic clash of personalities that had occurred at the bank. On the other hand a sequence of closed questions followed by reflections could be seen as a relatively inefficient way for the worker to gain a small amount of factual information. All she really wants to know is whether the client is getting her money each week.

3. Closed Questions and the Content of Interviews

Client-centred literature on helping relationships stresses that closed questions should be asked only to obtain precise, specific pieces of information such as "How old are you?" or "How many sisters and brothers do you have?". On the other hand, evidence from work on psychiatric interviewing techniques by Cox et al. [1981]

suggests that closed questions may be as effective as non-directive methods in encouraging clients to reveal emotional data:

"One supposedly fact-oriented technique [requests for self-disclosures] was also very effective in eliciting feelings".

They found this to be true regardless of overall interview style. It was found that systematic questioning on factual matters had no substantial suppressive effect on the expression of emotions.

Social workers used closed questions to some extent in all categories of content. Table 17 shows the number of closed questions as a percentage of all worker utterances for each subject area. [See also Appendix 40].

Table 17 - Closed Questions and Interview Content

<u>Content</u>	<u>% Closed Questions</u>
Practical Matters.....	38%
Client Activities.....	38%
Statutory Matters.....	37%
Client's Health.....	36%
Events and Happenings.....	36%
Discussion of Third Parties.....	34.5%
Client's Feelings.....	29%
Making Arrangements.....	23%
Role of Worker/Department.....	15%

As expected, the use of closed questions was highest when factual matters were being discussed such as finance, housing and the client's work or social activities. It was lower when the client's feelings were under discussion and lowest when the worker was taking the responsibility for making arrangements or explaining his/her role or that of the department.

It is worth noting that, although not as many closed questions were asked in relation to the client's feelings as in other subject areas, 29% still represents a much higher proportion of closed questions than any other verbal interventions on this subject. [Open questions only accounted for 11% as did reflections of feeling]. Over the sample as a whole it was found that almost a quarter of all closed questions related directly to the client's feelings - 323 out of 1304.

4. Types of Closed Questions

Closed questions are generally associated with seeking information of a practical or factual nature. In the current sample they were also used to ask directly about clients' feelings, attitudes and opinions, and to encourage them to recount events or incidents relevant to the discourse. In addition, two subtypes of closed question were found in the sample. These consisted of asking for clarification from the client and of seeking confirmation from the client for the worker's ideas or

actions.

a] Closed Questions to Elicit Facts

Closed questions about factual matters were the dominant mode of questioning in the sample and were present in all interviews. The number per interview varied between 2 [interview 39] and 71 [interview 4].

This type of question outnumbered questions about client feelings by approximately three to one [833 to 289].

Closed questions were often used as a quick and efficient way of gaining information about the client's financial position or material circumstances. In interview 26, the client is very worried about her rent. The worker asks a series of short questions in order to sort out the facts:

"Has anybody been in touch with the Housing Benefit to find out when they are going to sort it out for you?".

"Have they sent you the £83?".

"So, they are supposed to send you £84 a month?".

"How much is the rent then that you should be paying?".

Closed questions were used in a similar way to

establish the client's home circumstances. In interview 2, the client has recently moved into a group home and the worker is trying to find out how he has settled in:

"So who is running the house then?".

"And who is cooking all the meals then?".

"Are you getting all your meals now?".

b] Closed Questions to Elicit Feelings

Although closed questions are sometimes thought of as an insensitive instrument for encouraging clients to talk about their feelings, it was a relatively frequent form of intervention in the sample interviews. There were 323 questions about feelings out of a total of 1304 closed questions.

All interviews except one contained at least one question of this type and the frequency ranged between one and 55 questions per interview for the sample as a whole.

In over a quarter of the interviews [13], the number of closed questions about feelings outnumbered open questions of all types.

In interview 2, the worker uses closed questions to help him understand how the client feels about being away from home:

"Does it bother you not seeing your family very much?".

"Your dad. Do you not miss seeing him?".

In interview 9, the worker uses a series of very precise questions to build up a picture of the client's anxiety state:

"Could you feel your anxiety going up as the effects of the tablet wore off? Or does your anxiety - does the effect pass off as the hours go by?".

"So if you knew what was going to happen and you took a tablet just before it, that might help you get over that particular thing?".

"Can you remember what happened on Thursday night? You know the meeting is going to be on Friday. Are you thinking about the meeting all Thursday night, wondering what it is going to mean?".

In all these examples, the clients are being given a chance only to confirm or deny the worker's assumptions about their feelings. In the last example, the worker seems to be putting words into the client's mouth. The client's response to these kinds of questions are discussed in section 6 below.

c] Closed Questions to Elicit Events

Clients described happenings, incidents or events in 14 out of the 40 interviews. Open questions such as "What happened then?" were more widely used than closed questions in these circumstances. When closed questions were used, it was mainly to collect factual data or to clarify points along the way. Closed questions to encourage the client to tell his/her story were less common. These occurred in only 4 of the 14 interviews and generally consisted of "when" questions. Interview 9 contained many of these:

"So when did they tell you about the meeting?".

"On Thursday, when did you first know about the meeting?".

"And at what point do you have a tranquilizer?".

Interview 9 [23 questions] and interview 13 [9 questions], between them, accounted for almost all examples of closed questions eliciting events. In both cases a blow by blow account of a particular incident was requested. Apart from these, interview 14 contained one question and interview 32 contained 3 questions of this type.

d] Closed Questions to Elicit Opinions

Feelings, attitudes and opinions often overlap. In

the current sample, opinions are taken to refer to a third party or to an outside event. More rarely, the worker may seek a moral judgement from the client on a matter directly concerning his/her behaviour.

Although clients' opinions of one sort or another were sought in 28 out of the 40 sample interviews, closed questions were used in only 13 of these. Open questions of the type "How is so and so?", "What do you think about so and so?" were the preferred intervention. There were 74 open questions seeking the client's opinion as opposed to only 34 closed questions.

Closed questions pin the clients down and ask them to make a judgement. In interview 31 the worker is asking for the client's opinion about her daughter who is recovering from a psychotic episode. In this case, the client's judgement is being used to supplement the worker's own assessment:

"How close is she to her ordinary self when she is well, is she now?".

"Would you say she is still shy once you got to know her or does she open up then?".

Occasionally, closed questions are used to elicit the client's opinion on a moral issue. The problems relating to this are discussed in section 6 below.

Sub-types of Closed Questions

a] Seeking Confirmation

This consisted of asking the client. "Is that OK with you?" or "Do you understand?". Questions such as these were classified as closed questions but were later separated out for analytical purposes. They occurred in 14 of the 40 sample interviews, but accounted for only 23 out of the 1304 closed questions in the sample as a whole.

It is perhaps significant that very little verbal checking was observed in the research interviews. Although client understanding and approval may be judged from non-verbal signals, especially puzzled looks or an anxious expression, asking for verbal confirmation can show appreciation for the client's feelings and help to draw him/her into the decision making process.

This form of question can also help to prevent misunderstandings. In view of the haphazard manner in which some information is given in the interviews [see Chapter 16], it might also be a helpful form of intervention for workers to incorporate into the information giving process.

f] Seeking Clarification

Workers in the sample sometimes asked for further clarification of matters raised by the client. This category does not refer to a request for further information [a probe], but only to any ambiguity of meaning which may arise from clients' statements.

Such queries commonly occur in everyday conversation and there is no reason to assume that they have particular significance within the social work process. For analytical purposes, however, they have been separately reviewed.

Clarification queries occurred in 25 of the 40 interviews and accounted for 38 out of the 1304 closed questions in the sample as a whole.

Summary of Types of Closed Question

Table 18 shows the six types of closed question together with the number of interviews containing each category and the total number of questions over the sample as a whole.

Table 18 - Categories of Closed Question

<u>Type of Question</u>	<u>No. of Interviews</u>	<u>Closed Questions</u>
1. To elicit facts	40	883
2. To elicit feelings	39	289
3. To elicit opinions	13	34
4. To elicit events	4	37
<u>Sub-types</u>		
1. Seeking confirmation	14	23
2. Seeking clarification	25	38
	-----	-----
	N = 40	N = 1304

The table shows that, as expected, closed questions were used most commonly to elicit factual information from clients. They were also used in the majority of interviews to find out about clients' feelings. To a lesser extent, closed questions were used to ask clients about their opinions, although the available data suggests that they were of limited use in this respect. In some circumstances when a detailed account was needed, closed questions were used to help clients to describe events.

5. Ways of Using Closed Questions

Closed questions were used to open up new areas of discussion and to collect additional information. They were commonly used in sequences, as well as in combination with other forms of intervention.

a] Beginning a Topic

Baldock and Prior [1981a] found that the social work interviews in their sample were typified by long, rambling passages by the client punctuated by short, sharp questions by the worker designed to refocus the interview and to set the client off on another tack.

Workers in the present sample used closed questions to effect topic changes in this way but not to the extent suggested by Baldock and Prior.

Six interviews began with a closed question. This created an atmosphere of getting down to business and set the tone for the interview. Closed questions were used to introduce new subjects in 32 out of the 40 sample interviews. Over the sample as a whole, 254 topics were introduced by social workers. Of these, just over one-third [89] began with a closed question. The frequency was fairly evenly distributed across interviews. It was rare [6 out of 32 cases] to find more than half of all topics in any one interview, introduced using this behaviour. [See Appendix 34].

b] Closed Questions in Sequence

A possible danger with a series of closed questions is that the interview can begin to sound like an interrogation. While the worker continues to ask

questions he/she remains in control and clients are restricted to supplying answers rather than expressing their own concerns. Nevertheless, sequences of closed questions commonly occurred in the sample interviews.

It was found that 48% of all closed questions were followed by another closed question. The majority of interviews [36 out of 40], contained sequences of three or more questions. Just over half the interviews [21] contained sequences of five or more closed questions, and 14 interviews contained sequences of six or more closed questions. The highest number of closed questions in an unbroken sequence was seventeen [interview 1].

Where a high number of closed questions occurred together, this was often connected with an assessment of the client's material circumstances. In interview 1, the client is an elderly man about to leave hospital. The worker is asking his daughter about his home circumstances. There is a son living at home:

"And how old is he?"

"And he works?"

"Full time?"

"And is it a house they've got?"

"Rented? Corporation?"

"And they sleep upstairs, your mum and dad?"

"And where is the bathroom?"

"And can she manage to get to the bathroom?"

"And what about him? He's not very mobile is he?"

"I presume you haven't got a commode?".

This sequence represents a quick and efficient way of gaining a quantity of factual information. The client is pleased to co-operate as she is hoping that home services of various kinds will be provided as a result of the interview.

c] Closed Questions in Sequence with Other Behaviours

In just over half of all cases [52%], closed questions were followed by other forms of worker intervention.

i] Open Questions

In 9% of all cases, an open question preceded a closed one. In 7% of all cases, an open question followed a closed one.

An open question followed by a closed question has the effect of narrowing down the focus of the interview. It moves the conversation forward from the general to the particular. For example in interview 2, the worker begins with a general

enquiry:

"So all I wanted to do was to find out how things are going at the house at the moment. Are they going OK?".

He immediately follows this up with a specific question:

"Did you sort out your problem with your money on Friday?".

Closed questions can be used in this way to help maintain focus. They can also be used, as Ivey and Authier [1978] suggest, to lower the emotional intensity if feelings within the client threaten to overwhelm him/her. Huxley [1985] demonstrates the use of the progressive narrowing down of questions in interviewing mentally ill clients who may be reluctant to talk about sensitive or emotionally loaded topics [see also Chapter 14, Section 5].

In the current sample, workers also used open questions following closed questions to broaden out the subject matter. For example, in interview 3, the worker is asking a respite foster mother about her new job; she moves from specific points about the rota system at work to the more general issue of how this will affect

the fostering situation:

"So what sort of pattern will you do? Will it change from week to week, which days?"

"So how will that fit in with having Ruth?"

Although there were 121 cases of open questions preceding closed questions in the sample and only 94 cases of open questions following closed questions, the difference is not great. Clearly both forms of questioning sequence were used, to good effect.

ii] Other Forms of Verbal Intervention

The most common behaviour to follow a closed question, apart from another question, was a reflection of content. These accounted for 14% of all verbal behaviours in this context. Reflections of feeling accounted for a further 4% of worker responses following a closed question.

Information and advice followed closed questions in 18% of all cases. This not only reflects the high proportion of both these interventions in the sample as a whole, but also indicates that the client's reply was not taken up and developed further in these cases. Discussion behaviours such as challenging or supportive comments, a worker self-revelation or an interpretation,

followed a closed question in only 7% of all cases.

These results indicate that closed questions were not much used to promote rational debate. They tended to be used more as a means of gathering information. Approximately three-quarters of all closed questions occurred either in a sequence of questions or in a combined sequence of questions and reflective behaviours which encouraged the client to keep talking.

6. Closed Questions and the Client

a] Relinquishing Control

It was suggested in section 2 [above] that the fact that workers asked so many closed questions was associated with their perceived need to control the interview process. A necessary concomitant of the workers' control within the interview is the client's lack of control. If asking questions is taken as an indicator, then clients asked very few. In only 23 out of the 40 sample interviews did clients ask for any information and the majority of these interviews contained only one or two questions.

Some possible reasons for this finding are suggested below:

1. The worker is so firmly in control that it is difficult to break into the cycle to ask a question.
2. Role expectations in society put the client in a subservient position relative to the professional authority of the social worker.
3. Clients at certain points in their lives and more especially in a crisis, may welcome a worker who is prepared to assume control.
4. Clients may find it easier to accept the paternalistic control of the social worker than to accept responsibility for taking a more active role in the problem solving process.
5. Clients may feel they have to "play along" with the worker's definition of the interview in order to obtain the goods and services they require.

The available evidence, however, suggests that worker over-reliance on the use of closed questions was not as negative as expected. Clients found ways of expressing themselves within the restrictions imposed.

b] Encouraging the Client to Talk

It is sometimes assumed that short, sharp questions produce short, sharp answers but this was not always the case within the sample.

Client speech following closed questions was timed in 13 out of the 40 sample interviews [roughly one in three]. Client responses lasting more than 15 seconds were noted. Out of a total of 511 closed questions, 93, or a little less than one-fifth, produced a client response of 15 seconds or more.

Early research by Dohrenwend [1965] found that responses to open questions were likely to produce more client speech than closed questions. This was borne out by the results from the present sample. Open questions were more likely to produce longer responses than closed questions. In the same 13 interviews, 73 out of 211 open questions, or just over one-third, produced client speech of 15 seconds or more. This may be partially explained by the finding that closed questions tended to be associated with requests for factual information while open questions tended to be associated with requests for feelings.

It is also interesting to note that, within the subsample, interviews in which a higher proportion of responses to closed questions were longer, a higher proportion of responses to open questions were longer also. For example, in interview 18, none of the 24 closed questions produced a client response of more than 15 seconds and neither did any of the open

questions. On the other hand, in interview 12, seven out of the twelve closed questions produced lengthy responses and six out of the twelve open questions produced the same. These observations suggest that other factors such as the client's natural talkativeness, the subject matter, and the use of other verbal and non-verbal encouragers to talk, may help to account for the length of the clients' responses. The use of closed questions in itself did not appear to be a limiting factor.

c] Giving Factual Information

On the whole, clients in the sample co-operated with the workers' attempts to collect detailed, factual information by answering as accurately and concisely as they could. In return, they expected practical help and services from the social worker. For example, in interview 16, the worker is trying to fix an appointment for his client at the housing department:

Worker: "Is there any days you can't make first of all? They are asking me the days you can't make".

Client: "Any day".

Worker: "What about when you go to the clinic?".

Client: "Oh, except....I go to the clinic in the

mornings".

Worker: "Which days?".

Client: "Thursday".

Worker: "Just Thursdays?".

Client: "Yeah".

Worker: "Apart from that have you anywhere to go? Socially anywhere?".

Client: "Not as far as I know".

The problem with this type of sequence is that once the worker has established a continuous set of direct, closed questions, it may be difficult to change tack and, at the same time, to attend to any "feeling" messages from the client. For example, later in interview 16, while the worker moves through his assessment, a young unmarried mother begins to express some of her hostility to the welfare services in general. The worker ignores this cue and proceeds with his assessment:

Worker: "Any other problems with the Social? What about the clothing grant?".

Client: "Oh, ay. They told me I had to go up to the doctor's and get a note why I had put on weight".

Worker: "Yeah? Did they say doctor's? They said doctor's did they?".

Client: [with feeling] "Said to me, had you had it before! So I says, no, I've not had nothing off any of yers".

Worker: "Who was your last doctor?".

d] Giving Information about Feelings

Between one-fifth and one-quarter of closed questions in the sample asked directly about client's feelings. Almost all workers [39] used some questions of this type.

Clients did not seem inhibited by direct questions about their feelings and often answered at some length and in considerable depth. For example in interview 12, the client is about to move on from an alcoholism unit to a dry house in the community. The worker asks him about his anxiety:

Worker: "You said your anxiety is a problem. I get the impression that things are going a little better than when I saw you last week. Is that because someone was interviewing you from the hostel and you were worried about whether you would be accepted or not?".

Although in this case, the question is "softened" by

a reflective comment which indicates understanding and sensitivity to the client's feelings, the question itself is extremely narrow, even suggesting a possible answer. Nevertheless, the client takes this as a cue to expand on his feelings:

Client: "I think in one way it was. I mean, I felt I was in limbo 'cos I'd come here. I knew nothing about the De-tox, I don't know Manchester at all, lots of things really. I just felt I was stuck in the middle of whatever I didn't know. Sounds daft, but I didn't know where I was going and I didn't know what was going to happen. I only knew that I didn't want to drink and I thought I was going to and end up on the street, even though I'd been told I wouldn't, and I'm going to start my travelling again - and how long am I going to cope with that without turning to drink again. And I knew I didn't want to drink and I knew I didn't want to travel but I could see it happening all over again. And it frightened the life out of me. The thought of the drink now. It scares me silly".

In interview 30, the worker asks a series of short, closed questions to encourage the client to express her feelings. The questions are a step by step path towards uncovering emotions she feels guilty about voicing. The client is a middle-aged woman who has recently suffered a series of distressing life

events. The worker asks her how she might express her hurt:

Client: "Just cry probably".

Worker: "And if you cried, what would you want people around you to do?".

Client: "Give a bit of comfort".

Worker: "What sort of comfort would you want?".

Client: "I don't know. I feel selfish even wanting it".

Worker: "OK. Well, never mind that. If you were allowed to be selfish, what sort of comfort would it be?".

Client: "Just physical comfort and to say, look, it's not your fault. Cos it's not my fault. I'm not a witch. I've never done nothing at 'em. I'm not giving you any eye-wash. I've never done anything at 'em".

The evidence from the present sample supports the findings of Hopkinson et al. [1981] in their work on interviews with the parents of children attending for psychiatric assessment:

"A straightforward request that the informants say something about their feelings appeared rather successful in getting the informant to do just that.

When the parent was not expressing feelings, this direct approach proved to be the most successful means of inducing them to do so".

e] Giving Opinions

There are occasions on which closed questions seem inappropriate. This is where a discussion or debate is to be encouraged or the client's opinion sought.

In interview 13, worker and client discuss a moral issue. The client has assaulted a teacher at school. One of the provoking factors had been the teacher snatching the client's school bag:

"Do you think it would have been wrong to say keep the bag for the moment and go to your lesson? I'm not saying it's right. I just want to know your opinion".

Despite the disclaimer, the phrasing of the question must leave the client in little doubt as to the worker's opinion on the matter. Nonetheless, the client thinks the teacher should have given him his bag back.

He is given a chance to recant:

Worker: "You don't feel you could have let her keep your bag and gone on? That would not have been right in your opinion?".

The client still thinks that the teacher should have

given him his bag back.

This example illustrates the problem with a more closed, directive style in trying to promote a discussion. It is not that the worker imposes his/her frame of reference - the client shows that he is well able to stand his ground - the problem is that the frame of reference becomes narrowed down and so precludes a wider discussion of the issues.

Summary and Conclusion

Despite being proscribed in the literature on client-centred work, asking closed questions was the dominant form of verbal behaviour both within and across interviews. Sequences of closed questions were common, some of them quite lengthy.

The high number of closed questions may partly be accounted for by the perceived need of workers to control the interview process and partly by the predominance of assessment techniques within interviews.

Closed questions were most commonly used to elicit factual information but were also extensively used to elicit other types of information including data about the clients' feelings and emotions.

The most common worker behaviour to follow a closed question was a reflection of content. Reflections encouraged the client to continue with the theme initiated by the worker's question. This format was one of the main means of carrying the interview forward.

For the most part, clients co-operated well with this question and answer format and workers were able to gain a great deal of information on a wide variety of topics. The main disadvantages of this method were that it rarely allows for the participative debate between worker and client, particularly on moral issues, and that underlying

feelings could be missed or ignored by following an essentially closed line of questioning.

Chapter 16

Giving Information

Introduction

"If the reader were to listen to a person's conversations during one single day, it would usually be found that for much of that time that person was engaged in explaining; that is, giving facts, information, views and opinions".

[Hargie et al. 1981, p.148].

Information was found in all interviews and was the most frequent form of intervention in 12 of the 40 interviews. Yet it did not dominate the dialogue in the same way that it might in ordinary conversation. Workers tended to ask more questions. In the sample as a whole, they asked 1304 closed questions and 373 open questions while informative statements accounted for only 799 verbal interventions.

In the model proposed here, a distinction is drawn between information and advice. In giving advice, the worker is attempting to influence the opinion or behaviour of the client directly. Advice contains an explicit or implicit injunction to act in a certain way. Information may not necessarily be value free, but it does not contain a moral imperative. [Advice is discussed in Chapter 17].

The distinction is not always drawn in the literature. For example BASW [1977] in The Social Work Task sees the role of advisor as involving the giving of factual information as distinct from counselling.

On the other hand, Goldberg et al. [1979] choose to combine information and advice into one category of helping in contrast to problem solving, sustaining, reviewing or making assessments.

In the American literature, the skill of giving information is rarely discussed. For example, Kadushin [1972] in The Social Work Interview devotes chapter 5 to the development of the social work process. The techniques he describes include asking questions, reflection, clarification and interpretation, but there is no mention of providing information. Gambrill [1983] classes giving information with "feedback". For her, this includes an explanation of the framework of the interview, indications of regard and providing the client with a more helpful vocabulary with which to discuss his/her concerns. The skills required to impart factual knowledge are not included in this model.

In Britain, giving information tends to be discussed in the general literature on helping rather than in social work texts. Hargie et al. [1981] speak of the need to prepare, structure, sequence and organise facts and ideas in a logical order. They emphasise the importance of accuracy and fluency and the use of examples and summaries where appropriate. Priestly and McGuire [1983] draw a parallel with some of the skills used in teaching; explanations need to be clear, logical and easily remembered.

1. Frequency

All interviews contained some information and it was the most frequent behaviour in 14 of the 40 interviews. [See Appendix 30].

It was the second most frequent form of intervention in a further 7 interviews.

Some of the interviews consisted largely of giving information to the client while others contained very little. The incidence ranged between 7 and 69 interventions per interview. In percentage terms this accounted for between 3% and 42% of the total number of verbal interventions in each interview.

Although the frequency of information giving cannot necessarily be equated with the amount of information given, data from the sample suggest that this might be the case. Seven interviews contained particularly lengthy information giving passages: 6, 14, 24, 29, 33, 35 and 36 - all of which contained passages of over 200 words. In 6 out of the 7 interviews, information giving was the most frequent form of verbal intervention and it came a close second to asking questions in the seventh.

2. The Relationship with Other Variables

When the correlations between variables in the sample was considered, a picture emerged of information giving as a

more assertive type of interviewing, associated with the greater use of discussion techniques, and consequently offering a chance for more active participation by clients.

Table 19 shows how giving information was related to each of the variables under discussion. A correlation is taken to mean a correlation coefficient of at least .01 and a strong correlation [*] is taken to mean a correlation coefficient of at least .001.

Table 19 - The Relationship of Information Giving to Other Variables

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Correlation</u>
Information: Length of Interview	Positive
Higher Worker Talk Time	Positive*
Supporting	Positive*
Challenging	Positive
Worker Use of Self	Positive*
Closed Questions	Negative*
Open Questions	Negative
Reflection of Feeling	Negative
Reflection of Content	None
Direct Guidance	None
Practical Help	None
Interpretation	None

It is not surprising that giving information is associated with social workers' talking more. In some interviews quite time consuming explanations and instructions needed to be given. Neither is it surprising that such interviews tend to be longer than average.

It is interesting that information giving is associated with discussion behaviours such as giving support, challenging, and the worker self-revelation. The exchange of information and ideas implicit in the use of these behaviours argues for a higher degree of client involvement in this type of interviewing.

The data indicate that interviews in which there was a high proportion of closed questions tended to contain less information giving. There was a strong negative correlation between these two behaviours. Interviews which had a high proportion of open questions and reflections of feeling [which were themselves correlated] also tended to have less information giving, although the negative correlation was less strong. This suggests that the information giving interview may represent a type of interview distinct from both assessment interviewing, which is associated with the high use of closed questions, and from client-centred interviewing which is associated with the use of open questions and reflective techniques.

There was no evidence that giving direct guidance was associated with giving information, although both were

independently associated with the discussion behaviours - supporting, challenging and worker self-revelation.

The use of interpretive behaviours might have been expected to show a negative correlation with information, given that this variable was associated with the use of open questions and reflection of feeling. However, the very low incidence of interpretation in the sample as a whole probably accounts for the lack of this.

No link could be established between giving information and giving practical help.

3. Giving Information and the Content of Interviews

The content of the 40 sample interviews was divided into 9 main subject areas. Some information was given in all of these. The table below shows that information giving was highest in topics with a high factual content. As expected, information giving is seen to tail off as the discussion moves towards more client-centred topics.

Table 20 - Information Giving Interventions as a Percentage of Total Interventions by Category of Content

<u>Category of Content</u>	<u>% Information</u>
1. Statutory Matters, eg. court reports, mental health tribunals etc.	38.8%
2. Explanation of role of worker or department	35.1%
3. Arrangements to meet	31.6%
4. Practical matters, eg. welfare rights, housing etc.	29.3%
5. Discussion of third party, eg. child, parent, spouse	20.7%
6. Activities, eg. work, school, groups, classes etc.	15.8%
7. Discussion of events, eg. trips, hospital visits etc.	15.7%
8. Client's health, mental or physical	13.7%
9. Client's feelings	12.6%
10. Other	38.8%

The catch-all category of "other" was used for subjects unrelated to the main task of the interview. It was typified by an informal exchange of views as found in everyday conversation. Although information giving forms a high percentage of the interventions in these cases, the category as a whole accounts for a relatively small proportion of total interview time.

Similarly, summaries, usually found at the end of interviews, contained a high proportion of information giving [29.3% of all interventions in this category] but took up very little time in the interview as a whole. Summaries were not considered as topics in their own right, but were distinguished from other categories for analytical purposes.

4. Types of Information

Lengthy explanations of practical matters are of a different order from short exchanges concerning arrangements to meet. Views and opinions are different in kind from factual statements. Workers make informal observations and comments as well as offering more weighty arguments.

It is possible to organise this diverse information in a variety of ways. The categories chosen here are designed to reflect the various roles of information giving within the interview. They are listed below together with an indication of the frequency with which they occurred in the sample as a whole.

Table 21 - The Frequency of Different Types of Information

<u>Type of Information</u>	<u>No. of Interviews</u>
a] Practical	29 [250 interventions]
b] Informal	26 [202 interventions]
c] Theoretical	26 [150 interventions]
d] Feedback	16 [57 interventions]
e] Arranging	16 [51 interventions]
f] Reporting	14 [76 interventions]
g] Role of Dept./Worker	14 [62 interventions]
h] Purpose of Interview	7 [12 interventions]

Number of Interviews = 40. Total Interventions = 799

4a Practical Information

"Social workers must be knowledgeable about available facilities and services. If they do not have expert knowledge it is difficult to see who should have it. They must develop their skills as providers of useful information".

[Davies 1981, p.146]

Financial, material and accommodation problems are common in social work practice. The Barclay report [1982] on the role and tasks of social workers suggests that for every 10,000 population [the number typically served by an average social work team], one in ten may well be living at or below the level of financial need recognised for the purposes of Income Support; gas and electricity disconnections may be running at forty or so a year; five hundred people may be living in housing which is unfit or

in substantial need of repair. Although it is not suggested that all these people will become social work clients, the evidence from the present sample indicates that social workers are prepared to take their responsibilities seriously and have developed considerable expertise in the field of welfare provision.

4a [i] Frequency

Practical information was the largest group of informative interventions. It was present in almost three-quarters of all interviews [29] and accounted for the highest number of interventions [250 out of 722].

4a [ii] Content

In 11 cases the practical information concerned some form of financial aid such as supplementary benefit, housing benefit or redundancy payment. In four cases, information was given regarding accommodation. In a further four cases the provision of services, such as home help and meals-on-wheels, was discussed. Information was also given in various interviews on filling out a taxation form, finding a job, groups and classes. One interview concerned the procedure for adopted children to trace their natural parents. The provision of material goods such as clothing and bedding figured in two interviews.

4a [iii] A Duty to Inform

Workers in the sample clearly saw it as part of their function to make clients aware of the benefits and services to which they were entitled. For example, in interview 26, the client is complaining that she does not have enough to live on once she has paid her quarterly bills:

Client: "Then there's my electric bill when that comes in. It comes to about £24 as a rule".

Worker: "How do you pay off your electricity bill? I mean do you pay it off all in one lump sum?"

Client: "No. I save it".

Worker: "You save it. Do you buy stamps?"

Client: "No. I just save the money".

Worker: "You could buy stamps each week from the Post Office, well I think it's from the showrooms, which you could put by towards the bill - or another thing the Electricity Board does is that they work out over a year how much the total bill is likely to be, they divide that by fifty-two and then they suggest to people that they pay off that amount per week".

In interview 2, the worker is discussing with the client, how to go about finding a job:

Worker: "They have a special person at the Job Centre called a D.R.O. [disablement resettlement officer]. Have you ever heard of him? Well, they are supposed to help people who are disabled in some way and if you go and see him, he'll know all sorts of places where you could work if they had vacancies".

4a [iv] Expertise

Workers generally displayed a high level of familiarity with the intricacies of social security provision. Information was delivered confidently and, in general, showed both knowledge and experience of the field. The worker in interview 7 for example, sounds as if she knows what she is talking about and has dealt with similar cases before. She is trying to get the client re-housed:

"Will you let me have your computer number 'cos I can't ring up without that or else I get nowhere. Once I've got that they will then get the access to the information and be able to tell me".

"It may be that if we could send a letter of support because of the schooling, that may be they would take that into account but that would not necessarily give you any more points. It just may be that they would consider the area more carefully. In general, the more places you say you are willing to live, the more likely you are to get an

offer".

4a [v] Personal Knowledge

As well as exhibiting a general knowledge of welfare provision, workers often demonstrated detailed knowledge of the clients' personal circumstances and how the provision applied to them. In interview 8, the worker is explaining to an elderly client why she has to pay a certain sum of money for her rent:

"Well you see, what they advised you was that they thought you were going to be paying about £18 per week and they thought that was going to be the heating charge which is £6.33 together with the rebated rent. In other words they thought the rebate was going to take your rent down to about £11 or £12 - and if you paid £18 including the heating, that would cover all that you were going to owe.

4a [vi] Inability to Help

Information of this type is not always helpful in a practical sense. Sometimes the worker can only inform the client of the dismal reality of the situation. In interview 1, the worker has to explain to the client the near impossibility of transferring elderly patients to convalescent homes:

"Well, we tried the one convalescent hospital that will take the elderly and it was going to be three weeks to a

month before they could even consider the application. So I took a partly filled in form but Dr R said it was not really worth it - I mean, he'll be gone by the time we fill it in. And then it's Ormskirk and they have to consider their own health authority first which is Ormskirk, and then if they've got no patients, they have to go to the Wigan health area and take from there, and then if there are any beds left, we get a crack at them".

4b Informal Information Exchange

An important part of the sample interviews was made up of an exchange of views in much the same way as happens in ordinary conversation [although to a lesser extent]. Such exchanges serve to emphasise that the social work interview is not usually a formal matter conducted across a leather topped desk, but part of an ongoing relationship between worker and client in which befriending may well be one element.

4b [i] Frequency

Informal information was present in the majority of interviews [26 out of 40] and was the second most frequent form of informative intervention.

4b [ii] Content

The content of informal information exchanges was too extensive to categorise. It ranged from general conversations on the rising rate of divorce [interview

10], the date of the local Whit walks [interview 11] and the latest fashion [interview 13], to the problems of taking back overdue library books [interview 39].

In many cases, the information was directly related to the client's concern but the worker would add his or her own comments or asides.

4b [iii] Examples

In interview 1, the client is worried about the dangers of her elderly father smoking in bed. She wonders whether the worker has come across this before:

"I have come across it - wives who can hardly close their eyes at night they are so worried about this. It's a dangerous habit in the elderly in bed".

and:

"I had another lady whose husband slept upstairs and she slept downstairs and she was terrified the bedroom would go up in smoke - because it's so easy if you are a bit dithery to drop the cigarette".

This information is not helpful in a practical sense to the client but it helps to convey that the worker understands and sympathises with the problem and offers possible comfort in the fact that the client is not alone in her fear.

In interview 3, the worker is talking about a departmental magazine which gives details of children who are available for fostering. She adds her own rather mischevious comments to the information she is giving to the client:

"And there are lots of gorgeous pictures of children waiting for long term homes. They all look like angels on the pictures!".

Throughout the sample there are instances, many quite trivial, of social workers making observations and comments that add warmth and interest to the interview.

4b [iv] Criticism

It may be this more conversational style that Baldock and Prior [1981] pick up when they describe the social work interview as having a "curiously ramshackle air". Talking about how social workers begin interviews they say:

"They preferred to begin by avoiding the main reason for the meeting and talking about something quite unimportant. The workers would follow the initial greeting by launching into a casual and apparently irrelevant warm up stage".

They conclude that these conversational gambits serve as a covert way of getting the client to talk:

"Appearing casual, even disorganised, they systematically collected information from their clients and got them to talk in a purposeful way about their problems".

The evidence from the present sample does not indicate anything sinister. Giving informal information in a

casual or conversational way seemed to be much more a part of providing a warm and relaxed atmosphere in which worker and client could work together.

4b [v] Interviews without Informal Information

The sixteen interviews which did not contain informal information were examined to see whether they were more brisk and businesslike. This was not found to be the case. The social workers in these interviews tended to use alternative means of creating a warm and enabling atmosphere, such as the use of supportive interventions, active listening techniques and reflective comments to indicate empathy and understanding. These techniques were also apparent in the interviews containing informal information, indicating that a conversational approach may be simply one of a range of options in the social worker's repertoire of interviewing skills.

4c Theoretical Information

As well as practical information, social workers also give a certain amount of information which is designed to help clients towards a better understanding of themselves, their relationships, or their situations. These are not interpretive comments which lead to insights in a psychoanalytical sense. They are statements about feelings, family relationships, child development and other matters of which the worker is presumed to have professional knowledge and experience.

4c [i] Frequency

The majority of interviews contained theoretical information [26 out of 40]. The incidence was, however, lower than for practical information. There were 150 interventions of a theoretical nature as against 250 of a practical nature.

The incidence was generally low, ranging from 1 to 12 interventions in each interview. Two interviews fell outside the normal range: interview 24 contained 24 theoretical interventions, largely concerned with the problems of children in care; interview 38 contained 22 interventions largely concerned with helping a child to understand the sort of factors that had led to his parents placing him in care.

4c [ii] Content

There was a wide range of information given out relating to child care, family relationships and personal development. The nature of grief and depression, mental illness, the needs of the elderly, the position of step-parents and the position of local authority house-parents were some of the varied topics discussed.

Examples

Information based on Professional Expertise

Some theoretical information is clearly based on a body of knowledge concerning child development and family relationships. In interview 38, the worker tries to share this knowledge with her 13 year old client, whose family has refused to see him ever again, to help him understand the circumstances that have led up to his reception into care. This information is not value free. Her object is to make the client feel less blameworthy but also to absolve his parents from blame. By drawing out a life chart on a piece of paper, she attempts to demonstrate visually the various problems and stresses within the family:

"So here we are with this babe here and this mum - both feeling unhappy. And mum feeling badly about herself because she is not able to cope with this baby, and not understanding why. So sometimes when this happens, this baby here is seen as a problem, a difficult child. Do you understand why?".

The worker here is drawing on her theoretical knowledge and applying it to the case in hand. Similarly in interview 32, the worker uses his knowledge of sibling relationships to help a young mother understand why her toddler son may have become so difficult to manage:

"It is sometimes the case that the middle child can be quite difficult - because the baby is bound to get the attention because she is the baby, isn't she? And the eldest had quite a lot of attention before he was born.....".

In interview 14, the worker tries to explain the concept of peer group pressure to a mother who sees her 13 year old daughter as a problem:

"Not being that secure, she does need to conform a lot and that is in conflict with what her family want".

Occasionally in the interviews, the information took the form of explaining a theoretical approach. In interview 30, the worker introduces the client to a method of problem solving known as "solution training". She begins the interview by saying a little about how she has been feeling:

Worker: "Well, that fits in neatly with solution training. Start with the discomfort, recognise the problem, diagnose the problem, analyse the problem, sort out options and evaluate the outcome".

The rest of the interview is an attempt to use this framework as a way of teaching the client to solve problems for herself.

In interview 37, the worker tries to put over a more

psychodynamic approach to a mother who finds herself unable to cope with a severely disturbed teenaged daughter:

Worker: "There is no clear cut answer. When things change it won't be because you suddenly thought 'Oh, there it is!'. It will be because of a gradual recognition and acceptance of things. I mean you said something a while back about the memory of a child that had been left or something. I think it's the small things like that".

Information from Other Sources

Most of the information given in the sample interviews does not represent any particular body of knowledge. It simply represents the views and opinions of the social workers:

".....the kind of knowledge of social affairs and the psychology of man that any alert reader of the 'Guardian' or 'New Society' might be expected to have....".

[Davis 1981]

Some of it sounds like common sense, some like homespun wisdom, and some platitudinous.

In interview 14, the worker assures a distraught mother that her teenaged daughter's infatuation with the pop star Michael Jackson will soon fade. In interview 40, the

worker tells the client that as people get older, they get a bit more responsible. In interview 2, the worker warns the client that people will only trust him if they think he means what he says. In interview 8, the client knows what the worker is going to say before he says it - he has been trying to help her over the loss of her husband:

Worker: "The happier the marriage....".

Client: "The worse it's going to be".

Worker: "The worse it's going to be".

Such exchanges are the stuff of ordinary everyday conversation. They comprise the sort of information that any trusted adviser or friend might give. They may serve to emphasise the informal, befriending role of the worker alongside that of expert adviser.

4d Feedback Information

Making assessments forms a large part of the social workers job. Goldberg et al. [1979] estimated that 78% of all cases in their research sample contained some assessment activity. This figure rose to 99% in the cases of clients classed as having mental or emotional problems. The present study indicates that in a sizable number of cases the information from these assessments are fed back to the clients.

4d [i] Frequency

Information as a result of the social workers' assessment was fed back to clients in 16 of the 40 sample interviews. The frequency was low, generally between 1 and 7 interventions of this type in each interview. Interviews 14 and 35 were outside the normal range, having 14 and 11 interventions respectively.

4d [ii] Content

Social workers fed back their assessments either of the clients themselves, or of a third party such as a spouse, a son, or a daughter, or as in interview 35, of a total situation such as children living with their mother and a new step-father.

4d [iii] Examples

In interview 12, the worker is reviewing the progress made by an alcoholic client:

"We certainly think it's the right direction you are heading in....I think you do have a good understanding at this point in time, that gives you a good grounding upon which you can work over the next few months".

In interview 35, the worker goes further and makes explicit the thought process behind his assessment. The client has decided to relinquish custody of his children to his ex-wife:

"But going back to what I was saying earlier about my reservations about the time you were going through your soul-searching. I just wanted to be certain that you were making the right decisions and the right decisions for the right reasons. I thought initially that you were almost bending over backward to punish yourself for what you'd done and that you were almost discounting your own feelings - thinking, 'well, I deserve whatever comes to me for the way I've treated her'. May be even putting back a bit the feelings of the kids. But in the end, I think you have made the right decision for the right reasons and you have not been neglecting the children's point of view at all".

In the two examples above, the clients are the subjects of the assessments. In interview 3, the worker is discussing her views on the progress of a handicapped child with a respite foster mother. She gives positive feedback to bolster up the foster mother's own evaluation:

"She understands better now what is required of her, doesn't she?"

"She's come on a lot, developed tremendously".

"She needs individual attention".

In interview 14, the worker is discussing her view of a teenage girl with the girl's mother. She has been seeing the client separately at the child guidance clinic. Now, with the girl's permission, she is using her more positive

evaluation to put against the mother's more negative evaluation:

"The more I see her the more I see her strengths".

"I think she is better than she appears to you".

"She's a nice kid".

Giving feedback is indicative of an open style of interviewing. It is in contrast to the more covert style identified by Baldock and Prior [1981] in which the client is encouraged to talk at length about him/herself while the worker makes mental evaluations which are later committed to a confidential file. A sizable proportion [over one-third] of workers in the current sample were prepared to share their opinions with clients where appropriate. [In other interviews, particularly those concerning practical matters, the question of assessment did not always arise].

The function of feedback within the interview, would seem to be to place another opinion alongside the client's own, with the purpose either of supporting the client or of encouraging a re-evaluation.

4e Arrangements to Meet

This was a special form of information exchange concerning times and dates.

Sixteen interviews or just over one-third of the sample

contained information regarding meetings or further appointments. The incidence per interview was generally low except for interview 17 which contained 10 interventions of this nature - due to a certain amount of confusion as to the date of the next review meeting to discuss the progress of the client's daughter.

As most of these interventions occurred at the end of interviews [12 out of 16], they are discussed in Chapter 10.2 above [Beginnings and Endings].

4f Reporting Back

Face to face contact with clients is only one aspect of the social worker's job. Between visits, the worker has often written to or spoken with various people on the client's behalf. In some interviews, it was necessary for the worker to report back to the client, the content and result of these activities.

4f [i] Frequency

Fourteen interviews contained information of this type. It accounted for 62 verbal interventions over the sample as a whole. In 8 interviews, there were only a few comments bringing the client up to date, but in the remaining 6 interviews, reporting back was the major component of the interview.

4f [ii] Content

The people contacted by social workers between interviews included doctors, teachers, residential workers, colleagues, neighbours, foster parents and members of the client's own family.

Some interviews were simply concerned with relaying other people's views. In others, the worker used the device of reporting to emphasise his/her own views.

4f [iii] Examples

It was found that social workers rarely reported bald facts about work completed or negotiations undertaken on the client's behalf. There was usually a motive for bringing in a particular item of information at a certain point. The work done between interviews was discussed at the interviews and was regarded as part of the ongoing process of work with the client.

For example in interview 15, the worker uses the fact that she has written a court report about the client as a reminder to him to keep up his progress. The client has been a non-attender at his school:

"I wrote you a court report today and I wrote on it, 'J has attended all week' and I thought 'I hope I don't have to rewrite that'".

Later, she lets the client know that she has written to his teacher and wants him to understand why:

"I said in my letter to Mr S that I wanted him always to be there if you were finding things difficult because I think in the past when things have not been right you have sort of escaped, haven't you?".

The social worker in interview 33 is trying to help a thirteen year old who has been in trouble with the police. He is working closely with the school and with the boy's mother. This interview has been set up to inform the mother of the progress that has been made at school and to encourage her to do her share. The incidents he chooses to report can be seen as furthering this aim:

"He certainly cares a lot about you. You know Mr W [teacher] said to me that he asked J how his mother was, he asked him how you were, and he said J's face brightened up".

Workers sometimes used the reported views of others to bolster up their own views. This serves the purpose of allowing the worker to continue to promulgate unpopular opinions while absolving him/her of direct blame. In interview 23, the worker quotes the views of the client's foster mother with regard to him getting a job:

Worker: She still feels quite strongly that you are not interested in looking for work and she would say that if you were really interested in work you would smarten yourself up".

Client: "Why? Why should I smarten myself up?".

Worker: "Why? It's quite simple why. Because she would say that people get put off by your leather jacket and your badges".

Reported conversations can also be useful to the worker under pressure. In interview 1, the client is demanding to know why her elderly father is being discharged from hospital without adequate arrangements having been made for his care. This is how the worker manages to convey that it is not entirely her fault:

Worker: "I got a message from my colleague that your mum was worried about paying for her husband 'till she got home.....and I had a word with our doctor on Friday morning and he didn't know anything about it and neither did I.... What the consultant asked last Thursday morning at the ward round meeting we have every Thursday was, would I enquire because there was going to be a gap between either your mother going home or your mother being fit to look after him - whether I would enquire whether any of the younger generation in the family was in a position to have him, just to see whether he could be got more independent. So I rang your sister.....".

Workers need to be selective about the information they

report as some of it may be of a sensitive nature. For example the worker in interview 35 is reporting on a visit to the client's ex-wife. He has found that the children are well and happy but wants to put this over to the client without in any way devaluing his own role with them. He needs to let him know that the children miss him without leaving the impression that this is making them miserable.

Sometimes harsh facts have to be reported. In interview 36, the worker has to put it to a mother that the children have been saying that she does not feed them properly and that her husband has accused her of drinking.

Reporting information is not a strictly factual exercise. The research sample demonstrates that it can serve a number of functions and requires a variety of skills to operate in different situations. It also emphasises the fact that the face to face interview is only one part of a much wider process involving a variety of social networks in which the worker is active.

4g The Role of the Department/Worker

Rees [1978] suggests that clients find "social work" an imprecise term,

"Prior to meeting a social worker, these people [clients in his sample] were unsure about their entitlement to consult such personnel and had no precise knowledge of what they did".

Ignorance about the precise nature of social work is echoed in the community at large, in other professions and within social work itself. B.A.S.W. [1977] produced a report which attempted to define the social work task and more recently in 1982, the Barclay report addressed some of the same issues. The only point on which there is clear agreement is the imprecise and indefinable nature of the role of both departments and workers.

In the present sample some workers found it necessary to clarify for clients certain aspects of their role and function.

4g [i] Frequency

Statements concerning the social work position occurred in a quarter of all interviews [10]. These accounted for only one or two interventions per interview except in the case of interview 37 [3 interventions].

4g [ii] Examples

In interview 35, the client wishes to know whether the social services will remain involved with the family of his ex-wife, to keep an eye on the children:

Worker: "Not really, no.....in the same way that I haven't been doing really while you have been having them. Had the thing been cut and dried in your favour, probably I would have pulled

out. It was because we knew the case was hanging in the air that I was obliged to call now and again - to see if everything is OK - if there had been any changes".

The client in interview 14, is also worried about terminating contact. The worker has to reassure her that there is always "an open door".

The client in interview 2 however, is seriously thinking of terminating contact himself. The worker explains his position:

"You don't have to have a social worker. You are not in care. You are out of care. You are living in a house with other people. I am quite happy for you to keep coming to see me.....".

Sometimes workers need to reassure clients that they will continue to receive help. In interview 31, the psychiatric social worker explains to the mother of a schizophrenic girl that he will continue to supervise her once she has left hospital. In interview 16, the worker assures a client who is moving from the district that he will still visit and will be arranging alternative provision.

Some clients misunderstand the social worker's role. In interview 22, the worker who is preparing a court report concerning custody proceedings, has to make it clear to

the father in the case that he will also be interviewing the mother and the children independently. In interview 24, the worker has to explain that the client should not bring up her housing difficulties at a child care review:

"....but the people who are there are not particularly interested and they'll all turn round and say 'Well, that needs to be done by me. That's one of my jobs'".

In a more light-hearted vein, the social worker in interview 23 plays on the client's ignorance of social work practice to tease him about his girlfriend:

"You know if you are in care, your social worker has to approve your girlfriends? Oh, yes. They definitely do. You could be led astray!".

Explanations of the social work role represented only a small fraction of information giving interventions. The present research does not allow us to say what misapprehensions remained amongst the client population, but within the sample interviews, social workers appeared to show a willingness to clarify misunderstandings, give assurances and explain their position to the client where appropriate.

4h Purpose of the Interview

Only 7 out of the 40 sample interviews contained any information about the purpose of the interview. As these generally occurred at the beginning of interviews, they

are discussed in full in Chapter 10.1 above [Beginnings and Endings].

5. Ways of Giving Information

Taking the sample as a whole, the manner in which workers gave information to their clients tended to be unstructured, informal and conversational. A lack of clarity was noted. This was mitigated to a certain extent by the opportunity to expand on issues during discussion with clients. It was also noted that social workers sometimes had to handle sensitive and emotionally charged information which did not lend itself easily to a more formal, structured approach.

5a Clarity

Hargie et al. [1983] consider clarity to be the most important consideration in giving information. The authors isolate seven key elements which combine to achieve this:

1. Planning, terminology, and articulation.
2. Fluency - avoiding hesitations, "uhms" and "ers".
3. Avoiding vagueness - "things like that", "etc".
4. Appropriate language - avoid jargon.
5. Providing emphasis - through repetition, gestures, facial expression.
6. Careful use of illustrations and examples.
7. Summary of key points.

With one or two exceptions, the social workers in the sample showed scant regard for these principles. For example, the worker in interview 35 is explaining to his client about the preparation of a custody report for the court:

"So what we do now is to write the report out again and send it in. There has been no date given at the moment. I think they are just waiting for the report. There is no great rush for it no doubt. They would have had it a bit earlier if I had managed to catch up with you. I hadn't realised what you were doing, so having failed to make contact with you three, maybe four times, I thought I'd better leave a note now and ask you to get in touch with me to say when it would be convenient to see you. I tried all sorts of different times. I had been told, I can't remember who by, maybe it was the nursery, that you were at the Nags Head but I didn't know whether that was just evenings and I thought, well, if I try and concentrate on trying to get hold of you during the day, I might do better then. Anyway, it's all been done now".

Although the gist of this passage is clear to the researcher and presumably to the client, it could be criticised on several grounds. It contains too many subordinate clauses, the inclusion of irrelevant data and unnecessary repetition.

This style of imparting information may be judged even less efficient when it comes to imparting large amounts of factual data. In interview 6, the worker is explaining to a young man who had been adopted as a baby, how to trace his natural parents. Here the informal, unplanned approach leads to a sense of confusion:

"This form, I can complete it on behalf of the registrar general - no, I'm sorry, I'm getting confused, there is another form that I can complete and send off for your original birth certificate if you'd like to do that. You have to pay for it. It costs £4-60, and you send the money off with it. The information you get back on that is very valuable. You will get the place you were born which may be a hospital, a nursing home or a private address - what was in fact her normal address. Now there may or may not be something about your natural father on the birth certificate. If your mother was married and it would seem that she probably wasn't because they would put formerly - you know, there would be another surname on this birth certificate application form if she was married - but she may have been, it's not impossible. If she was married then it would probably have something about her husband, presuming he was the father of the child. If she wasn't married to your natural father, then unless he was actively involved with her at the time and actually went to register the birth with her, or else she'd already got a court order against him, a paternity order, then his

name wouldn't be on the birth certificate. I would say the chances are there wouldn't be any details about him at all on the birth certificate that is. So you may find a certain amount of information but really only a couple of addresses are likely. So if you want to get a bit more background, there may also be her occupation possibly, but that isn't necessarily so. If you want more information about her circumstances and possibly about your father then there is another form I am entitled to sign....." etc.

Even allowing for natural variations in talkativeness and style, this does not seem an efficient way of getting large quantities of information across to the client.

The question posed by the research data on information giving is whether the adoption of a warm, conversational style in which issues are discussed as between friends is compatible with the more didactic approach that may sometimes be necessary to impart factual information to clients. Workers may well feel that they have given clients a great deal of information [and the statistics show that they do so] but without recourse to proper sequencing, listings and summaries, clients may be excused if they are unaware of the precise nature of the information they are supposed to have acquired at the end of the interview.

5b The Use of Discussion

Social workers lack of clarity may be mitigated to some extent by the opportunity afforded for clarification through discussion. In a one to one situation such as an interview, as opposed to classroom teaching or a meeting, information can be tailored to individual needs. Feedback is obtained through discussion and points can be explained and expanded as the response demands. This applies to both practical information and information about family matters and relationships.

5b [i] Practical Matters

In interview 1, worker and client are discussing arrangements for the client's elderly father when he is discharged from hospital. The client has arranged for him to go into a private nursing home. It occurs to the worker to ask about the fees:

"How are you going to manage about the fees there? Can you afford it? Is there any problem?"

The client replies that the family are all going to contribute toward the cost. The worker then informs her about getting help with the fees:

"You could apply, you know for help from the DHSS with fees. Supplementary Benefit".

The client does not sound very interested. She says that

her father is not in receipt of Supplementary Benefit. The worker follows this with information that is directly relevant to the clients own case:

"Doesn't matter. He's taking on a bigger financial commitment now. If his capital is below £2,500, and he hasn't got the income to meet the fees, once he is in, apply for Supplementary Benefit".

The client again expresses some doubts about taking this up. The worker reassures her by giving her more specific information:

"If he would send a letter of application to the Social Security for Sale which is - I'll just find it for you - It's Dalton House. It's quite possible. It's done very often".

5b [ii] Information about Relationships

Issues concerning feelings and relationships may be raised by the client. Discussion of these issues may involve discussion techniques such as worker self-revelation, supportive and challenging statements as the worker struggles to convey more complex ideas.

In interview 24, the client is worried that it is proving difficult to integrate his three children back into family life after their spending a considerable length of time in care. The worker gives him information in order to help him understand why they are having such problems:

"....With those three girls, since they've been in care and they've been in a children's home and now they are in the family group home, they learn a different way of living, they learn a different way of life. They lose touch with what relationships and what families are all about. And consequently, when they started coming here and started to try and become part of a family again, they have not known really how to behave....".

The client subsequently makes the point that their thoughtless and destructive behaviour is still wrong. The worker accepts this but returns to his main argument:

"Of course it's wrong. If you like they are damaged children, damaged property. They have been damaged".

The client cannot accept this. He maintains that some standards have to be enforced. Again, the worker concedes but returns once more to his main argument:

"Well, I agree that they can't be allowed to get away with everything. What I am saying is that it is unfair of you to expect them to meet you half way - because I think that as damaged children if you like, they have had a pretty chaotic life...".

Unlike a lecture or a talk, the social work interview provides the opportunity for the speaker to go back over the same ground, to put things in a different way and deal

with any doubts or queries the client may have on the spot.

5c Other Types of Information

Not all information is given in response to concerns raised by the client. Workers also have agendas and there are pieces of information which they need to relay to the client. This is particularly true of reported information, statutory information and information based on the worker's assessment of the client, a member of the client's family or of the general situation.

Such subject matter may be of a sensitive nature and workers may have to choose their words carefully. Timing may also be important. For example, the worker in interview 36 has to face the client with the allegation that she has been neglecting her children. This piece of information comes towards the middle of the interview and the worker is careful to prepare the ground by leaving open the possibility that the children's father may have turned them against their mother:

"That is why I am wondering has he, sort of made the kids antagonistic toward you or have you drifted that way over a period of time....".

He tries hard not to make the allegations sound too damning:

"Because the kids don't say that much. I think they are

kind of choosy what they say and what they don't say. But they have sometimes said 'Oh, my mother never does this for us' and painted a picture that you don't care less about them. As I say, they don't do it all the time, but from time to time they do".

Having given the client time to take this in, he goes on to cite more hard evidence, although his manner is still tentative:

"I mean all those reports we used to get about the kids being badly dressed and underfed and all the rest of it - they have apparently been backing them up to the foster mother. I think the first week they were there. I think they have stopped saying it now, but the first week they were there, I think she said they were saying things like, at tea time, she'd say -

What do you want for tea? This or that?

Oh, we had fish fingers or something at dinner time.

Yes, well, that was dinner time, now it's tea time.

What! Are we having two meals in one day!".

Unfortunately, social workers are all too often the bearers of unpalatable information. In the sample interviews, it was felt that, generally, this was dealt with sensitively and in a non-judgemental manner.

6. Information and the Client

6a Requests for Information

Social workers gave a great deal of information of various kinds in the research sample. This activity accounted for up to 42% of the total number of verbal interventions per interview. Yet it was found that very little of this was actively requested by clients. In only 23 of 40 interviews did the clients ask for information and the majority of these contained only one or two questions.

Rather than ask for information directly, clients in the sample tended to state their problems in an open way which allowed the worker to respond not only with sympathy and support but also with information or advice as appropriate. Information giving is one of a repertoire of helping interventions at the worker's disposal. There is no need for clients to ask for it directly as they will get it in any case, if the worker sees fit. In this way, information is seen to "grow" out of other conversations.

For example, in interview 8, the client has received a letter from the housing department which she does not fully understand. Her request for help is couched in terms of her feelings about the matter:

Client: "I went down to say they wasn't giving me anything towards my rent as I thought. But I might have been reading it wrong. But it

worried me. That is what set me off on Saturday morning and it made me really poorly all weekend".

The worker responds in a factual way by referring to the letter:

Worker: "What this means is that they have not worked out your rebate yet. In other words, they are presuming you don't get a rebate and they are simply working out how much behind you are now".

In interview 20, a mother describes her feelings of hopelessness and frustration in dealing with a difficult toddler. She receives information in the form of a behavioural programme designed to help her cope better with the tantrums and tears. Similarly, in interview 20, a mother describes how low she feels staying at home all day with her small boy. She receives information about the local playgroup.

The research evidence suggests that clients ask for information indirectly when they express their anxieties. Workers respond with information when it is seen as an appropriate way of dealing with the anxiety. It is one of a repertoire of skills which include encouraging the client to talk, making reflective comments or asking further questions.

6b The Worker's Need to Control the Interview

It is possible that the pattern of information exchange described above could have evolved in response to the worker's need to control the interview process. In Chapter 15 [Closed Questions] it was suggested that a question can be a very powerful tool within the interview. The questioner holds the initiative, defines the subject matter and is able to limit the range of possible responses. Workers in the sample seemed reluctant to hand over this power to their clients.

When the client is allowed to ask a series of questions, the flow of the interview may be disrupted. The client in interview 11, uses this technique deliberately to deflect the worker from his purpose which is to persuade the client to clean up his flat. Despite his best efforts, the worker gets drawn into a purposeless discussion, although he finally manages to turn it round to his advantage. [The comments in brackets are the researcher's own]:

Worker: "This is why I want the house to become cleaner so you can become better in yourself and begin to enjoy life a bit more".

Client: "Do you enjoy life?".

Worker: "Mm. I do. But sometimes I have to do things I don't really want to do". [Still in control]

Client: "How is that woman who had her leg off?".

Worker: "She's been in hospital and she is coming out of hospital". [Showing impatience]

Client: "She's alright?".

Worker: "Well, she is going to have to go back in soon".
[Showing some annoyance]

Client: "Gangrene?".

Worker: "Mm". [Unco-operative]

Client: "She'll have to have the other one off".

Worker: "Probably". [Hostile]

Client: "Well, that is what upsets me about Arthur Askey. He was such a lively little fellow. They took one leg off then they took the other one off. Well, it upset me that".

Worker: "He's dead now isn't he?". [Showing momentary interest]

Client: "He's dead now, yes. But he was a lively little fellow".

Worker: "You see, someone like this woman, she is in a lot of pain, but she doesn't just sit back in a chair. She does things". [Back in control].

As well as deflecting the purpose of the interview, client questioning may lay workers open to challenge, as in the following extract from interview 24. The client is finding it difficult to cope with his three daughters on their return from Care:

Client: "I mean, just how far can we take it and accept it without making a stand on it?".

Worker: "Well, that is up to you. I can't answer that".

Client: "One doubt I have, is whether they are just using their mother and me to get out of Care".

Worker: "Well, to a certain extent, I'm sure they are".

Client: "So where do their loyalties lie?".

Certain workers could find this style of client questioning uncomfortable and difficult to cope with.

The issue of why workers seem so reluctant to relinquish full control of the interview and allow themselves to be questioned is addressed in Chapter 15. It is acknowledged that the worker is responsible for setting up the interview and ensuring that it is successfully conducted and that also on occasion, he/she may need to reinforce statutory authority [e.g. with regard to child abuse and mental health admissions]. It is also acknowledged that the client colludes to some extent in a pattern of interviewing which is largely controlled by the worker.

With regard to giving information, these factors could contribute to the pre-emptive way in which workers give out facts and opinions to their clients. As noted above [see item 5b] this does not necessarily mean that information is not subsequently discussed and debated with clients. Indeed, evidence from the sample interviews suggests that this is often the case.

6c Role Expectations within the Interview

The evidence from the sample suggests that both client and worker accept the "rules of the game" within the interview. All interviews conformed, to a greater or lesser extent, to a stereotype of the client expressing his/her thoughts and feelings to a social worker who offers information, advice, support or other interventions as appropriate.

Clients in the sample who requested information tended to do so in a very tentative way. In interview 12, the worker has asked whether there is anything else the client would like to know about:

Client: "I think it's more or less OK. I'm not going to go into the Giro syndrome. I'm waiting for that to come and it hasn't come and that makes me a little bit, not uptight exactly, but it hasn't come. I mean I haven't had one since I come here".

In interview 26, the worker is helping her client to make up her mind about going into an elderly persons home by encouraging her to ask more about it. Despite the workers prompting, the client sounds apologetic:

Client: "Well, it's not very noisy is it? I wonder if it would be noisy. You have to say these things don't you, if they are on your mind".

Worker: "Of course. That's why I'm asking you really. I want you to be able to talk about any worries you have about going there".

Once the main business of the interview is over it sometimes seems that a spell has been broken and clients begin to talk and act quite differently:

Client: "Where are you going for your holidays?".

Worker: "Connemara".

Client: "Hope the weather bucks up for you then. When are you going?".
[Interview 9]

Client: "How old are your children?".

Worker: "Seven and nine".

Client: "Both girls aren't they?".
[Interview 29]

These extracts show that the clients are not innately

fearful of asking questions and do not regard their workers with undue deference. Yet within the confines of the interview process, they conform to the stereotype of clients expressing their thoughts and feelings to an attentive and sympathetic social worker.

Summary and Conclusion

The skills of imparting information are generally neglected in the social work literature despite the fact that this behaviour forms a major part of the social work interview.

As expected, a greater proportion of informative interventions were found in topics containing a high factual content such as statutory or practical matters. However, a high proportion of information given by workers in the sample also concerned "soft" subjects such as feelings and relationships.

Much of the information given in the sample was of a general nature and was delivered in an informal and conversational style. These comments contributed much to the building of a warm, enabling atmosphere in which to work and in many ways set the tone for the interviews.

The data indicated that all categories of information tended to be given in a spontaneous, informal way rather than being planned and clearly articulated. While there is no reason to believe that any of it was inaccurate, some was muddled and confusing. This was particularly unfortunate where precise, factual information was required. With regard to feelings and relationships, it was suggested that workers failed to distinguish professional expertise from homespun wisdom and that

clients could have difficulty in distinguishing between the two.

The fact that information was openly debated within the interview could mitigate the lack of clarity to some extent. Information giving was correlated with discussion behaviours such as supporting and challenging statements. Misunderstandings could be dealt with during discussion in a way that was tailored to the individual needs of the client.

Clients themselves almost never asked for information directly. By expressing their problem or their feelings, they stimulated the workers to respond with the necessary information. The workers in the current sample, for their part, seemed never at a loss for information to impart on a wide variety of subjects.

Chapter 17

Direct Guidance

Introduction

Direct guidance involves a recommendation designed to influence the client's behaviour or decisions in specific directions. It contains a moral injunction implying that the client "should" or "ought" to follow a certain course of action. The strength of the injunction varies, leaving the client less or more free to comply:

"Why don't you try talking to your mother about it?".

"You really ought to discuss this with your wife".

"You must register with a doctor as soon as possible".

Heron [1975] defines valid prescriptive interventions as those which do not encroach on the client's right to self-determination and are presented in such a way that the client feels free to accept or reject them. He warns against "benevolent take-over" in which the worker makes a series of kindly recommendations which the client could very well have determined for him/herself and also against "moralistic oppression" in which the capacity for authentic behaviour is frustrated by imposing values on the client.

Advising, suggesting, urging and insisting have been contentious behaviours in social work for many years.

Such forms of intervention appear to run contrary to notions of client self-determination as enshrined by Biestek [1961] in The Casework Relationship and also to the parallel trend for client-centred counselling on the Rogerian model [see, for example, Ivey and Authier 1978]. Research into social work, however, has shown that a considerable amount of advice is given and that clients both expect and welcome this.

Hollis [1968] is often quoted as describing direct guidance as the hallmark of the clumsy or inexperienced social worker. In fact, although she believed it was preferable, wherever possible, to induce clients to think things through for themselves, she also recognised advice as a useful form of treatment:

"As long as the worker is philosophically committed to the value of self-direction, reasonably conscious of his own reactions to the client's need for dependence and alert to every possibility of encouraging the client to think for himself, he will make wise use of procedures of influence".

[p.98].

There is ample evidence that clients both expect and welcome advice in the social work interview. An early study by Reid and Shapiro [1969], which divided workers into high, low and moderate users of advice, found that clients of low users said they did not receive enough advice; very few clients expressed favourable reactions to the low use of advice or thought that high users gave too

much advice.

In the classic British study by Mayer and Timms [1970], the authors found that their sample of working class clients also expected and welcomed advice. American work in the 70's echoed this theme. Clients in Maluccio's study [1977] reported that they expected to receive more advice and over half were dissatisfied by the worker's failure to give advice. A study by Ewart and Kutz [1976] at a child guidance centre found that clients welcomed advice as it stimulated them to consider more helpful ways of dealing with the children's problems.

There is research evidence to show that social workers are moving towards a greater acceptance of advice giving as part of their repertoire of interview skills. Butrym [1976] points out that there may have been a shift over time to seeing self-determination less as a fixed principle and more as a goal to be attained. Sainsbury [1975] found that social workers gave a great deal of advice. This was acceptable in the context of the author's notion of "befriending" which encompasses the idea of partnership, intimacy and sharing in relationships. In a later work by Sainsbury, Nixon and Phillips [1982], the authors found that advice giving ranked first as the most helpful type of intervention among a sub-group of workers in a statutory agency. It is interesting to note that it was not ranked so highly by any of the corresponding sub-groups of clients.

In the current sample, workers did not seem reticent about giving direct guidance. It was given in different ways on a variety of topics and it elicited a variety of responses from clients. These issues are discussed below.

1. Frequency

Direct guidance was one of the most frequent forms of intervention in the sample. It occurred in 34 out of the 40 interviews. Within interviews, frequency varied from 1 to 27 interventions. Twelve out of the 34 interviews contained 5 or less interventions. Only 2 interviews contained 20 or more. The majority of interviews [20] contained between 6 and 19 interventions. [See Appendix 29].

Higher frequencies could be associated with more lengthy discussion of a particular issue rather than frequent guidance on diverse topics. For example, in interview 11, the client is a socially isolated man whose main problem is self-neglect; all 20 instances of direct guidance over the course of some 35 minutes are directed at getting him to clean up his flat and himself. Consequently there are injunctions on dealing with the excreta from his cats, dealing with the flies that are attracted to the excreta, dealing with the contaminated food that results from the flies and the fleas that result from the cats.

2. Relationship to Other Variables

Direct guidance was positively correlated with worker self-revelation and the use of both supportive and challenging statements. This suggests that it occurred in interviews in which there was some discussion or debate with the client as all three of these behaviours tend to be associated with this mode of interaction.

Direct guidance was also correlated with higher worker talk-times, longer interviews and a high number of topic changes per interview. This fits with the observations above in that longer interviews in which the worker was more active tended to contain more discussion; short, concise worker-directed interviews tended not to contain lengthy debates; counselling interviews could be long but typically contained only one or two main subjects and were more client-centred with the worker taking a less active role.

As with worker self-revelation, offering practical help and challenging behaviours, the use of direct guidance was positively correlated with male social workers. Although the numbers are very small [11 male workers], a picture emerges in the sample of the more traditionally masculine assertive behaviours being associated with the male social workers. [See Appendices 36 and 37].

3. Relationship to Content

Direct guidance accounted for a relatively high proportion of the verbal behaviours in the summaries and conclusions to interviews. At the end of a discussion, it is not surprising that suggestions are made or guidelines set for future action. Direct guidance also figured prominently in making arrangements for future meetings as in this context the worker has to make it clear what he/she would like to happen.

Other subject areas in which the use of direct guidance played a considerable role [between 6% and 7% of all interventions] were the discussion of the clients' activities, practical matters, statutory matters and discussion of third parties such as the clients' children, parents or spouses.

Direct guidance was used least in a discussion of the clients' health, their feelings and events in their lives. These are areas in which the workers presumably found it less appropriate to make suggestions or offer moral guidance.

4. Types of Direct Guidance

4a Practical Guidance

This covered the field of social work expertise relating to employment, housing, welfare benefits, day care and residential provision for different client groups. In

addition, it ranged over a few miscellaneous subjects such as fire precautions, writing a letter to a friend, how to go about seeing a local politician and getting a radiogram to work.

It was estimated that just over one-third of all guidance concerned practical matters [110 out of 317 interventions].

4b Moral Guidance

Moral guidance involves a recommended change in attitudes or behaviour. It was contained in 30 of the 40 interviews and accounted for over two-thirds of all direct guidance. It can be divided into 4 main subject areas:

i] Helping the client to make a difficult life decision such as having children home from Care [interview 36] or deciding to go into an elderly persons' home [interview 36]. There were 4 interviews containing guidance of this type.

ii] Giving guidance on coping with powerful feelings such as loss following bereavement [interview 8], stress [interview 30], or aggression [interview 13]. There were 7 interviews containing guidance of this type.

iii] Helping the client improve the general quality of his/her life, for example, by attending

a day centre [interview 10], joining a group [interview 18] or getting a job [interview 20]. There were 11 interviews containing guidance of this type.

iv] Coping with difficult relationships such as parent/child [interviews 14, 27] or spouse [interviews 14, 36]. There were 12 interviews containing guidance of this type.

It is sometimes difficult to disentangle practical and moral advice. For example in interview 23 the worker is giving the client, an unemployed youth in Care, some practical advice about getting a job. At the same time it is implied that it would be "good" for him to do so. Given these difficulties it was still clear from the sample that the majority of guidance given was moral guidance.

4c The Source of Direct Guidance

Some direct guidance to do with the workings of the Welfare State stems from a body of knowledge which social workers acquire either in the course of their training or afterwards from books, courses or their professional colleagues. This knowledge is available to anyone who can read and understand the government pamphlets but social workers are seen as having special competency in this field.

They are also expected to have some competency in child care practice and care of the mentally ill, the elderly and the handicapped if they are working in those fields. They have to deal with the effects of social and economic deprivation in all its forms. The knowledge base for this second area of guidance is more amorphous. Not all of it is based on verifiable research data. Much of it depends on the moral stance of the social worker.

The factors affecting the moral stance of the social worker can be divided into five categories:

- i] The law
- ii] The standards set by society
- iii] Specific policy decisions
- iv] Professional knowledge
- v] Personal philosophy.

Each of these are discussed below.

i] The Law as a Source of Moral Guidance

Social workers like everyone else are bound to uphold the law. Thus the worker in interview 15 concerns herself with the problem of a child who is not attending school. The worker in interview 27 advises the client that she may not leave the hospital or start proceedings for the revocation of a Care Order while she remains detained under the Mental Health Act. The worker in interview 16

castigates his client for selling her milk token book.

ii] The Standards Set by Society

In interview 11, the worker is faced with a flat that is in a filthy, unhealthy state due to sheer neglect by the client. The social work effort is devoted to getting the client to clean up the place to accord with generally accepted standards of hygiene and decency.

In interview 23, the worker tries to get a young man to smarten up his dress when he goes after a job. He makes it clear that these are not necessarily his standards but the standards of potential employers.

iii] Specific Policy Decisions

In interview 2 the worker advises a mentally handicapped client that he is better off living in the community than in a residential establishment. This is in accordance with a policy of care in the community and is bound to be reinforced by the social worker, if only because the long-stay establishments are gradually being run down.

In a more limited context, the worker in interview 1 is charged with enforcing the decision of her clinical team to discharge an old man from

hospital, although this is against the wishes of the family.

iv] Professional Knowledge

It is sometimes difficult to tell whether guidance is based on professional knowledge or on personal belief. In interview 32, the worker is advising a young mother on the construction of a behavioural star chart to help in the management of her small son. It seems clear that this is derived from a body of expertise not normally available to people.

By contrast, in interview 4, the worker advises the foster mother of a mentally handicapped child not to let her play in the paddling pool in case she slips and falls. This advice may be based on knowledge of other handicapped children who have had accidents or it may be based on the worker's own fears and worries. Possibly the foster mother is right when she protests that the paddling pool is perfectly safe.

In interview 19, the client has a 12 year old son who is in trouble for smashing up a telephone box. The worker suggests that he take up football or some similar activity. The belief that young boys should take up healthy outdoor pursuits to keep them out of trouble is widespread but how far, in

this case, it is based on professional knowledge and how far on personal belief, is open to question.

v] Personal Philosophy

In some cases guidance is more explicitly personal. In interview 20, the worker is trying to influence the client to save money. She says that since the Child Benefit Allowance was raised she has been putting aside the difference into savings. She recommends that the client do the same. Similarly, she recommends giving up smoking since she has also managed to achieve this herself.

In interview 29 the social worker links the Japanese theory of bio-rhythms to the management of clinical depression. Talking of his own "bad days" he says:

"...it seems to me that they happen with some degree of regularity and when I have checked back - I bought a book with a diary of your own personal bio-rhythms - I found with some consistency that it occurred on days when I was in a critical state....".

He goes on to advise the client not to try to do too much on his "critical days".

It is not the intention of this author to challenge the

validity of any particular belief but only to question whether the client is able to distinguish the personal from the professional in the giving of social work guidance.

In practice, direct guidance may originate from all five sources at once. The social worker almost certainly upholds the law. He/she may well support specific policy decisions and adhere in general to the standards set by society. His/her personal philosophy may accord well with these general principles. Professional knowledge may become merged with general knowledge gained through life experiences.

None of which can help the client much when it comes to distinguishing "good" from "bad" advice.

5. Ways of Giving Guidance

Direct guidance in the sample has been divided into five types: requests, reassurance, directives, advice and suggestions. Requests and reassurance are specialised forms while directives, advice and suggestions constitute a hierarchy of guidance from the strongest to the weakest forms. Each type is discussed below with reference to both practical and moral dimensions.

a] Reassurance

Most often this consisted of the worker drawing on

his/her knowledge of similar situations and telling the client not to worry. There were 21 instances of reassurance over the sample as a whole contained in only 8 interviews. The incidence per interview was between 1 and 5. Reassurance was given on both practical and moral problems in roughly equal proportions.

In interview 1, the worker offers reassurance by telling the client that if her elderly father has to come back into hospital she should not look on this as a failure. She explains that many old men need to come in and out of hospital on a regular basis. [Reassurance on a moral matter].

In interview 7, the worker reassures the client that the Council is not about to put up her rent:

"Well, they're not going to do that so don't let that bother you any more". [Reassurance on a practical matter].

b] Requests

In making a request the worker asks the client to take some action. Eight interviews contained requests accounting for only 9 out of the 319 instances of direct guidance. All the requests were of a practical nature. In interview 16 the worker asks the client to price some second-hand

baby carriages before the next meeting. In interview 28 the worker asks the client to make out a list of jobs to aid in the construction of a curriculum vitae.

c] Directives

In this form of intervention the worker assumes responsibility for directing the actions of the client and telling him/her what to do.

There were 22 directives in the sample but they were contained in only 5 interviews. Interview 30 alone contains 11 directives due to the peculiarities of the social work technique [instructions on body massage as a form of relaxation therapy].

All directives concerned practical matters. In interview 34 the worker tells the client, a 13 year old boy, to keep a diary of incidents at school. In interview 28, the worker tells the client what he must do in order to claim back-pay through his Union.

Interview 11 provides the only example of a client being told to do something against his own wishes. The worker, who has tried unsuccessfully to get the client to clean up his flat, finally assumes control and says that he will get the Home Help

service to do the job, warning that the client will have to help as well.

d] Advice

Advice does not contain the same degree of force as a directive but in the context of the social work interview it carries the moral authority of the worker and the implication that this is the "right" way to think or behave.

Advice formed the largest body of direct guidance. Thirty interviews contained advice comprising some two-thirds of all interventions in this category. It was mostly advice on moral issues. There were 44 pieces of advice about practical matters as against 184 on moral matters.

Practical advice is given in interview 1, in which the client is worried about the risks of her elderly father smoking in bed. The social worker advises her to buy a domestic fire extinguisher. Similarly in interview 8, the client is worried about the risk of intruders at night. The social worker advises her to put the light on if she hears anyone to warn them that she is awake.

Moral advice usually occurs in the context of doubts or conflicts in the client as to how to behave. In the following examples the worker is

telling the client how he/she should act as opposed to what each would normally do. In interview 13 the worker is advising her 13 year old client who is in trouble for hitting a teacher at school, to consider verbal rather than physical solutions when people make him angry:

"But can you do something else like saying really sternly, 'don't talk about my mum like that' or 'It makes me angry when you talk about my mum like that'".

The worker in interview 14 is giving moral advice to the mother of a difficult teenager:

"And if you ever have an opportunity to praise her, I think that a child who is not very secure needs more praise".

e] Suggestions

Suggestions do not have the force of other forms of direct guidance. Although they are attempts to influence the client and carry the moral authority of the professional, he/she is relatively more free to accept or reject the idea.

Fifteen of the 40 interviews contained suggestions. It was the next most frequent form of guidance after advice giving. The incidence within interviews ranged from 1 to 11.

In contrast to advice, most of the suggestions [27 out of 37] concerned practical matters. Some of these were quite trivial. For example in interview 8, the worker suggests that the client solve the problem of finding change for the gas meter by drawing some out of the bank each week. In interview 35, the worker suggests to the client who is grumbling about the cost of the launderette that he might look round for a cheap washing machine.

Suggestions concerning moral matters occurred in 10 interviews. In interview 36 the worker is helping a mother cope with her feelings about having her children back out of Care:

"Do you think it would be of any assistance to you if, while the kids were all out at school, you and I went down to speak to Mary [the foster mother] without the kids around?".

In interview 25, the social worker is discussing the client's sense of emptiness and lack of fulfilment since her family had grown up:

"What I was thinking, with your children growing up and away and with you not having been successful in getting pregnant, whether in the future it might be possible to do any kind of voluntary work with children so that you would have some contact with

children?".

Table 22 shows the incidence of the different types of direct guidance for the sample as a whole.

Table 22 - Ways of Giving Direct Guidance

Type of Guidance	Moral	Practical	Total	Interviews
Requests	0	9	9	8
Reassurance	11	10	21	8
Directives	0	22	22	5
Suggestions	10	27	37	15
Advice	184	44	228	30
Totals	207	110	317	N = 40

6. Direct Guidance and the Client

"After you went on Wednesday last week, I sat down and thought about what you'd talked to me about and it comforted me you know. I seem to get a lot out of it". [Interview 8].

Many social workers might like to imagine their clients saying something similar after their own weekly visits. Unfortunately, the evidence from the research sample does not support this image. At first view, it seems that guidance is rarely asked for and reluctantly followed by clients. A closer examination shows ways in which it was used constructively to open up discussion and lead to a

rational debate.

6a Asking for Guidance

Clients asked for guidance in only 4 of the sample interviews, [interviews 1, 8, 24 and 35].

In interview 1, the client has requested the interview to ask for help in coping with an elderly relative. The client in interview 8 is an old lady who has been recently widowed. She asks the worker for advice about dealing with financial matters. In interview 24, the client seeks guidance about how to handle his three daughters who are returning from a family group home. He asks what he should do if they do not arrive on time, what to do if they are ill and about other related matters. In interview 35, the client asks the social worker how he should handle the situation when his children relate disturbing things about his ex-wife and her new husband.

The fact that clients rarely ask for guidance does not necessarily mean that they do not expect to get it. The frequency with which direct guidance occurs in the sample interviews, suggests that seasoned clients may well have that expectation.

Some clients present their problems in such a way that guidance is called for. For example, the elderly lady in interview 26 is undecided about leaving sheltered accommodation and going into an elderly persons' home.

Responding to her dilemma and obvious distress, the worker makes various recommendations about visiting the home first, spending a few days there and talking to one of the residents.

In some cases guidance may be part of the contract, implicit or explicit, between worker and client. Indeed, in the case of child guidance clinics, guidance is part of the name of the agency. Thus it is reasonable to assume that the mother in interview 14 is expecting advice from the worker who is seeing her daughter at the clinic each week.

6b The Response to Guidance

The clients' response to guidance in the research interviews varied from uncritical acceptance to outright rejection.

The figures must be viewed with caution, as in most interviews [20 out of 34] there were responses which were difficult to evaluate. In some there was no audible response and, in others, either the response sounded non-committal or the worker did not give the client a chance to respond.

In addition, it is not possible from the research data to know what effect direct guidance had in the long term. It is probable that clients later think over what has been said in the interview and may alter their views or

behaviour accordingly. It is possible to say, however, that of the 30 interviews containing direct guidance for which data is available, all except one contained some acceptance, with or without reservations, of the guidance offered. Nineteen interviews contained one or more total rejections. [See Appendix 45].

In only 4 interviews [interviews 12, 30, 35 and 40] was all guidance offered accepted uncritically. The typical responses in the sample interviews was initial resistance whether or not the advice or suggestion was later accepted.

6c Resistance to Guidance

There was evidence of various forms of resistance in the research interviews. Some clients openly rejected the guidance. Others reacted by offering counter-arguments, providing excuses, changing the subject, verbally attacking the social worker or, in one case, getting a headache.

The client in interview 9 makes it quite clear she is not going to follow the social worker's advice. He puts it to her that she should talk to her doctor about changing her medication. She responds with:

"Well, I'm quite happy actually with the tablets I have at the moment".

In interview 29, the social worker is advising the client

on how to cope with his frequent bouts of depression. He talks at some length on this topic but at the end the client responds:

"Yeah. I think I'll be alright actually. Now when shall I see you again?".

The use of "actually" in both these excerpts seems to imply that the worker has totally misconstrued the situation.

The client in interview 30 offers an excuse as to why she will not be taking the workers advice. He has advised her to get her boyfriend to give her a body massage in order to help her relax. She is clearly uneasy about the idea:

"It's just that I feel so awful with him, 'cos he's not well either".

In interview 32, counter-arguments are produced by the client who is resisting the social workers suggestion about letting her toddler play outside:

Worker: "What about the back garden?".

Client: "They won't stay in the back garden".

Worker: "Can't you keep the door shut?".

Client: "Tom can climb up the gate".

Worker: "Can he climb over it? Can Mark?".

Client: "No. Mark can't but the minute the gate is open he will be out".

Worker: "Ah, but if the gate is shut and he is in there?".

Client: "Well, I suppose they'd play if I left the back door open, but Tom would find a way to get out".

The worker here is only talking about Mark, as Tom is away at an assessment centre, but the client has managed to confuse the issue still further by talking about both boys at once.

Interview 24 provides an example of the client challenging the worker personally. The worker has been advising the client about dealing with the problems of her three teenage daughters who are returning home after some considerable time in Care. He attempts to sympathise with the mother of the girls but she is unable to accept this:

Worker: "It is very, very frustrating at times".

Client: "I mean, for you to put kids in Care, it puts you in a job anyway".

Worker: "That's right. But also getting them back home is a job as well. It's easier taking them away than putting them back".

Client: "Yeah, because you can throw away the key on

them can't you?".

In interview 2, the client, a mentally handicapped young man, also challenges the worker directly. After having listened for about half an hour to evidently unwelcome recommendations about managing his money and attending a day centre, he mentions to the worker that his friend has suggested that he should get himself a new social worker.

Clients may also use various diversions to avoid having to accept advice. The divorced and separated wives in interviews 14, 19 and 35, each turn the conversation to their ex-husbands when guidance is offered. For example, in interview 14, the worker is advising the mother of a difficult 13 year old to give her more praise and encouragement. She responds:

"It's so hard - I get so angry about Tony [the father of the child] because I want him to say those things and he won't speak to me".

The client in interview 11 avoids having to take advice in another way. The worker has been trying without success to persuade him to clean up his flat and get it painted:

Worker: "The other thing we wanted to do last year but you said 'don't' was we wanted to get the place painted".

Client: "Did you? Got a headache".

Worker: "Have you? OK. Have I been moaning at you too much?".

Although resistance to guidance was very prevalent in the sample interviews, it must be remembered that this represents the clients' immediate reactions. In many cases advice and suggestions were taken up later, especially after a fuller discussion had taken place. Few of us like being told what to do, so it is perhaps not surprising that clients too tend to react negatively at first.

6d Factors Affecting the Response to Guidance

Three factors which, it was supposed, could affect how the client responds to guidance are the type of guidance, the way in which it is offered and the relationship between worker and client.

When the sample interviews were searched, evidence could not be found to support these hypotheses.

6d i] The Type of Guidance

Clients were as likely to accept or reject guidance on practical matters as they were on moral issues. Sometimes they seemed to reject quite ordinary, commonsense suggestions. For example in interview 17, the worker is advising the client who has had various problems since moving into his new house to go along to his local Housing Office:

Worker: "If there are any problems with any neighbours or things like that, you can always see your estate management officer".

Client: "Yeah, I mean, I would but sometimes I haven't got time. Let's say I leave home - I walk all the way down - by the time I come back, with the kids, time is getting on - too late!".

In interview 24, the client is willing to accept practical suggestions about speeding up the process of moving house but challenges the worker strongly when he offers guidance on child care matters.

In interview 35, conversely, the client is willing to accept the social workers advice on handling a decision to have her three children remain in Care but strongly resists any practical suggestions about her accommodation.

6d ii] Ways of Offering Guidance

There is no evidence that guidance which is strongly put is any more or less effective than a mild suggestion.

In interview 2, the worker takes a direct line:

Worker: "Well, I keep advising you about this, don't I? Don't lend money and cigarettes and don't

borrow them. Look after yourself".

It is following this that the client mentions that he has been advised to change his social worker.

In contrast to this, the worker in interview 19 puts her suggestion very mildly. She feels that the client, a young mother, would be better off working rather than staying at home where she has developed an over-close relationship with her small son:

Worker: "I do think though, that you worry extremely about him. I know you've talked about thinking about getting a job and I just wondered if you had more to express yourself with, whether you would feel better and whether this would help Matthew?".

The client in this case also firmly rejects the idea.

6d iii] Worker/Client Relationship

It is difficult to argue that the client response to advice is dependent on the relationship between worker and client as responses varied within the same interview. In all but 4 of the 34 interviews in which guidance occurred, some pieces of advice were accepted while others were rejected.

Nevertheless, it was felt that it was more difficult for some clients than others to defy the worker. This would hold in cases where the power and authority of the worker greatly exceeded that of the client. For example, in interview 13, a worker in Child Guidance is interviewing a 13 year old boy who is in trouble for assaulting a teacher. The worker is trying to get him to adopt verbal rather than physical ways of dealing with difficult situations. The client appears to accept this, but there is a sting in the tail:

Client: "Next time just laugh in her face and say 'What's it got to do with you?' and just walk off. That will hurt much more than a good straight punch".

Worker: "Do you reckon you can do that next time instead?".

Client: [Cheekily] "Yeah, I reckon I could - if I remember!".

Worker: [Resignedly] "Yes. If you remember".

The relationship between the worker and the mentally handicapped young man in interview 2 is unequal in a different way. The client may not be able to muster effective counter-arguments against taking the advice offered, but he resists in other

ways. As we have seen above he finally suggests changing his social worker.

6d iv] Useful and Non-Useful Guidance

Given that clients within the same interview usually accept some pieces of guidance and discard others, it seems likely that the source of this phenomenon lies within the client him/herself. The evidence from these interviews suggests that the clients are sorting out, from the considerable amount of guidance on offer, that which is useful to them from that which is not.

6e The Effective Use of Guidance

Although it has been argued that the client will ultimately accept guidance which he sees as useful to him and reject the rest, he/she can be helped in arriving at that decision by effective interviewing skills.

In the sample interviews, the typical client response to guidance was one of initial resistance. If this resistance can be taken up and used to present the issues in an expanded form, it follows that the client will have more evidence on which to base a decision.

One way of offering guidance effectively is to make a range of suggestions until the client responds positively to one or the other. This technique is used in interview

26 by a social worker who is helping an old lady decide whether she wants to go into an elderly persons' home. She explores various alternatives including finding out more about the home, staying there for a trial period and talking to one of the residents. In this way, the client's response is tested out beforehand and guidance can be based on this knowledge.

In interview 23, the worker addresses the client's resistance directly and uses a debating style to put over the points he is trying to make. The client is an unemployed youth. His foster mother believes that if he were really serious about looking for a job he would smarten himself up:

Client: "She thinks I'm badly dressed? Have you seen the way she dresses? When I went to the job centre that morning, did I know I was going for an interview? Did I?"

Worker: "No".

Client: "Right. I took my earrings out didn't I? I had a decent pair of trousers didn't I?"

Worker: "I don't know".

Client: "I took my earrings out. I took my scarf off. I can't help my leather..."

Worker: "There might be some people who would give you a

job because wear a leather jacket....but Eva still thinks.....".

Client: "I should dress up the way she wants me to".

Worker: "Well, not necessarily the way she wants but the way most people think sensible and responsible young people should dress".

Client: "They don't think about the fashion today".

Worker: "What she thinks about is getting a job".

Client: "There's 3 million on the dole, isn't there?".

Worker: "And she would say that may be those 3 million don't get a job because they don't look right and they don't try hard enough. And there's some truth in what she says".

Client: "And there's no truth in what I say?".

Worker: "Oh no, there's truth in what you say. I mean if all those 3 million people got dressed up beautifully they can't all get the same job and there are not enough jobs to go round".

Client: "I know. Are they going to pick me or some bloke with qualifications?".

Worker: "Put it this way. If you ran a business and you needed somebody extra and you had two people who came along and one lay on the floor and swore

you would not be likely to pick him if you had somebody else who came and said, 'Yes sir. No sir. Three bags full sir'".

Client: "I don't like people who say 'Yes sir, No sir', I think they're creeps".

Worker: "Well, you see the point I'm making".

If one aim of the social work process is an interview in which the client is helped to make his/her own decisions as an active participant, then a full discussion of the issues surrounding direct guidance is important. Only through understanding these issues can he/she be expected to decide whether or not to accept the worker's views.

There are cases, however, in which full participative discussion around the issue of direct guidance is not possible. For example, in interview 11, the client is an anti-social recluse who is unable to keep his flat clean. Although the worker attempts to discuss the situation with him, in the end, direct guidance is used to enforce certain changes which are socially desirable.

In interview 27, the worker assumes control of the interview with a mentally ill client who is distressed. She takes over responsibility for the client's affairs and tells her what to do. In this case, guidance is used to calm and sustain the client.

Guidance is used to comfort the client in interview 8 in which an elderly widow is grieving for the loss of her husband. The worker advises her about how to explain to friends that he has died, what to do when Christmas cards come addressed to both of them, how to cope with Christmas day and similar matters. The client's feelings about all of this are expressed in the quotation at the head of section 6.

Summary and Conclusion

Evidence from the current research refutes earlier notions [Reid and Shapiro, 1969, Mayer and Timms, 1970] that clients may not be getting enough advice. It is more in line with later British studies which found that social workers were giving a great deal of advice [Sainsbury, 1975 and Sainsbury et al. 1982]. Data from the sample interviews together with these studies suggest that there may have been a change in attitude over the last decade.

Guidance was given on both practical and moral issues and covered the whole gamut of social work concerns. It was given in the form of directives, advice and suggestions. [Requests and reassurance were seen as special forms of guidance].

It was suggested that the source of direct guidance was uncertain in many cases as personal and professional views tended to merge on moral issues.

Clients rarely asked for guidance and typically resisted it initially when it was offered. However, much of it was later taken up within the context of the interview. [It is not possible to comment on the longer term].

It was suggested that the way in which guidance was presented, especially in terms of the worker providing opportunities for discussion, could be an important factor in helping the client to sort out useful from non-useful guidance. This is in accordance with the hypothesis that in successful helping relationships, it is important to share ideas in a way that is open to challenge. [See, for example Shulman, 1979].

Chapter 18

Offering Practical Help

Introduction

There were offers of practical help in just over half the sample interviews. In general, these related to the provision of financial help, accommodation, goods and services. Social workers offered to write letters, make telephone calls or set up meetings on behalf of their clients.

This is in line with a well documented body of research showing that social workers see this type of service as an important part of their role and one which can contribute to a good working relationship. Throughout the 1950s and early 60s, practical help tended to be devalued by workers who favoured a more insight-oriented approach. In discussing this, Sinfield [1969] placed part of the blame on the discovery in this period of the "problem family" with its emphasis on problems that came from within. Poverty tended to be seen as a misuse rather than a lack of resources. He notes wryly that it was left to others to pursue the question of the level of social security payments and of individual rights.

The Client Speaks [Mayer and Timms, 1970] was the first major British study to address the issue of practical help and it left the authors in no doubt as to its value:

"The persons we interviewed were desperately trying to survive. They were consumed with worry over debts, the possibility of eviction, the cutting off of their electricity, and it is absurd to expect that the urgency of their needs could be met by a non-material approach, whether this be in the nature of offering insight, providing friendship, or the opportunity to unburden themselves to a sympathetic listener".

[p.140].

Later studies confirmed this approach. Sainsbury [1975] considered that an immediate response to specific practical problems could lay the foundations for less tangible long term work. There was a pay-off in terms of the worker-client relationship.

Goldberg et al. [1977], found that one-third of all intake work in this study included some sort of practical assistance and four-fifths of all cases involved contact with outside agencies.

All the social workers in a comprehensive survey by Stevenson et al. [1978] regarded the provision of practical help as part of their task; a "considerable number" saw an initial focus on practical problems as a tangible demonstration of concern and competence, and a useful foundation for further work.

A more recent study by Sainsbury et al. [1982], showed that, although social workers considered practical help an important component of their work, clients were still more likely than workers to see this as a "most helpful" part of the service, and that social workers tended to

underestimate the importance that clients attached to offers of practical help. Sainsbury et al. also found that the initiative for making outside contacts derived chiefly from the social workers:

"The mobilization of resources and the achievement of co-operation between services are predominantly social work functions, at least in the initial stages of negotiation".

[p.63].

This was also found to be the case in the present study.

1. Frequency

Offers of practical help occurred in 22 of the 40 sample interviews. The incidence per interview was low. In 21 out of the 22 interviews, there were six or less than six, interventions of this type. In 12 interviews there were only one or two offers of practical help. Interview 1 was an exception, having 14 offers of practical help; this was an interview almost solely concerned with the provision of services for an elderly man returning home from hospital.

2. Relationship with Other Variables

A correlation was found between offers of practical help and male social workers. This must be interpreted with caution as there were only 9 male social workers in the sub-sample [11 in the whole sample] but it does accord well with two other correlations: direct guidance and male workers, and challenging interventions and male workers.

It suggests a pattern of more active, assertive interviewing on the part of male workers which reflects traditional sex roles in the wider culture.

3. Practical Help and the Content of Interviews

Offers of practical help naturally occurred in interviews in which there were discussions of practical matters. They accounted for 6.6% of all interventions on practical matters. They also tended to occur in sections of the interview [usually the end] in which arrangements were being made; for example, an interview might end with setting a date for a future meeting and a reiteration of what actions the worker intended to take in the meantime.

4. Types of Practical Help

a] Provision of services - 4 interviews.

This included liaison with the Home Help, District Nursing, Health Visiting and meals-on-wheels services [interview 1]; setting up transport provision so that a handicapped child could visit her foster parents straight from school [interview 59]; organising day care provision for another handicapped child [interview 4] and arranging activities during the day for a depressed man [interview 18].

b] Dealing with the D.H.S.S. - 4 interviews.

In 2 interviews, the practical help offered was finding out about money that had not arrived [interviews 2 and 12]. In interview 18, it involved an application for a clothing grant and in interview 21, an enquiry concerning eligibility for Supplementary Benefit.

c] Dealing with the Housing Department - 4 interviews.

In 3 interviews the worker offered to help with speeding up the process of obtaining council property [interviews 7, 16 and 36]. In interview 26, the worker promises to find out more about the client's entitlement to a rent rebate.

d] Material Goods and Money from Charities - 4 interviews.

In interviews 19 and 20, the social worker offered to write to a charitable organisation to obtain money for her clients. In interview 16, the social worker was going to try and obtain a baby carriage from his Department. In interview 20, the social worker promised to look out for some bedding for her client and in interview 4, the worker said she could provide a bed with cot sides for a handicapped child.

e] Contacting a Third Party - 5 interviews.

Five workers agreed to speak to another party on behalf of their client. In interview 1, the worker said she would talk with medical staff caring for an elderly patient. In interview 33, the worker intended to speak to staff at his client's school. In interview 27, the worker agreed to speak with ward staff at the hospital where the client was a patient and also to contact the client's solicitor. In interview 25, the worker agreed to talk separately with the client's husband.

f] Miscellaneous Help

This included providing a photocopy of an official form for a client [interview 5]; promising to send a copy of the magazine for foster parents [interview 3]; agreeing to get a letter typed for a client [interview 28] and helping a client to make a phone-call from the department [interview 28].

In interviews 1 and 17, help was provided in the form of addresses and telephone numbers. In contrast to this, in interview 27, the worker takes over the client's affairs entirely until she is well enough to cope again on her own.

5. Ways of Offering Practical Help

Offering help with practical matters raises some of the same issues as giving advice [see Chapter 17]. It may undermine the client's ability to act for him/herself and it can increase dependency on the worker.

Yet, in the real world, few clients have telephones, public agencies are often busy, and it is sometimes difficult to get connected to the right person. Few clients are familiar with the process of negotiation with officials or the process of formal letter writing. In these situations, the workers have little choice but to assume the role of advocate on behalf of their clients. How much help is offered will depend not only on the needs of the client but on how far the client possesses the ability to satisfy these needs.

In some situations the worker may be content to offer information and leave the client to do the rest. For example in interview 1, a hospital social worker merely gives the client the address and telephone number of her local D.H.S.S. office so that she can find out what benefits she is entitled to for herself.

In contrast to this, in interview 27, the worker takes over complete responsibility for all the client's affairs during her stay in the psychiatric unit where she is detained under a section of the Mental Health Act. During the course of the interview the client hands over a large

bundle of correspondence to the worker which clearly relieves her of a great deal of worry and anxiety.

Between the two extremes described above, the worker may choose to intervene to a greater or lesser extent. In interview 26, the worker leaves it to the client to decide how much she would like the worker to do:

Worker: "What do you feel is the next step for us to take? I could find out if you are getting the Benefit you are entitled to - I may need to speak to your warden about that".

Later in interview 26, the worker takes time to explain what she would like to do and what the consequences would be:

Worker: "Would you like me to contact Social Services just to see what the position is about your son? If I explain your situation to them, I could hear from a social worker who knows him how he is placed and whether there is any possibility of you moving closer to him".

The worker in interview 16 offers his client far less choice. He is proposing to set up a meeting at the Housing Department to discuss a tenancy for his client. The client is given a minimal role in this process:

Worker: "I'll come along with you. I'll pick you up and

take you along and we'll get that sorted out. If there are going to be any problems, if they say they can't see you for two weeks, then I might be able to sort something out with Homeless Families".

Later in the same interview, he reiterates his plan in a way which again emphasises his own control of the situation:

Worker: "I'll come and pick you up and you know, I'll do the interview. I'll sit in on the interview with you and make sure they ask all the right questions and we give all the right answers".

6. Practical Help and the Client

Practical help was actively requested by clients in only 5 interviews. In most cases, it was offered in response to a problem expressed by a client. The impression given in the sample interviews is that clients expected their workers to help them in practical ways. They never thanked their workers. In fact they very rarely made any comment at all. This suggests that they regarded this type of help as their right. They never turned it down.

There is some evidence for this view in interview 23, in which the client complains that she has not been given enough help. When the social worker reminds her that his Department has recently paid off her rent arrears, she

becomes angry:

Client: "We are grateful you have paid the arrears off. I mean, we don't have to be told and brainwashed that you've done this for us, you've done that for us. I mean it's not before time that someone has put their hand out and tried to help me for a change".

Conversely, the social worker seems to regard offering practical help as his/her duty. The worker in interview 12 sounds slightly embarrassed when the client does not recognise this:

Worker: "Having said that, I think you ought to know, I ought to say at this stage, that one of my jobs is to chase up, you know, Giros that haven't come through".

Client: "Oh, that's good. You've got a job!".

Summary and Conclusion

The data from the sample interviews confirmed the trends shown in recent studies towards social workers taking on an increasing amount of practical work on behalf of their clients. Practical help was offered in all interviews in which practical matters were discussed. This amounted to over half the sample [22 cases]. Help was chiefly concerned with financial and material benefits, accommodation problems and the provision of domiciliary

services. The worker also contacted other agencies on his/her client's behalf.

It was suggested that offers of practical help could undermine the ability of clients to act for themselves. In practice, it was acknowledged that it was not always possible for clients to act for themselves. It would depend on the client's access to outside resources and his/her own level of competence. There were, however, examples in the sample interviews of ways of offering practical help which maximised the client's role in decision making [as well as some which did not].

It was further suggested that social workers saw it as an integral part of their function to give practical help and that clients expected this, as of right.

Chapter 19

Interpretation

"Helping people become aware of what they are and are not doing and the reasons related to this is a feature of all helping approaches. It is hoped that this awareness will encourage people to act in new ways so that desired outcomes will be attained".

[Gambrill 1983, p.150].

Interpretations are statements designed to increase client self-understanding and insight. The worker presents a new frame of reference through which the client can view his/her problems and, one hopes, learn to understand and deal with them.

For example in interview 36, when the client complains about the wild behaviour of her children when they visit at weekends, the worker suggests a possible explanation and encourages her to see their behaviour in a new light:

"Do you feel in some way they may be punishing you for sending them away?".

In interview 29, when the client tells the worker that his mother nags him and will not leave him alone, the worker encourages the client to see this as part of the pattern of his relationship with his mother over many years:

"It seems like the sort of negative stroking you got as a child. It hasn't stopped. In many ways it is the same now as it was forty years ago".

One frequently assumed aspect of interpretation is depth. Ivey and Authier [1978, p.117] comment that for some workers:

"Interpretation is a semi-mystical activity in which the interviewer reaches into the very core of the client's personality".

The authors, however, believe that interpretation does not have to be deep to be effective. It should provide a new perspective that the client can use to explore his/her concerns more fully. It should be pitched at a level the worker feels comfortable with and that the client can understand.

A second aspect of interpretation is the theoretical orientation of the worker. The content of an interpretation will depend on which school of thought or developmental theory the worker happens to subscribe to. This is often vague. As Stevenson et al. [1978, Chap 5, p.263] point out in their study of social service teams:

".....there was evidence that social workers used concepts from sociology, social and individual psychology to understand clients and their difficulties. But there was less evidence that these concepts had been assimilated into an integral system to guide practice".

Interpretation is often regarded as the cornerstone of insight oriented casework. The work of Hollis [1964] perhaps best exemplifies this approach. Yet she was circumspect in prescribing the use of interpretation. She

felt there was a danger of discouraging clients from seeking answers for themselves:

"Explanations and interpretations should be used sparingly and chiefly when the client is unable to speak for himself, yet seems ready for understanding".

[p.17].

She also warns against foisting interpretations on clients who were not ready to hear them. In her work on interviews in marital counselling [1968], she found that a high drop out rate was associated with the over use of insight giving procedures too early in the contact.

Over the last twenty years, social work has moved away from specifically insight oriented casework to a more practical problem solving approach. Stevenson et al. [1978, Chap 5, p.118] found many workers ambivalent about the value of "in depth" work with clients:

"It was often the subject of derogatory remarks - too much concerned with changing the personal behaviour of clients, too little concerned with changing the environment. At other times such an approach was accorded a very high status and equated with 'real' casework. It was not uncommon for social workers to make apologetic or dissatisfied comments about not being able to work 'in-depth' owing to lack of time".

[Chap 5, p.118].

In the present sample, some social workers were still clearly committed to an insight oriented approach, while others used insight oriented interventions at certain points in their interviews. In some interviews, interpretative comments would clearly have been out of

place.

1. Frequency

Interpretations were present in 16 out of the 40 sample interviews. Apart from interview 37 which contained 19 interpretative statements, the incidence per interview was generally low. Ten out of the 16 interviews contained only one or two instances, and a further five cases contained between three and seven instances.

The relatively low incidence of interpretation is unsurprising. This is a subtle form of intervention calling for considerable sensitivity on the part of the worker. The effect of interpretative statements is likely to be lost by repeated glib or facile use. Furthermore, it may be an inappropriately complex response to the needs presented by clients. Both Mayer and Timms [1970] and Sainsbury et al. [1982] have shown that its use may be misunderstood or unrecognised by clients.

2. Relationship with other Behaviours

The use of interpretations was positively correlated with the use of open questions and negatively correlated with the use of closed questions. This suggests that interpretative statements were associated with a less directive, more client-centred style of interviewing in the present sample. [Not all theoretical positions would lead to this result].

There was also a negative correlation between interpretations and the number of topic changes per interview. This lends weight to the suggestion that interpretations are more likely to occur in interviews in which one or two major topics are discussed in depth rather than the kind of interview which moves quickly through a check list of problems.

3. Interpretation and Content

Given the low incidence of this behaviour in the interview generally, interpretations accounted for a very low percentage in all categories of content. As expected, the most significant incidence occurred in discussions of the clients' feelings and discussions of a third party such as a child, parent, spouse or close friend. Interpretations accounted for 2.1% and 2.3% of all behaviours, respectively, in these two categories of content.

4. Types of Interpretation

Two main types of interpretations emerged from an analysis of the sample interviews. The first provided "here and now" explanations for behaviour or events and the second attempted to link present behaviour to patterns of action or events in the clients' past. These two strands reflect the distinction drawn by Hollis [1967a and 1967b] in her two final graphs on the typology of casework.

a] Here and Now Explanations

In interview 32, the client's elder child is in a Childrens Home and she is having severe problems managing her younger child, a boisterous three year old who is attention-seeking. The client tends to see the child as intrinsically difficult and "bad". The worker offers an alternative explanation:

"One of the things could be that he is missing his brother. That's probably why he's wanting a lot more attention. He's wanting some comfort and reassurance isn't he? Because he's missing his brother".

In interview 25, the client is bemoaning the fact that her teenage children do not get along very well with her new husband who is considerably younger than she is. The worker offers a possible reason:

"I wonder if in some ways he might seem more like a big brother than a father - a step father".

Later in the same interview the client goes on to say that since her marriage her daughter no longer confides in her as she used to do. Again, the worker offers a new perspective:

"Do you think it's part of growing up? That she's wanting to show she is more independent?".

These interpretations are not derived from a specific and/or explicit theoretical framework other than an eclectic understanding of the dynamics of human relationships, based on personal or professional experience. In some cases they may be little more than the worker's own opinion. However, as with statements that offer information or advice, interpretations carry a certain amount of weight because of the authority and assumed expertise which attaches to the social work role. It is perhaps for this reason that most interpretations tend to be offered in a tentative way. The question marks and the use of "I wonder" in the examples above emphasise that the interpretations are ideas to be tested out rather than facts.

b] Looking for Patterns - Linking Explanations

Four of the 11 social workers who used interpretations used them in this way. For example in interview 28, the client is describing his employment history, which consists of a long series of jobs in a relatively short time. He has told the worker about the difference of opinion that led to him leaving his last place of work. The worker notices a thread running through the client's narrative:

"Is that typical of you? When things become

difficult and unpleasant, you don't like staying around. You'd sooner say thanks very much and move on? Rather than fight your way round it".

This leads to a discussion of this issue which proves to be fruitful. The worker considers it a theme that could be usefully developed:

"So it might be that that's a fairly consistent pattern throughout your life. It would certainly be worth considering and thinking about when we meet in the future".

In interview 39, the client is an alcoholic with a very poor self-image. She has voiced her fears that her common law husband may leave her. The worker interprets this in terms of what she knows of the client's past:

"I think that's a lot to do with your own feelings about yourself - that you don't really deserve him or something - or anybody".

In the sample interviews, linking explanations drawn from a knowledge of the client's past were all based on direct observations of the client's life as told in this and previous interviews. The study supports the finding of Stevenson et al. [1978, Chap 5, p.118] that workers showed no evidence of any underlying theoretical orientational beyond a

general appreciation of developmental factors and human relationships.

5. Interpretation and the Client

The value of an interpretation is judged by the client's reaction to it. Does the client use it to cope more effectively with the problem, to discuss issues in more depth, to develop personal insights? The psychotherapist Robert Hobson [1985, p.17] believes that interpretations can be of value if offered in the right way. He points out some possible pitfalls:

i] The worker may be on the wrong track. The client may not have the confidence to correct him/her openly.

ii] The worker may be right. The client may then idealise him/her as the all-knowing expert.

iii] If too many interpretations are offered or they are offered too soon, the client may feel invaded or exposed.

In the present sample a variety of different reactions were found. For example, in interview 12 the worker tries to interpret the client's feelings about his resolve to give up drinking after a life long addiction to alcohol which has led to the loss of his home, his job, his family and friends:

Worker: "So perhaps you know, what is happening to you now is the sum of all that experience rather than just a dry-out which isn't very much in itself, is it?".

This "hits home" and the client is able to expand on his feelings:

Client: "No. I've dried myself out. I've layed in bed and sweated it out, but it isn't the same feeling. It's just as if something completely went, you know it really went. It was like a release in a way. Rough as it felt, it was like a release.....".

In contrast to this, the client in interview 25 is unable to accept the interpretation offered by the worker. The client is upset because her children no longer seem close to her following her re-marriage to a younger man. The worker offers two possible interpretations for this state of affairs but the client seems unable to use either of them at this stage:

Worker: "Do they hold it against you that your marriage broke up and you married again?".

Client: "But she's changed towards me. She doesn't confide in me any more. She gave up college but she never even told me".

Worker: "Do you think it is part of growing up. That

she's wanting to show that she is more independent?".

Client: [not responding to the cue] "She's had a boyfriend for five months but he gave her up. So that upset her a lot".

Worker: [trying again] "It's the children growing up as much as you being married to T".

Client: "I don't really know why they hate him. D. is the worst...".

Sometimes the interpretation "hits home" but the client does not want to pursue it. For example, the worker in interview 11 is trying to get the client to clean up his flat. He interprets the client's reluctance to do this as a direct result of his past experiences. At the end, the client abruptly chooses to change the subject, rather than face the consequences:

Worker: "...when you were younger, who did the cleaning then? Did you do any?".

Client: "Mother did it and my sisters. I didn't do any cleaning".

Worker: "That's the problem now isn't it?".

Client: "She wouldn't let me".

Worker: "But that's the problem now really isn't it?"

You've never done it and therefore.....".

Client: "Never done it. Don't want to start. I smoke a lot. You can't knock it off can you? Do you smoke?".

If interpretations are offered inexpertly, the client is likely to resist them. In interview 37, the client has stated that she feels she can no longer cope with her obsessional teenage daughter. The worker responds with a convoluted interpretation of this statement. It is not possible to discover from the data how accurate this interpretation may be but it is clear from the client's reaction that it is too much, too soon:

Worker: "I think there is a possibility that you can't cope but you have put a block on proceeding with that thought because you have also said that I am giving up responsibility, that I am cheating, that I'm taking the easy way out. Now in a sense, for some people that would be so; to say I can't cope would be handing over the responsibility to someone else and would be cheating. In your case I think saying that is a way of not thinking even more about how you can't cope. Because if it's cheating, it's not being a good parent and it's not something you should be doing, is it? Do you see what I'm saying? I think, by raising the possibility that you can't

cope and then saying but that's cheating - I think saying that's cheating is stopping you from thinking even more about why you can't cope. And I think that's what we should be doing really, acknowledging that and how difficult it is. But you're afraid to even allow yourself to think that still - except perhaps a wee bit more than you have been recently. 'Cos I think it will probably make you feel bad".

Client: "No. I don't think it would make me feel bad because I've got to the stage - I mean this has gone on so long. I want something done and I can't do it so I want someone to take over who can".

The client in the extract above seems to echo the feelings of some of the dissatisfied clients in the study by Mayer and Timms [1970]. She has come to get some practical help with her difficult daughter and finds that all the worker can offer is penetrating insights into the problem. In addition, she finds the problem turned around so that it appears that she is the one who needs to sort herself out.

Summary and Conclusion

Interpretations occurred in 40% of the sample interviews. On the whole they were used to offer tentative explanations for problem behaviours. Sometimes explanations drew on the worker's knowledge and experience of developmental and relationship factors; sometimes workers pieced together information derived from the client's history to present patterns of behaviour that persisted over time.

The literature warns of the over-use or inappropriate use of interpretive skills [see Introduction, above]. For the most part, interpretations were offered tentatively and sensitively by workers in the sample. Where this was not the case, the client's reaction was to resist the interpretation.

The data shows that although insight oriented casework did not form a major component of the sample interviews but that interpretation was still regarded as a useful form of intervention in certain circumstances.

Chapter 20

Worker Self-Revelation

Introduction

In one sense, the worker reveals him/herself at all points in the interview. He/she feeds back responses and reactions to the client verbally and non-verbally. In this context however, self-revelation refers only to those verbal self-disclosures in which the worker chooses to convey specific pieces of information about him/herself:

"I felt just like that when my own marriage broke up".

"I have a little girl that age too".

Classic work by Jourard [1964/1971], showed that one way of encouraging clients to talk about themselves was for workers to talk a little about themselves, especially at the beginning of interviews. Thus, the worker provides a model of self-disclosure and the clients reciprocate in kind.

Apart from providing a role model, self disclosure can also serve to convey to a client that he/she is not alone and that others [in this case the worker] may have had similar experiences and feelings.

In client-centred counselling, the idea of personal revelation is linked to the concept of Genuineness, or the worker being truly him/herself in the interview. Clients,

it is argued, relate better to a "real" person rather than one who hides behind a professional mask or remains silent and impassive. Genuineness, however, encompasses more than verbal self-revelation as it describes a whole way of relating to the client as one person to another. [See, for example, Carkhuff 1969].

The use of self-revelation carries certain risks. Used inappropriately, it may distract from the client's problems by focusing on the worker: it may have the effect of burdening the client with the worker's problems: it may leave the client feeling that the worker is not sufficiently competent to help. For these reasons, Egan [1975, p.131] stresses that workers must be selective and focused in their use of self-revelation. They must be sure that they are meeting the client's needs and not their own. Egan believes that self-revelation should be used only occasionally:

"Helpers should perhaps be willing and able to disclose themselves, even deeply in reasonable ways, but actually do so only if it is clear that it will contribute to the client's progress".

Gambrill [1985, p.145] points out that it is the amount of information that we choose to share with others that controls the level of intimacy and trust within a relationship. For this important reason, she believes that workers must get it exactly right:

"Too much or too little disclosure will have negative

effects on others".

Benjamin [1981] takes an extreme view. It is his belief that personal examples can hinder except when solicited by the client:

"My personal experience or example holds meaning for me. I am not convinced that it will for the interviewee".

Taken over all however, there is a general consensus amongst commentators in the field that a judicious amount of self-revelation on the part of workers can be beneficial in the helping interview.

1. Frequency

Self-revelation was the least used form of verbal intervention in the sample as a whole. Although it appears in 14 of the 40 interviews it was used by only 10 social workers. The incidence per interview was low, between 1 and 5 interventions at most, accounting for 30 instances in all.

This finding echoes that of Shulman [1979] who undertook a four year study of worker-client interviews in several New York casework agencies, using various methods of study including video-tape and interview transcriptions. For Shulman, the ability to share personal thoughts and feelings ranked high in developing good working relations and being helpful. Yet he found that the average worker in his study was less able to share thoughts and feelings

than to verbalise client's feelings. Some even considered self-revelation to be "unprofessional" - although they had no hesitation in asking clients to do it.

2. Relationship with other Variables

It is difficult to generalise from the work of 10 social workers but, in this sample, self-revelation tended to be associated with more directive interview techniques rather than non-directive counselling skills. This is perhaps surprising given the emphasis on this form of intervention in the counselling literature. In terms of raw numbers, there was a strong correlation between self-revelation and both information giving and challenging behaviours. There was a weaker correlation between self-revelation and giving advice.

The association with challenging interventions seems to have come about because workers tended to use self-revelation in some interviews as a further form of challenge, placing the behaviour of the client alongside their own for comparison [see 4d below].

As with challenging behaviour and giving advice, there was a correlation between male social workers and the use of self-revelation. Although the numbers are very small [seven out of the ten social workers in this sub-group were men], there is some indication of a cluster of more directive behaviours which may be associated more with male than with female workers.

3. Worker Self-Revelation and Content

Worker self-revelation did not figure prominently in any category of content. The highest number of interventions occurred in discussions concerning the role of the social worker and/or the role of the department [2.8% of all verbal interventions in this category]. There was a very low incidence [0.2% of all interventions] in topics relating to the client's feelings where, according to the literature, it could possibly be most effective in encouraging revelations in depth on the part of the client. [See Introduction].

4. Ways of Using Worker Self-Revelation

a] Reciprocity and Rapport

Workers may use self-revelation to help establish themselves as "real" people with lives of their own outside the professional context. For example, in interview 34, the worker picks up the client's reference to pop music:

"I think it is very interesting that, I listen to it occasionally, I don't know very much about it. Mind you, I'm not up with a lot of pop music these days. I used to be but I just get busy with other things".

In interview 14, the worker has been discussing political involvement with the client:

"I always remember this friend of mine telling me when I was 9 or 10, that I should take an interest in political parties. I think I'm more interested now than she is".

The taped data reveal very few examples [4] of workers talking spontaneously about matters unrelated to the business of the interview. It is possible, however, that this type of social conversation took place before the recorder was switched on or after it had been switched off, as part of a more relaxed format outside of the main body of the interview.

b] Conveying that the Client is Not Alone

Workers may use examples from their own lives to let the clients know that their experiences are not unique, that they are acceptable and can be understood by others. For example, in interview 32, the client has been describing her child's exaggerated attention seeking behaviour. The worker says:

"That's just like my little girl".

In interview 12, the worker tries to put the client at ease about the way he speaks:

"You mentioned being a Cockney lad. Well, as a

Southerner myself, although I was born in London, I didn't actually live there for very long, I know my accent is identifiable as being Southern rather than from round here. I don't find it much of a problem because I don't have a marked London accent. You do. Is it likely to cause you any problems?"

There were 5 interviews in which self-revelation was used in this way.

c] Use of Workers' Feelings

Self-revelation occurs on another level when the worker reveals his/her feelings which arise directly out of the worker-client relationship as the interview progresses. Only one worker expressed his immediate feelings in this way:

"What I'm conscious of is that I'm not being helpful, in the sense that I'm groping in the dark. I'm not quite sure what there is that I can do".

[Interview 9].

d] Challenging the Client

The examples of self-revelation quoted hitherto have been generally supportive. Workers in the sample also used this type of intervention in a more challenging way. They used their own experience to illustrate desirable behaviour on the part of the

client. For example in interview 20, the worker is helping the client find ways of saving money. She makes two suggestions, giving up smoking and saving the Family Allowance:

"I mean, I've smoked in my life but I've given up. I don't suppose you feel you could do that?".

"Your Family Allowance is going up....Is it possible do you think, to save - I'm thinking of doing that - saving the difference - 'cos I haven't had it yet and if I can save.....".

In interview 11, the client has just been describing how he gave a lady £20 to take away some of his cats:

Worker: "Did you get a receipt?".

Client: "That's it. Your head goes funny, doesn't it?".

Worker: "Yours does. Mine doesn't. I don't give out £20 to someone and not get a receipt for it".

Client: "Ah, well. You're in your right mind aren't you?".

5. Worker Self-Revelation and the Client

Clients were responsible for getting workers to impart personal information in 4 interviews. As with the social

workers, this behaviour could be used either to develop closer rapport or to challenge the worker. In interview 19, the client uses humour to help establish a friendly relationship. She has been describing the system for obtaining a job at the local bakery which involves waiting until there are enough people on the list at the job centre:

Client: "You wouldn't like to go on the list, would you?"

Worker: "No thank you!" [laughs] "not yet!"

Not all social workers found it easy to accept attempts by the client to get closer to them in this personal way. The worker in interview 8, seems to brush aside his client's remarks by a retreat into his professional role:

Client: "You must be fed up with people who are always grieving and unhappy. Must be tiring for you".

Worker: "No well, you are used to it in a way. Sort of like a doctor really".

The social worker in interview 23 is faced with personal remarks of a more challenging kind - and does not come best out of the exchange. He has suggested that an unemployed young man may be too choosy about accepting a job:

Client: "Why am I too choosy? There are plenty of people

who wouldn't work behind the counter of a shop.
Would you?".

Worker: "Er...Uhm...".

Client: "Don't say yes if you won't".

Worker: "I can see myself being desperate enough for work
and for money to take a job working in a shop".

Client: "Yeah. What kind of a shop? A paper shop or
something like that?".

Worker: "I'd prefer another job".

Client: "That's alright. You give me your job and you go
and sit behind a counter all day".

These examples suggest that, although social workers may not be comfortable with the idea, clients would welcome more personal disclosure on occasion. The work of Sainsbury [1975, p.78] supports this contention. Seventeen out of the 27 families at the Family Service Unit which formed the basis for his research, knew a considerable amount about the personal circumstances and history of their social workers and 10 of these felt that they had been positively helped by the personal revelations of their workers. The reasons given for this included the need for a feeling of shared intimacy; that the help was acceptable because it came from a "real" person; that it was an indication that the worker was

capable of understanding the client's problems and that the client had been helped to cope by hearing how the worker had coped with his/her own problems.

The workers in Sainsbury's sample seemed more willing to use self-disclosure as an interview technique than workers in the current sample. This could reflect different ways of working in a voluntary agency as opposed to current practices in Social Services Departments, changes in practice orientation over the last decade, or the vagaries of the sample. Although levels of intimacy varied in the current research interviews, worker self-revelation was not one of the significant ways in which it was controlled.

Summary and Conclusion

Workers made little use of self-revelation in the sample interviews. As most casework commentators agree that this is a form of intervention that should be used sparingly, it is not surprising that it had a low incidence within interviews. It is more surprising that only half the social workers [10 out of 20] used it at all.

Although self-revelation could be used to create a feeling of intimacy or rapport with the client, in some cases it was associated with a more directive and challenging style of interviewing in which the worker's own behaviour was held up as a model for the client to follow.

There is some evidence from the sample that clients would be receptive to more self-revelation on the part of workers but the workers themselves were either reluctant to share personal facts and feelings, or they felt it was not relevant to helping their clients. The research data do not provide a reliable explanation; possibly, workers feel vulnerable and exposed if they reveal too much about their own lives or feelings; they may fear a loss of professional standing if they admit to weaknesses or mistakes. Alternatively, workers may feel that the level of intimacy engendered by self-revelations is not appropriate to the relationship within the social work interview. Yet workers did not seem unduly defensive in other respects and most workers in the sample succeeded in generating a high level of rapport with clients by other means.

Another possibility is that the majority of workers were unaware of the potential of this form of interview behaviour. It has been argued elsewhere in this thesis [see, for example, Chapter 15 on Closed Questions] that social workers in the sample tended to rely on a limited range of techniques to obtain their objectives. They gained information by asking questions and they encouraged the client to talk through the use of active listening and reflective behaviours. There was limited use of skills borrowed from the counselling tradition which include worker self-revelation, along with asking open rather than

closed questions, and the use of reflection of client's feelings.

The literature suggests that workers could enrich their interviewing skills by a greater and skilled use of self-revelation. By dropping the professional mask and appearing more "real" to clients, workers could help to promote an atmosphere of openness and sharing which is more conducive to mutual participation in the problem solving process.

Chapter 21

Supportive Behaviours

All social work interviews can be regarded as supportive in the sense that they are designed to help rather than hinder the client. A worker who offers the client undivided attention is offering support; a worker who shares empathetic understanding with a client is offering support; a worker who offers to accompany a client to a meeting or to help her write a letter is offering support. Although all these various behaviours are important, this chapter is concerned only with verbal expressions of support such as:

"Well done".

"I don't think you need worry about that".

"I think you are quite right!".

In this context, expressions of support are taken to include any statement which sustains the client, shows approval or validates the client's ideas or actions.

In the present sample, overt expressions of support were rare and this was found to be consistent with the findings of a succession of casework studies over the last twenty years.

Supportive, sustaining verbal communications were a key

variable in Hollis's typology of casework [1967]. However, when she tested out her model in a practical setting [marital counselling interviews], she found social workers used very few of these procedures [Hollis, 1968]. She suspected that this was because support was being conveyed by non-verbal means.

Mullen [1968, 1969] confirmed these findings in a series of studies using taped interviews with clients who were having relationship difficulties.

Reid [1967] adapted and developed Hollis's psycho-dynamic casework model in his own work. He found it necessary to include a category of reassurance/support in his taxonomy of interview behaviours but again found very little evidence for it in practice. The raters in his study commented that concern was shown by tone of voice rather than in words.

These findings from American literature were replicated by Lishman [1985] in a Scottish study. Using a taxonomy of verbal behaviours based on the Reid model, she studied 21 video-taped interviews of workers talking to clients who had relationship difficulties. She found that overt expressions of support accounted for only a relatively small proportion of all techniques [an average of 10% per interview segment studied].

Heron [1975] discusses the relatively low use of verbal support in Six Category Intervention Analysis. He

suggests that we live in a society in which there is considerable embarrassment involved in both the giving and receiving of validation and support. He notes that, if effective support has taken place, this embarrassment is often discharged in laughter. We may find it difficult to offer support without appearing either patronising or gushing and insincere.

Most commentators [see above], have not concluded that support is a rare commodity in the social work interview but rather that it tends to be conveyed through non-verbal means. This may well be the technique of choice in a society in which client and social worker alike find it difficult to deal overtly with statements which are direct, genuine, unqualified, intimate and caring.

1. Frequency

As indicated above, supportive comments were rare in the sample interviews. Although this behaviour was present in 34 of 40 interviews, the incidence per interview was low. Twenty out of the 34 interviews had an incidence of 5 or less. Eight interviews had an incidence of between 6 and 10 while only 6 interviews had an incidence of 11 or more.

2. Relationship with other Behaviours

Supportive behaviours were negatively correlated with asking direct questions and positively correlated with giving information. There tended to be a higher number of

supportive statements in the more lengthy interviews involving detailed discussion of clients' problems rather than in the shorter, more practical fact-finding interviews. However, given the low incidence of supportive statements it would be unwise to deduce too much from this.

3. Relationship to Content

The highest number of supportive statements occurred in topics relating to events in the clients' lives, their feelings and their relationships to other people, although they still formed only a small proportion of the total verbal behaviours in these categories.

4. Types of Supportive Behaviour

When supportive behaviours were analysed two main types emerged. These comprised sustaining behaviours and reinforcing behaviours. [See Appendix 41].

a] Sustaining Behaviours

These supported the client in the sense of offering emotional comfort and conveying a sense of caring concern. Some examples of sustaining interventions are given below.

In interview 19, the worker hears that the client is now free of cancer and responds warmly with:

"Oh gosh, that's marvellous isn't it?".

In interview 30, the client is moved to tears. The worker responds:

"Want a tissue? It's OK".

In interview 15, the social worker says to her client near the end of the interview:

"I'm very glad that things are going fine".

Fifty-four of the 194 supportive statements [less than one-third], comprised interventions of this type. They were fairly well spread across the sample. The relatively low number of sustaining behaviours lends credence to Heron's contention that we find it difficult to express emotional support verbally in our culture. [See Introduction, above].

b] Reinforcing Behaviours

Supportive behaviours which reinforce the ideas or actions of the client can be expressed in many ways from simple acquiescence, through agreement and endorsement to enthusiastic encouragement.

Interview 26 provides an example of a worker endorsing the client's point. They are discussing the worker's idea that the client might move to be nearer her son:

Worker: "But from the point of view of your loneliness, would it be better if you lived nearer to him?"

Client: "Well, I don't know. He is out a lot".

Worker: "That's true. That's important".

In interview 19, the worker takes up the client's idea and reinforces it with an idea of her own:

Client: "Once them three get fixed up I'm certainly thinking of applying for a two bedroomed flat".

Worker: "Yes. It would certainly be much cheaper for you, wouldn't it?"

In interview 8, the worker reinforces the client's action by encouraging her to talk more about it and showing approval. In this case, the client has just begun to take an interest in life again after a recent bereavement. She mentions that she has had the television on:

Worker: "That's a big step forward isn't it? Is that the first time you've had it on?"

Client: "Yes. Yes".

Worker: "In 4 months?"

Client: "In 4 months, yes".

Worker: "And what were you watching?".

[The client explains that she did not enjoy the programme much].

Worker: "But at least you had it on".

In interview 25, the worker praises her client's plan to look for work:

"I think your plan is a very good one".

"I think that is a very good idea".

"Excellent".

5. Ways of Using Supportive Behaviours

a] Supportive behaviour is used to encourage the client to accept the worker's ideas and suggestions. This is done by showing approval when the client acts in accordance with the views of the worker. For example, in interview 3, the worker commends a foster mother in a respite fostering scheme for her attitude toward her handicapped foster daughter:

Worker: "She wasn't very well at the weekend was she? I was pleased you hung on to her and had the doctor in".

Client: "Well, I thought, it's a bit silly, she wasn't fretting so much like she was before and I mean, what could they have done other than what I

did?".

Worker: "I was pleased about that because it's almost like your own child really. That's what you'd have done".

The worker shows approval by telling the client that he/she is pleased and by praising the client's actions. In interview 16, the client is able to demonstrate how well she has been caring for her new baby. She announces a weight gain of 11 ounces in a week:

"That's great that, isn't it? That's what we were aiming for. You know, I'm pleased about that".

Thus, the client is rewarded for "good" behaviour.

b] In the research interviews, supportive behaviour was also used to endorse the views of the clients. By this means, the workers conveyed the impression that the clients' ideas were valued and that they could play an active role in problem solving.

In interview 12, the worker supports the client in his efforts to articulate how he felt after he had given up drinking:

Client: ".....all I was doing was getting up in the morning and waiting for 7 o'clock to come. You

know, I was doing nothing in between and I got too - introspective I think is the word - long one that - but I got too into myself".

Worker: "Yes, I think 'introspective' is a good word to choose because it probably expresses how you were feeling at the time".

When supportive statements were used in this way, it was usually in the context of a reciprocal discussion. For example, in interview 39 the client is talking about her husband who has been admitted to an alcohol treatment unit:

Client: "Women seem to think that men should be strong and they're not. They're just the same as us, in fact".

Worker: "Yes. And I think they find it frightening sometimes that so much is expected of them".

6. Supportive Behaviours and the Client

The data indicate that clients actively seek support. Praise and approval are presumably rewarding for clients and serve to raise self-esteem.

It was possible to identify three sets of circumstances which tended to provoke a supportive response from the worker. The first was an announcement by the client of

some new achievement, the second was a self-depreciatory remark by the client, and the third was an attempt by the client to gain the worker's support by means of argument.

In interview 25, the client is eager to announce how well she has been doing lately:

Client: [proudly]. "Did I tell you I'd started looking for a job?".

Worker: "You did tell me and I was very pleased to hear it".

In interview 23, the client wishes the worker to know that she has taken his advice and begun to talk to her son more:

Client: "...he listens as well, but if the television is on or anything around he may be distracted so I always make sure it is off or I take him to the park - just two of us sitting down so there is nothing to distract, nobody to knock at the door".

Worker: "That's very good, that is. I think that is really good for talking to a child in particular. You're quite right. You don't want any distractions, do you?".

By contrast, the client in interview 32 feels far less confident about her behaviour:

Client: "I think I'm doing something wrong around here".

Worker: "I don't think you are. I think you are doing very, very well".

In interview 37, the client complains that her son thinks she is "thick".

Client: "He calls me thick. But I don't think I'm thick".

Worker: "Oh, I don't think you're thick either!".

Clients also engage in rational debate to try to win the support of the worker. Quite often they succeed. In this extract from interview 4 the worker is trying to encourage a foster mother to allow a handicapped child to do more for herself. At the end of the discussion, the worker endorses the compromise reached by the client:

Worker: "Do you still have to feed her or does she finger feed herself?".

Client: "Well, I tend to feed her most of the time but she will eat biscuits and things she can hold. She probably could spoonfeed herself a little bit more if I left her but.....".

Worker: "What, because of the mess?".

Client: "I try to leave her with something she won't make too much mess with. If I want to make sure she's

got something down her properly, I feed her and then leave her with a little bit".

Worker: "Yes. That's the answer. Make sure she's got enough".

Summary and Conclusion

Although most of the interviews in the sample were supportive in tone, supportive statements were among the least used forms of intervention. This finding is consistent with a number of studies of American casework. Heron [1975] suggests that cultural factors may be partly responsible as the verbalisation of feelings towards another person is not encouraged in our society.

Statements which reinforced the ideas or actions of the client were more common than those which were sustaining in nature. Reinforcement was a double edged tool in this study: It was used both to reinforce client initiatives and to reinforce client behaviour when it was in accordance with what the social worker intended.

It was not surprising that clients appeared to appreciate the support they were given and in some cases could be shown to be actively seeking it.

Chapter 22

Challenging Behaviour

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines the verb "to challenge" in two main ways: "to call to respond" and "to take exception to". Both these meanings were evident in the sample. Challenging statements were used to stimulate rational debate with clients as well as to correct clients' misconceptions or to point out discrepancies in their ideas or actions.

For the purpose of analysis, challenging behaviours were taken to include any statement by the social worker that doubted or questioned the validity of the client's statement or which expressed open disagreement. Also included were confrontational statements which pointed out discrepancies in the client's ideas or actions.

Egan [1975] argues that all challenges contain a negative component for both parties. Social workers may feel that they are abandoning their traditional supportive, friendly role and jeopardising the worker-client relationship. Clients may be told things they would rather not know. He suggests that challenging tactics have to be handled with great care and sensitivity. They are not appropriate when the client is feeling anxious, threatened or disorganised. They should always be aimed at inviting the client to explore problems more fully and not allowed to degenerate

into an argument between worker and client. Challenging should not be used as an opportunity for the worker to prove his/her superiority.

Berenson and Mitchell [1974] believe that workers have to earn the right to challenge their clients. This right is based on the quality of the relationship and the level of understanding displayed by the worker. Clients will not respond to a worker who they feel does not care about them and does not understand their problems. On the other hand, they will accept a great deal from one who does. In addition, workers themselves need to be open to challenges from the client. If the worker is defensive, the client is likely to be so too.

Berenson and Mitchell also believe that, although a challenge is likely to have something negative about it, a successful challenge should also relate to the client's assets and strengths. For example, a challenge which draws on the client's strengths might be:

"You've managed to keep this flat tidy in the past. I wonder how it's got into such a mess just now?".

An example of a challenge which emphasises the client's inadequacy might be:

"The flat is looking a terrible mess today. Can't you get it cleaned up?".

The first example is likely to lead on to further

exploration of the problem. The second example is likely to produce resistance.

Challenging behaviours may be useful in situations in which the client's defences, restrictive attitudes, beliefs or behaviours are proving an obstacle to further work and progress. For Shulman [1981] - "identifying obstacles to work" is a primary helping skill. He cites the need to confront clients on issues such as dependency within the helping relationship, transference problems, or reactions to agency policy.

Some forms of therapy aimed at personal change are founded on the notion of challenging the clients' most fundamental attitudes and beliefs if these are identified as self-limiting or self-defeating. For example, in Rational-Emotive therapy [Ellis, 1973], common attitudes such as the need to be always liked and loved, the need to prove competent in all areas of life or the belief that all problems should have quick and easy solutions, are confronted and debated.

Although challenging is generally acknowledged in the literature as a helpful form of interview behaviour, thoughtlessly employed it can do a great deal of harm. This is graphically described by Heron [1975, p.6] as a phenomenon he labels "Trigger Finger":

"Through anxiety and insecurity, in fact through unresolved fear of confronting his client, the

practitioner reaches too quickly for the gun of negative feedback and fires a hurtful round which makes a small hole through the defences leaving them largely in tact, but leaves a messy wound in the person. In its extreme form, trigger finger manifests as upright, agitated, destructive, critical attack upon the person of the client".

It is perhaps, the explosive potential of challenging behaviours that explains why half the interviews in the sample contained no examples of worker challenges at all.

1. Frequency

Challenging was one of the least frequent forms of verbal behaviour. It was present in only half the sample interviews. Two hundred and thirty-four challenging interventions were spread over 20 interviews.

The incidence per interview varied between 1 and 42. Ten of the twenty interviews contained 5 or fewer challenging behaviours; a further 6 interviews contained between 6 and 15; and the remaining four interviews contained between 23 and 42 instances of this behaviour.

A high number of challenging interventions did not necessarily represent a more challenging interview but could signify a lengthy debate with the client on one or two specific themes.

2. Relationship with Other Behaviours

When the Pearson test for correlation coefficients was applied to all the behaviours in the interviews,

challenging behaviour was found to be correlated with the use of the more assertive interview techniques such as giving information, giving direct guidance and worker self-revelation. There was also a positive correlation between the use of challenging behaviour and male social workers.

3. Challenging Behaviour and Content

Challenging behaviours accounted for only 5.1% of all interventions in the sample as a whole. They accounted for 10.3% of all behaviours when the role of the social worker or the department was being discussed. This figure was mainly accounted for by three interviews [2, 22 and 24] in which some hostility to the social worker's role was expressed and a discussion ensued in which these views were challenged by the workers involved.

Apart from this, the highest number of challenging behaviours occurred in discussions about another person [a child, a spouse or a parent], and in discussions about the client's own feelings and beliefs. These accounted for 8.4% and 7.2% respectively of all behaviours in the relevant categories.

4. Types of Challenging Behaviours

Workers in the sample challenged client statements in three main ways. They corrected client misconceptions or errors of fact; they produced counter-arguments to the

client's own in order to stimulate discussion; they confronted clients directly in order to influence attitudes and behaviours which were seen as unhelpful or maladaptive.

a] Correcting Client's Misconceptions

This form of challenge occurred in 14 of the 40 sample interviews. For example, in interview 32 the client is expressing how hopeless she feels about managing her three young children. In the first extract, she is talking about her baby:

Client: "- because if she wakes up, that's it!".

Worker: "Well, it's not quite it!".

Later, the same client talks about her three year old:

Client: "But you can't ignore him".

Worker: "Well, you can. There are ways".

In both cases, the worker uses straight denial to challenge the client's view, although it can be seen that his intention is to support and reassure the client.

The worker is able to challenge the client in this way because of the authority which he/she is assumed to possess. An example of this occurs in interview

27 in which the client, a patient in a psychiatric unit, is convinced that the hospital staff will force her to return home to her husband against her will. The worker challenges this:

Worker: "I don't think anyone is going to. It's your decision".

In this case, the worker is able to speak on behalf of the clinical team.

In interview 30, the validity of the worker's challenge rests on his assumed superior knowledge. The client, who attends Alcoholics Anonymous, is expressing her feelings about her son being in police custody:

Client: "They [AA] would say that he is a fully grown adult and he is responsible for his own actions and whatever he gets he's asked for anyway and it shouldn't affect me at all. But it does".

Worker: "I don't understand AA to say that you are not allowed to feel. You are not allowed to drink because you are feeling bad. There is no prohibition on feeling".

Workers also challenge factual statements. In interview 34, the client tells the worker that his headmaster has not heard about his [mostly bad]

behaviour from his class teacher. The worker doubts this:

"Are you sure she hasn't talked to Mr H about it?".

b] Promoting Discussion

Most forms of challenge call for a response and workers were sometimes able to exploit this to enable their clients to take a more active part in discussion. For example, this light-hearted exchange takes place near the beginning of interview 23. The worker is challenging the client's contention that Heavy Rock music has a big following:

Worker: "How do you know there are that many? How many do you know personally?".

Client: "Heavy Rockers? I know quite a few".

Worker: "Well, how many is quite a few? Five? Ten?".

Client: "More than that!".

Worker: "Twenty?".

Client: "About that. Yes".

Worker: "Twenty. Well, that's not many is it?".

Client: "I know. But those twenty, they know

others".

Worker: "They might just know each other".

Where the worker is prepared to challenge the client's feelings and attitudes, a deeper discussion may follow. In this extract from interview 24, worker and client challenge each other's arguments. The client's three daughters are returning home after several years in a family group home. The client has just made a remark about the youngest:

Worker: "I get the impression that you don't like her out of the three".

Client: "It's not that I don't like her. It's just the fact that she's the one I'm getting more rejection from than the others....They won't bend".

Worker: "Why should they bend?".

Client: "Well, why shouldn't they? You have to? You have to bend to rules and regulations like everyone else in the world does".

Worker: "It suits me to bend. I mean, it doesn't necessarily suit them".

Client: "Yes, but at the group home they clean up. It's one of the jobs that they do. If they can do it there, why can't they do it here?".

Worker: "Because here is not the group home. Here is an alternative to the group home".

Client: "But when you were at home, you had to do a certain amount of work. Even if you had brothers and sisters, you still had to do it".

Worker: "But the point I am trying to make is that they have got here and they have got the family group home and they can play one off against the other".

Client: "Yeah, but it's wrong".

Worker: "Of course it's wrong".

Exchanges such as these were particularly evident in interviews 11, 23, 24 and 37 which contained a high number of challenging interventions. They were also present, to a lesser degree, in a further 5 of the sample interviews [2, 8, 9, 22 and 32].

Challenging behaviours in the sense of producing arguments and counter-arguments are essential to the process of rational debate and it is significant that this behaviour occurred in only 9 out of 40 interviews. This may be taken to reflect the low level of participative discussion in the sample as a whole.

c] Influencing Attitudes and Behaviour

Challenging may also be used to confront clients directly with attitudes and behaviour which are seen as maladaptive by the social worker. This was the most common form of challenge and was present in 19 of the 40 sample interviews.

For example, the client in interview 2 tends to tax the patience of his friends by his constant talk of fires and fire engines. He complains that he is being teased:

Worker: "It's not because you talk about fire engines a lot?"

The client responds to this by describing a huge blaze he has attended:

Worker: "But they are not really interested in the fire brigade, are they?"

In interview 10, the client is explaining why he always arrives late at the day centre. The worker challenges this:

Client: "But I can't get a breakfast before I go because I go to bed to sleep. I get up at 7.30. I can't get breakfast in half an hour!"

Worker: "You can't get up and get breakfast and be out in half an hour!"

Workers also confronted clients with negative patterns of thinking which may be preventing further progress. This is similar to Shulman's concept of "identifying obstacles to work", and has some parallels with Ellis's technique of rational-emotive therapy. [See Introduction, above].

In the following example from interview 13, the client feels that everything is going wrong for him at school. The "wrong thinking" is "I'll never be able to make any progress". The worker challenges this directly:

Worker: "How do you explain how well you've done this term? This is the only one bad thing that has happened the whole of this term after all the bad things that were happening last term. Do you feel that you've been trying but that nothing has changed?"

Client: "When I get the report it will be the same old comments at the end - could do better, could do better, he tries hard but he could do better".

Worker: "Don't you think a lot of people get that on their reports? Have you looked at the other kids' reports?"

Client: "Yeah, but they get B's and A's and

everything".

Worker: "Not everybody".

In interview 20, the "wrong thinking" is "everybody is better off than I am". The client is in despair because she needs to get a job but cannot find anyone to look after her small boy:

Client: "But there are other people who seem to get what they want".

Worker: "Well I don't know whether that is so really. I don't think anyone can get a child in a nursery without good reason".

Client: "Oh, no. But everything seems to go right for them. You know, you look round and they're doing great".

Worker: "But you don't know how they are feeling".

5. Challenging Behaviour and the Client

Clients generally accepted the social worker views when it was a question of correcting a misconception or a misunderstanding. When their arguments were challenged by the workers, they were willing to enter into rational debate and to produce counter-arguments. However, it was rare for a client to concede a point when confronted by the social worker in a way that challenged attitudes or behaviour. For example, returning to interview 2 [see 4c,

above] in which the worker is trying to persuade the client to stop talking about fires and fire engines; when he suggests that this might be the reason the client's friends tease him, the following exchange takes place:

Client: "Mind you they all say about the fireman that some of them are not that good but I told them that three of them got killed in action. In fact one of them broke his back....".

Worker: "But they are not really interested in the fire brigade are they? So have you stopped talking about it so much now?".

Client: "Not really, because they don't mind a lot now".

In interview 10, the worker finally withdraws from the argument having failed to win over the client on the issue of arriving at the day centre on time: [See 4c above].

Client: "On Thursdays I can't go early because I go down to get my money".

Worker: "But you just sign in the book for that don't you?".

Client: "So they think I can be in early every day but I can't. I'm held up on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Worker: "But they know about Tuesdays and Thursdays".

Client: "Don't seem they do".

Challenging behaviour was much more likely to be immediately effective if the outcome of a change in outlook and behaviour was attractive to the client. For example in interview 30, the client is castigating herself for feeling so much anguish when her son was imprisoned.

Client: "I'm hurting and it's him that has gone through it. I'm hurting for him".

Worker: "Does that mean your hurting is less worthy than anybody else's?".

Client: "So I'm allowed to hurt if my children hurt?".

Worker: "You're allowed to hurt if you hurt".

This echoes Berenson and Mitchell's point that successful challenges should contain a positive element rather than pointing up the client's weaknesses. [See Introduction, above].

The fact that clients are reluctant to see the worker's point of view during the interview does not necessarily mean that the challenge was not effective. Clients might well reflect on what was said later in the day and see it in a different light.

Summary and Conclusion

Challenging was a relatively rare verbal behaviour in the sample interviews. It was most commonly used to challenge the attitudes and behaviour of clients with a view to changing maladaptive practices [19 interviews]. In 14 interviews it was used simply to correct errors of fact or misperceptions. In 9 interviews it was used to encourage the client to engage in a rational debate of the issues.

As the willingness to challenge another's argument is a key component of successful discussion, it is surprising that this behaviour was not used more for this purpose in the sample interviews. However, as has been noted elsewhere in this thesis [see, for example, Chapter 15, Closed Questions], workers rarely used participative debate as part of their interview technique. In this respect, the absence of challenging behaviours fits a general pattern.

The fact that less than half of the interviews contained behaviours that directly challenged clients' behaviours or attitudes indicates a reluctance to use this behaviour on the part of workers. Egan [1975] suggests that this is not uncommon. Workers are afraid of hurting clients, they may feel they have no right to intrude in sensitive areas, or they may be afraid that they will no longer be liked. Whatever the reason, few social workers in the current sample favoured a confrontational style of interview.

Chapter 23

Reflection of Content

Introduction

Reflection of content [sometimes also referred to as paraphrasing], consists of picking up on the client's response and reflecting back the content of the speech in the worker's own words. As opposed to reflection of feeling [see Chapter 24], it focuses on the cognitive or factual aspect rather than on the emotional import of the statement.

Reflection is not a mere repetition or "parroting" of the client's words. By the use of their own words, workers show that they have understood the clients' remarks and are following or "tracking" the discourse.

In interview 8, for example, the client has a faulty light switch in her bathroom. The worker follows her somewhat diffuse account with a concise reflection of content which shows that he has acknowledged and understood the problem. It is a reflection of content rather than feeling because he chooses to focus on the practical matter of the switch rather than on the obvious distress this has caused the client:

Client: "This is a nuisance, this in the bathroom. There's a faulty switch in the bathroom. It's a month since it was reported - so I went down

and phoned them and they said they'd be sending somebody - but when the steam is in the bathroom, after I've had a bath, I went and touched the switch, it was you know, all 'diddly'. So I can't use the bathroom".

Worker: "The steam affects the lighting switch and you get an electric shock".

Reflection of content is rarely afforded as much space in the literature as reflection of feeling which is seen as an important component of the empathetic response in helping situations.

One school of thought sees reflection of content as primarily a client-centred response which is supportive and facilitative. For Ivey [1971] and Ivey and Authier [1978] it is one of the primary attending skills in counselling interviews. For Kadushin [1972, p.144] it indicates to the client that the worker is ready and willing to hear more about a particular topic. As a reflective comment is an intervention that refers only to the client's speech, no new elements are introduced into the discourse from the worker's viewpoint. The interview, therefore, remains client-centred and the client is encouraged to continue with the subject matter in hand.

Other commentators have given reflection of content a much more active role within the interview. Hackney and Cormier [1979] point out that each client response

contains a number of potential topics which the worker may choose either to reinforce or to ignore. Thus, the use of reflective comments presents the worker with a constant series of choices as to how the interview is to develop. Benjamin [1974, p.10] has coined the term "leading from behind" to describe this process which he saw as a powerful though subtle way of controlling the interview.

Summarising is a special form of reflection of content. Gambrill [1983, p.136/7] points out the importance of summarising data from the client as a way of reviewing progress and checking for any misunderstandings or inaccuracies. Egan [1975, p.159] underlines the importance of summarising relevant data at the beginnings and ends of interviews as well as at other key points as a way of maintaining the focus.

Social workers in the present sample used reflection of content in a variety of ways. These are described in the subsequent sections.

1. Frequency

Reflection of content was one of the most frequently employed worker behaviours accounting for 11.5% of all worker interventions over the sample as a whole. It ranked third in frequency after asking closed questions [31%] and giving information [21%] although it fell considerably behind these two in terms of numbers.

Thirty-eight of the 40 interviews contained reflections of content. Interviews 16 and 17 which did not contain this behaviour were both by the same social worker. The incidence per interview ranged from 1 to 47 but three-quarters of all interviews contained 15 or less reflections of content and over half the interviews [22] contained 10 or less.

2. Relationship to Other Variables

There was a strong positive correlation between reflections of content and the use of closed questions. [This is discussed more fully in the relevant section of Chapter 15 on closed questions]. It is suggested that asking direct questions coupled with the reinforcement of the client's response through the use of reflective techniques is one of the key ways in which the worker directs the interview.

There was also a strong positive correlation between reflections of content and reflections of feeling, both in terms of raw numbers and in terms of the percentage of each behaviour used in individual interviews. This suggests that amongst some social workers, there was a tendency to use reflective interventions in general, irrespective of their differential usage within interviews. From the data available, however, a more reflective style of interviewing could not be linked to any other particular interview characteristic.

3. Reflection of Content and Subject Matter

Reflections of content were present in all the main subject areas of the sample interviews, including those containing a high emotional content as well as those which concerned more factual matters. The incidence was highest in matters relating to the client's health [21% of all verbal interventions], followed by a recounting of incidents or events by the client [18%]. Reflections of content accounted for 13% of all interventions in topics which dealt with the client's feelings [reflections of feeling accounted for only 9% in this category]. Reflections of content accounted for 12% of all interventions in topics which concerned practical matters or the clients' day to day activities. In all other categories, reflections of content represented less than 10% of worker verbal behaviours.

The data indicate that workers found reflection of content a very useful tool in a wide variety of situations both within and across interviews.

4. Types of Reflection of Content

a] Reinforcement

Reinforcement accounted for the vast majority of all reflections of content over the sample as a whole. [387 out of 473].

Reflections of content act as reinforcers by picking up aspects of the client's previous speech. As the worker's comments reflect interest in the client's concerns and new ideas are not introduced, the client is encouraged to continue with his/her theme. For example, in interview 21, the worker encourages the client to tell her about a trip to the country with some friends:

Client: "We took a flask of coffee and some scones and we pulled up and it was lovely."

Worker: "Gorgeous views".

Client: "Oh, it was beautiful. It wasn't clear, it was misty but it wasn't raining".

Here just two words are enough to convey that the worker is following the story, is in general sympathy with the ideas expressed, and that she wishes the client to continue. The client responds accordingly.

Reinforcement is also commonly used when the worker needs to gather more factual data. In interview 7, the client who is hoping to be re-housed has told the worker that she must expect to wait another year:

Client: "Cos apparently you get allocated so many points a month".

Worker: "For having been on it that time".

Client: "But I mean, since I got the points.....".

The worker's reflective comment here signals to the client that she is prepared to hear more about the time factor, rather than move on to other aspects of the case. The client therefore continues on this theme.

Selective reinforcement, or deciding which aspect of the client's statement to focus on, presents a further issue. This is discussed in section 5 below.

b] Acknowledgements

In a minority of cases [61 out of 473], the reflection of content could not be seen as a reinforcer encouraging the client to continue with a particular theme as the worker him/herself continued to speak immediately after the reflective comment. In these instances, the reflections were regarded as simple acknowledgements of the clients' statements. For example, in interview 27, the client is a hospital in-patient. She tells the worker that her husband will be sending her some money:

Worker: "When did he tell you that?".

Client: "He told me last night on the phone".

Worker: "Oh, I see. You have spoken to him. [Reflection]. Well, in that case I think we are going to have to wait a day or two to see if the money comes".

In this case, the acknowledgement serves to indicate to the client that the worker's query has been answered and that she is now ready to proceed with what she has to say.

Some acknowledgements appear to round off topics and so clear the way for a new subject to be introduced. This may happen when the worker is moving through a mental check list. For example, in interview 15, the worker is asking her 13 year old client about family relationships. She asks first about his brother. The client does not describe any problems, so after acknowledging his response, she moves on to the next item on the agenda:

Worker: "Oh. So things have been OK between you and him. [The brother]. Have you been down to your sister's a lot?". [New subject].

c] Summaries

Reflective summaries, or reviews of information given by the client, accounted for only 25 the 473 reflections of content. Nevertheless, they formed a

distinct sub-group. A reflective summary still reflects the content of the client's speech but not necessarily the intervention immediately preceding it. In interview 1 for example, the client has spent some considerable time outlining the plans made by the family for when her father leaves hospital. The worker uses a reflective summary to indicate to the client that she has understood these before moving on to offer help with equipment and services:

Worker: "So the plan is that your mother goes home, just to be with her son for a week and your dad is leaving us tomorrow and he is going for care for a week, isn't he?"

In interview 25, client and worker have been talking about the problems of getting back to work. The worker reflects back the client's views at the end of the discussion:

Worker: "I see. So you would like to try an interview, see what the problems are and then we can talk about it and see what to do".

Summaries are not simply a reiteration of everything the client has said. They help the client to focus on important issues. They are especially helpful when the client is rambling, or is stuck, or the

interview appears to be leading nowhere. They may also serve to encourage the client by summarising progress or achievements. Workers in the present sample, however, seemed reluctant to share reflections of this type with the client.

The reflective summaries described above should be distinguished from worker summaries in which the worker summarises his/her own plans or ideas. [This is discussed in Chapter 16]. It is worth noting here, however, that neither form of summary is very much used in the sample interviews. Workers did not seem to find it useful to review where they were up to or what had been said, either at the end of topics or at the end of interviews. This seems to apply equally to information obtained from the client or given to the client. It could be taken as further indication of the lack of formal organization within interviews, noted in Part III of the thesis.

d] References to Previous Interviews/Past Events.

A Sub-type

Occasionally, workers summarise past events or remind clients of previous discussions or decisions. For example, in interview 26, the worker wishes to know the client's feelings about entering an elderly person's home. She first refers to earlier events:

"So it was nearly a year ago that you and I had a conversation about whether you wanted to go to a Home for the elderly and we went and looked round it and felt that you were really quite a lot better than many people there and that was when you decided you would like to visit as a volunteer once a week...".

In interview 27, the client, a psychiatric in-patient, has expressed a wish to see her daughter who is in Care:

Worker: "Some time ago, in one of your other admissions we got a solicitor who was going to come and see you to see if we could take that case back to court and appeal against not being able to see J - but you weren't around. You went off to London".

For the purpose of analysis, such interventions were classified as reflections of content although they were of a slightly different order from the reflections described above, in that they did not refer directly to client speech. It was a rare form: only 7 of the 25 summaries in this category referred to past events in this way.

This finding suggests that workers may see each interview as a separate and complete entity rather than part of an on-going process. There was little

evidence that the workers were engaged in a style of working over time that involved beginning, middle and ending phases. Egan [1975], for example, outlines three stages for working with clients; problem exploration and clarification - developing new perspectives and setting goals - action. Maluccio [1979], in his study Learning from Clients, describes three phases in a worker-client relationship; getting engaged - staying engaged - becoming disengaged. Egan's model is action-oriented while Maluccio's is based on parameters of the worker-client relationship, but both imply a longitudinal method of working with clients consistently over weeks or months.

The fact that workers in the present sample rarely made references to past conversations cannot be taken as conclusive proof that they were not working in this way; but it would be fair to say that these reflections occurred less often than would be expected in planned and phased casework - especially as none of these were first interviews. The fact that the majority of interviews contained a great deal of assessment work, along with information and advice, also supports the view that social workers tended to see each interview as, in some respects, a fresh start.

5. Ways of Using Reflection of Content

Reflections of content proved a versatile form of behaviour. It was used in combination with questions to acknowledge and reinforce responses, as a simple listening behaviour to encourage the client to keep talking, and to convey a variety of other messages to the client such as sympathy, doubt, approval or disapproval.

a] Reflections of Content and Questions

The largest group of reflections of content [35%] followed closed questions. Asking a question and then reflecting back the meaning of the client's response was a common verbal pattern. For example in interview 9, the worker is trying to get to the root of the client's anxiety:

Worker: "Well, what were you anxious about this morning?"

Client: "Oh, everything. Just facing everything".

Worker: "So it's nothing specific".

Later in the interview, the worker asks the client about the reactions of people at work to possible redundancy:

Worker: "Was nobody talking about redundancy? I know you did, but did other people say 'Oh, that's

trouble'?".

Client: "Oh, yes. One or two people said it could be one of three things, redundancy, merger or take-over".

Worker: "So to some extent people went off to their buses and their trains with this in the back of their minds".

Thirty-two per cent of reflections of content were followed by closed questions. Thirty-five per cent were preceded by closed questions. In many cases, this represents a sequence of: question - answer - reflective comment - further question. The following extract from interview 20 illustrates this pattern. The client who has severe financial problems has just stated that she sometimes goes without a meal in the evenings:

Client: "I just can't be mithered".

Worker: "It's not really a way of economising then?" [Question].

Client: "Well, not really, no. But at times I do".

Worker: "You think you'll do without a chop or...." [Reflection].

Client: "I'll just have a sandwich or something. You know, I used to get those pork chops - if I had

a couple of those left over at the end of the week, I'd give them to G and the kids and just have a chip butty or something like that".

Worker: "Do the other two have school meals? Do they have free school meals?" [Question].

Client: "Oh, yes. They have school meals".

Worker: "So they do have one good meal a day" [Reflection].

Client: "Oh, yeah. They get good meals every day".

Worker: "Do you feel they need another meal when they come home. I'm sure they'll eat it" [Question].

Client: "Well, they're hungry buggers. They'd eat me out of house and home, if they could".

Worker: "So you really do give them another meal" [Reflection].

Reflections of content here help to "soften" the effect of what, in reality, is a cross examination by the worker about whether the client is feeding her children properly. A potential interrogation is turned into more of a two-way conversation by the use of sympathetic reflective responses.

Seven per cent of all reflections of content were

preceded by open questions. This reflects the lower incidence of open questions over the sample as a whole and also the fact that open questions were more likely to be followed by reflections of feeling [15% of all cases].

Taking open and closed questions together, 42% of all reflections of content were preceded by a question.

b] Sequences of Reflective Comments

Eighteen per cent, or almost one-fifth of all reflections of content, were followed by another reflection. This had the effect of encouraging the client to expand further on his/her theme. Sequences of more than two successive reflections of content were rare; there were only thirteen instances of three or more together in the sample as a whole.

Reflective interventions may be used in sequence as an alternative to questioning techniques in order to gather data. By reinforcing each response, the worker encourages the client to give information in his/her own way. For instance, in interview 21, the worker wishes to find out how successful the client has been in organising her sickness benefit:

Client: "You get this book after 23 weeks".

Worker: "When you've been on the sick".

Client: "Well, I've been off 23 weeks, I don't know if it's this week or next week because I reckoned up last night in my diary".

Worker: "It's some time now isn't it? Yes, I was wondering about that".

Client: "So you go on to that you see. And also one of the ladies from the lab', she brought me a photostat copy of how long you get paid for according to your years of service".

Worker: "I see. Yes. The regulations".

Client: "It's upstairs. I thought I'd show you when you came".

In a minority of cases [5%], reflections of content were followed by reflections of feeling. They were also preceded by reflections of feeling in 5% of all cases. This suggests that both forms of reflection may be used in sequence to encourage the client to continue talking or to reinforce certain themes.

Reflections of content followed questions or other reflections in 65% of all cases. Approximately one-third of the reflections of content [35%] did not appear to follow any consistent pattern of use but

were inserted into the interviews where appropriate.

c] Reflections of Content which Convey a Message

All [accurate] reflective comments by their nature indicate that the worker is attending and following. In addition, they may also convey other messages such as understanding, support, surprise or approval. Some of the various ways of using reflections of content are illustrated below.

i] Simple Following

Worker: "When are you coming to the hospital again?".

Client: "I don't know. When I get an appointment".

Worker: "You are going to have an appointment".

[Interview 20].

ii] Understanding Meanings

In interview 3, the client is giving the worker her opinion of a friend's child:

Client: "He's growing up and I think he's accepting things a bit better and he's going out of the house now a bit more to friends".

Worker: "So he's got a bit of a life of his

own".

iii] Acknowledging a New Piece of Information

In interview 20, client and worker are discussing the problem of getting the client's little boy looked after while she works:

Worker: "And how did you manage when you were a lollipop lady?"

Client: "Well, my husband was out of work at the time".

Worker: "Oh, I see. So he was caring for the children".

iv] Checking to Get it Right

In interview 9, the worker wants to be clear about when the client has taken her medication:

Worker: "Thursday night, when you read the notice, are you saying then you'd taken your tablet?"

Client: "When I saw the notice, it was being put on the board at five minutes to five, I'd already taken my tablet".

Worker: "You'd already taken your tablet and that was having some effect on you".

v] Approval

In interview 20, the worker has been trying to find ways of helping the client to save money:

Worker: "What sort of allowance do you make for presents?".

Client: "Well, I don't. I just get what I can afford".

Worker: "You do. You do stick to what you can afford".

vi] Surprise

In interview 1, the client's father has been admitted to hospital after becoming difficult to manage at home:

Worker: "Do you find him on the better side now? Now that he is in hospital? Do you see any improvement?".

Client: "No".

Worker: "Don't you? You don't see any change!".

In interview 12, the worker is preparing a patient at the Alcohol Treatment Unit for the strict regime he is likely to find at the dry house which he is going to visit that afternoon:

Worker: "You said you quite enjoyed the groups at the unit even though they have been few and far between and a bit chaotic because of the way things are going at the moment with staff shortages and so on. [Reflection]. How do you feel about doing a lot more of those?".

6. Reflection of Content and the Client

Examples of reflection of content in this chapter have illustrated the use of this form of intervention as an effective attending and following behaviour and as a way of acknowledging and reinforcing the client's comments. It has been seen as a predominantly client-centred, facilitative behaviour that encourages the client to talk about his/her own concerns.

An alternative view sees reflection of content as predominantly worker centred. This form of intervention can be seen as a way of "leading from behind". The worker steers the interview by selectively reinforcing those aspects of the client's discourse which he/she wishes to

discuss. This view has both positive and negative aspects. Baldock and Prior [1981a] see the process as covert and deceptive. They comment that because of their adherence to precepts of non-directiveness and non-judgementalism, workers seem to be "firmly occupying the back seat" during the interview - but they add:

".....such an interpretation would be false: in general they were very much in charge, steering the interviews along paths chosen by them for definite, albeit hidden reasons".

They point out that the hidden methods used by social workers serve to enhance their control.

Commenting on these findings, Clifton [1981] writes:

"The social workers seem to have resolved the dilemma posed by their wish to maintain a non-directive relationship with clients in the face of requirements to supervise or to keep a watchful eye on developments, by perfecting a 'deceptively low profile technique' which left their clients confused and, indeed, deceived".

These are serious criticisms of British social work methods. Commentators on American casework seem to take a less negative view of steering the interview along lines laid down by the worker. Egan [1975] for example, stresses the responsibility of the worker in holding the focus of the interview when the client appears to be rambling or going off at a tangent. More helpfully, Shulman [1981, p.65] recognises that the worker's ability to direct the interview is a power that can be used for good or ill. Workers may either encourage elaboration of

the client's theme or direct the flow of work in another direction. He criticises workers who shift the focus of the interview away from the client's expressed concerns, show lack of interest in the clients' themes, or change the subject according to their own sense of urgency rather than that of the clients. If used purposefully, however, behaviours which reinforce "productive work patterns" on the part of the client can be very beneficial to the helping process.

In the present sample, workers used reflections of content to direct the flow of clients' talk in various ways. In interview 2 for example, the worker asks the client whether or not he has been to the day centre. The client responds by offering a discourse on his favourite topic, which happens to be fires and fire engines. The worker is actively trying to discourage talk about fires as this preoccupation has led to a number of social problems for the client. Accordingly, he chooses to ignore the client's account of the incident that morning and returns decisively to the subject of the day centre:

Worker: "Have you been recently?"

Client: "No. I've been off. I've been helping my mates all the time for three months with Bonfire Night coming up and this, that and the other. I mean, we had a big one this morning, I mean we've had a huge incident this morning up at the Thistle

Hotel in town, a five pumper, three machines, a big one and three Dennis pumps, a TTL from London Road and an Echo 53 from Gorton going out - which is the alarm bells gone flying off which is a bit silly on a warm day like that".

Worker: "So as regards the Day Centre. You haven't been for a while".

Client: "No".

The worker here is successful in bringing back the focus of the interview to the topic in hand [the day centre] and in discouraging further problem behaviour on the part of the client [continuous talk about his exploits with the fire brigade]. Neither of these objectives appear to be supported by the client but nevertheless they can be viewed as being in the client's interest. They are not covert aims as both have been discussed with the client earlier in the interview.

In interview 12, the worker uses reflections of content selectively to emphasise certain ideas. The client, who has a drink problem, is being encouraged to think about areas of his personality which he might like to change:

Worker: "Is that causing you any problems, the extent to which you feel you are selfish though?".

Client: "No great problems, but now I haven't had a drink for a couple of days you know, it's just part of

my personality that I've got to change.....I've got to make an effort to talk to people instead of sitting there with my face in a book, you know, embarrassed".

Worker: "So, you've identified another area there, do you think, socialising or.....".

Client: "I find that very difficult. It might not appear it, you know, typical Cockney lad and all the rest of it, but I find it's a nightmare having to go into a room with a load of strange people and talk. I can do it at an AA meeting. I can sit there with fifty people and it doesn't bother me. I can say what I think - I correct that - I never did say what I think. That is why I went back on the booze. I never shared. But I find it hard work trying to communicate what I feel you know. And worry, I worry a lot.....".

Worker: "So rather than just socialising, you are talking about sharing, which is a bit more of course".

Client: "Yeah. Come to think of it. Yeah".

In this extract, the worker has moved the discussion forward from a consideration of the client's self-centred behaviour, through his ability to socialise, to a consideration of the notion of sharing in relationships. These ideas have not been imposed on the client; the

worker helps the client to sort out his ideas by extrapolating key themes from the client's speech.

All client speech presents multiple messages. Workers are constantly faced with choices about whether to respond to all or part of the message, to the cognitive or feeling component, and to which particular part of each. By responding to a particular part of a client communication, the worker makes it more likely that the part will be developed and that the rest of the message will be dropped by the client in future communications. The worker's skill lies in ensuring that he/she^{*} responds to that part of the client's message that has the most bearing on the client's concerns and is, therefore, the most important.

Hackney and Cormier [1979] note the tendency of some social workers to reflect back either the last component of the client's speech, because of its immediacy, or to reflect the component which seems most interesting. They point out that these are poor criteria for selection. A skilled use of reflection of content always reflects the client's needs rather than the worker's.

It would be improper to pass judgement on the way individuals in the sample used reflective comments but it is clear that the majority were aware [consciously or unconsciously] of the value of this form of verbal intervention in controlling and directing the flow of the interview.

Summary and Conclusion

Reflection of content was one of the most frequently used and versatile forms of intervention in the sample as a whole. It was used by most social workers within a variety of subject areas.

This behaviour served to signal to the client that the worker was following and attending; it served to acknowledge the client's remarks and to reinforce aspects of client discourse; it was also used to summarise the client's comments or to refer to previous events.

Reflections of content were commonly used in question and answer sequences and in listening sequences; but they were also used singly to convey a variety of messages as the interview progressed.

Opinions differ on whether reflection of content is primarily a worker-centred or client-centred behaviour. It has been seen both as a facilitative device to encourage the client to talk and as an active behaviour which the worker uses to direct the interview "from behind", through the use of selective reinforcement of the client's themes.

Evidence from the present sample shows reflection of content used in all these ways. The versatility of this form of intervention may partly account for its wide use amongst social workers in the sample.

Chapter 24

Reflection of Feeling

Introduction

Reflection of feeling involves the worker in mirroring back the feeling component of the client's statement but using his/her own words. Reflections may be based either on the client's statement or on non-verbal behaviour which conveys a message about the client's feelings.

Reflection of feeling has four main functions:

1. It demonstrates not only attention and interest but also understanding and concern: it is important in conveying empathy.
2. It places the emphasis of the exchange on what the client is feeling rather than on what the worker thinks or wants to know: it is client centred.
3. It indicates that it is acceptable and may be helpful to talk about feelings: it encourages the client to talk more about feelings.
4. It can help to clarify the client's thoughts and to focus attention on certain aspects of the client's discourse: it can help to move the interview forward.

Ivey and Authier [1978] have suggested that reflection of feeling consists of five main elements or microskills. In

practical terms these are:

1. The direct labelling of the emotional state of the client.
2. Reference to the client either by name or personal pronoun.
3. Present tense reflection - emphasis on "now".
4. The addition of certain paraphrased elements of the client's past statement.
5. The use of appropriate facial expressions, general bearing and tone of voice.

Reflection of Feeling and the Client-Centred Model

It is more than thirty years since Rogers [1957] first identified empathy, along with warmth and genuineness, as an essential element in the helping process. In the late nineteen-sixties and early seventies, various attempts were made to operationalise these definitions so that they could be measured and taught. The reflection of client feeling was the main means by which empathy could be conveyed. The model suggested by Carkhuff [1971] may serve as an [abbreviated] example of the way in which the skill of reflecting feelings was broken down into a scale demonstrating various levels of empathy:

At level 1, there is no empathy: the worker's responses are not appropriate to the mood of the client's statement.

At level 3, the worker responds accurately to the client's more exposed feelings.

At level 5, the worker responds to all the client's exposed feelings and shows an awareness of the feelings that are not so evident.

At level 7, the worker shows an awareness of the precise intensity of the underlying emotions but his/her responses move only slightly beyond the area of the client's own awareness.

At level 9, the worker responds to the client's full range of feelings in their exact intensity.

The client-centred counselling model has been endorsed by various commentators in the American literature. For Fischer [1978], the proper use of reflective techniques is what distinguishes high level helpers from low level helpers. He uses a modified form of the Carkhuff rating scales as a basis for training casework students. Shulman [1981], sees the ability to put the client's feelings into words as the vital element in building a relationship between worker and client. For Shulman, reflective techniques establish the worker as a direct and caring person who is able to see the world through the client's eyes. While empathy is the cornerstone of Rogerian counselling, for both Fischer and Shulman, it is the foundation on which workers can build more pro-active

helping skills.

An Alternative Model

Bessell [1971] writing about the social worker interview in Britain takes the view that the expression of empathy can be over-stressed. He sounds a warning note:

"If the social worker comes to the conclusion that the client has sufficient resources to solve his own problem but needs help in mobilising resources and clarifying the problem then he would probably use the technique of reflective counselling. This is different from ordinary conversation and needs to be used with great circumspection by the social worker or else it can come across to the client as a means of evading the responsibility to help".

Egan [1975], an American writer, also expresses the view that the value of reflective statements in conveying empathy may be taken too far. While acknowledging that such behaviour is helpful in building rapport, he argues that clients may be fearful of too much empathy, too soon, and not know how to use it. He suggests a simple model in which reflections of feeling are divided into two major categories:

1. Primary level accurate empathy - in which workers try to let their clients know that they have understood what has been said. They stay within the clients' immediate frame of reference, not digging too deeply. In some ways they are saying what the clients could have said. This helps to establish a working relationship, aids in problem clarification, and

helps the clients to talk more about themselves.

2. Advanced level accurate empathy - in which the worker goes beyond what is stated to what is half-expressed or implied. It can help the client move on to new territory.

Similar to Egan's notion of advanced empathy is the category of "exploration" put forward by Shapiro et al. [1984] in their analysis of the psycho-therapeutic interview. The authors base their work on the conversational model of psychotherapy formulated by Hobson and later described in his book Forms of Feeling [1985, p.187]. For Hobson, the interview, which he prefers to regard as a type of conversation, is a creative process:

"There is a progressive increase in mutual understanding which involves negotiation and adjustments, the correction of misunderstanding. This activity is characterised by a shared language of feeling".

In order to achieve this understanding, the therapist makes a series of tentative statements or informed guesses as to the patient's feelings. Hobson advocates the use of the words "perhaps", "maybe" and "I wonder" which leave the statements open to further negotiation and he draws a contrast between this method and "interrogation" in the form of a sequence of questions by the worker.

Most social workers in the present sample did not use reflection of feeling as a major method of intervention;

but there was evidence of both simple reflective behaviours and the more intuitive "informed guesses" that characterise exploratory forms of "advanced empathy" described by Egan. These are described in section 4 below.

1. Frequency

Reflection of feeling was one of the least used verbal behaviours. It was present in 32 of the 40 interviews but accounted for only 190 worker interventions in the sample as a whole. The incidence per interview was generally low. Only 7 interviews contained 10 or more reflections of client feelings [3 of these were by the same social worker]. A review of the literature - see Introduction above - suggests that social workers in the sample may have under-estimated the potential usefulness of this form of intervention.

2. Relationship with other Variables

There was a strong correlation between the worker's use of reflection of feeling and the worker's use of reflection of content, both in terms of raw numbers and of percentage use per interview. Both behaviours were used to encourage the client to keep talking, although reflection of content was used more often than reflection of feeling. [There were 473 instances of reflection of content as opposed to 190 reflection of feeling in the whole sample].

There was a weaker correlation, in terms of raw numbers, between reflection of feeling and open questions, and it was not confirmed in terms of percentage use per interview. It is perhaps surprising that the two behaviours were not more closely associated given that open questions are used most frequently to elicit clients' feelings and attitudes. The data, however show that open questions were more commonly followed by closed questions than by reflective behaviours [see Chapter 14 - Open Questions].

There was also a correlation in terms of raw numbers between the use of reflection of feeling and the sex [female] of the social workers. As the use of challenging behaviour, direct guidance and worker self-revelation was more common among male workers, it is tempting to conclude that female workers tend to rely on a softer, more empathetic style while males employ a more instrumental approach - especially as this would confirm common sexual stereotypes. However, these figures have to be interpreted with caution for the following reasons:

- a] of the 7 interviews which contained 10 or more reflections of feeling, only one was by a male worker, but 3 were by the same female social worker;
- b] of the 8 interviews which contained no reflective behaviours, three were by female social workers.

3. Reflection of Feeling and Interview Content

The highest number of reflections of feeling occurred in a discussion of clients' feelings and attitudes. This behaviour accounted for 10.8% of all worker interventions in this subject area. They also commonly occurred in discussions about health matters, accounting for 6.1% of all interventions. On all other topics, reflections of feeling accounted for less than 5% of worker interventions. Although the data indicate that reflections of feeling were usually associated with more emotive topics, they were not the most frequent behaviour in the discussion of client feelings. Closed questions accounted for 29.2% of all interventions on this subject and reflections of content for 13.7%.

4. Types of Reflection of Feeling

For the purpose of analysis, reflections of feeling in the sample were divided into two groups. These were labelled primary reflection and secondary reflection.

Primary reflection is close in meaning to Egan's "primary level accurate empathy" [see Introduction above]. It reaches for the feeling component of the client's statement but does not go beyond what the client means to convey.

Secondary reflection is closer to Shapiro's category of "exploration" [see Introduction above]. It goes beyond

the client's overt statement to suggest underlying themes of which the client may not be consciously aware. Although the worker may use reflective behaviours to bring out these feelings, there is no attempt at interpretation.

a] Primary Reflection of Feeling

Examples

In interview 6, the worker uses primary reflection of feeling to indicate understanding. She is asking her client, who was adopted as a baby, why he has chosen to seek out his natural parents:

Worker: "Is there any particular reason that prompted you to.....?"

Client: "Just curiosity really".

Worker: "Yeah, so it's not a fantastic dissatisfaction with anything in particular"
[Reflection of feeling].

Client: "Oh, no. It's just something I'd like to know because I'm curious about it".

The worker here is using reflection of feeling to check her understanding of the client's motivation. He confirms this in his next statement. A little later in the interview, the worker uses the same technique but this time gets it slightly wrong. The client corrects her:

Worker: "And have you asked your adoptive parents very much about it? Or is it a subject they don't particularly like to talk about?"

Client: "They would do if I asked but I don't particularly want to ask them in case they don't like me asking".

Worker: "Right. So you are aware of their feelings in the matter and they may feel a little bit sensitive" [Reflection of feeling].

Client: "Well, they may do or they may not but I'd rather not ask them".

Worker: "You'd rather not put them in that position. That's fair enough" [Reflection of feeling].

These extracts show that, even at primary level, reflections of feeling need to have a tentative quality about them. Workers extrapolate from the data. As the full feeling component of a client's discourse is unlikely to be stated directly, worker and client may need to negotiate to arrive at a mutually acceptable meaning.

b] Secondary Reflection of Feeling

Secondary reflection is also concerned with the search for shared meanings but the worker now reaches beyond demonstrating empathetic understanding. In an attempt to move the interview forward, the worker focuses on feelings [some of which may be unpleasant] that lie hidden beneath the surface. In the context of a non-judgemental relationship in which good and bad feelings are equally accepted, secondary reflection helps the client to express and explore areas that may have lain hidden and inaccessible.

Examples

b] [i] Reflecting the Emotional rather than the Factual Component

In interview 25, the client, a psychiatric out-patient, has been living in the community with other ex-patients in a house she refers to as "number 39". She left the house to marry Brian. She is asking the worker for information about her position should she leave her husband. Instead of simply answering her query, the social worker focuses instead on her underlying feelings about leaving her friends at number 39.

Client: "I lost number 39 through Brian. I know that. I was just wondering if my marriage broke down and I was divorced from Brian, would my name go back on number 39 then, do you think?".

Worker: "It sounds as if you miss number 39 a little bit".

Client: "I do. I do".

The client's ready acceptance of the worker's reflective comment, indicates that she was right in her judgement to explore this area in greater depth.

b] [ii] Helping the Client to Explore Feelings

In interview 24, the client is talking about the difficulties of relating to his adolescent step-daughter who returns at weekends from a family group home. Although the reflection of feeling is not accepted by the client as accurate in this case, it serves to help him explore his feelings further as he attempts to clarify what he has said to the social worker:

Client: "She is the odd one out, because you can't put your arm round her. She rejects it. You try to show her affection and sometimes you think you've got there and sometimes you

haven't. She keeps you out on a limb, all the way through".

Worker: "I get the impression that you don't like her - out of the three....".

Client: "It's not like that I don't like her, it's just that she's the one I'm getting more rejection from than any of them. I mean, if you are nice to her....".

Clearly, the art of reflection is not just dependent on words. The worker must tune in to the client's tone of voice, his/her facial expression and other non-verbal cues. The client must also tune in to what the worker is saying. In the extract above, the worker's tone of voice indicates that his words are not meant to be a challenge. In the context of a secure relationship with the worker, the client is able to respond to such a comment in a way that moves the interview forward in terms of self-exploration and understanding.

b] [iii] The Ventilation of Suppressed Emotions

Reflection of feeling can sometimes bring suppressed emotions to the surface and allow the client to ventilate feelings. By labelling the underlying emotion, the worker indicates

his/her acceptance of it. The client can then "own" the feeling without fear of judgement.

In interview 23 the client is a seventeen year old who [judging by this interview] does not find it easy to talk about his feelings. He is telling the social worker that he believes the police have fabricated evidence against him:

Client: "I signed 6 papers. Right? About 6 or 7 papers. Right? So the copper signed it and I signed it. Right? And that night they came to our house. That inspector showed me them. Right? And they were all with my signature on them. So, unless that guy has written 3 more about it....".

Worker: "You seem to be pretty sore at the way the police handled all that" [Reflection of feeling].

Client: [Pause]. "All what?".

Worker: "Well, that incident".

Client: [Pause]. "Well, yeah, yeah".
[Pause]. "That night when Steven had gone, why did they break in? Why did they push his mam away from the door? Like I say, we wasn't in there. She was a bag of nerves....".

In the extract above, the client begins slowly and carefully to describe what happened, punctuating each sentence with "right?". The worker responds by making a reflective comment identifying the emotional content of his speech. The client hesitates at first, but is eventually enabled to express his sense of outrage in a rush of angry words describing how the police came to his home.

5. The Use of Reflection of Feeling

Primary versus Secondary Reflection

Primary reflection was used more often than secondary reflection in the sample as a whole. There were 128 primary reflections and only 62 secondary reflections. Eight interviews contained only primary reflections. Of the 24 interviews containing both types, only 4 contained more secondary than primary reflections of feeling. The incidence of these two types of reflective behaviour was too low to make meaningful generalisations about their differential use within the sample interviews. [There were only three interviews with more than 7 instances of secondary reflection of feeling]. This raises the question whether social workers in the sample were sufficiently aware of the potential usefulness of these behaviours. In particular, they seemed reluctant to use secondary reflective techniques to explore clients'

feelings in more depth and to move the interview forward in terms of clients' awareness and understanding.

Context

The largest group of reflections of feeling followed questions [82 out of 190 cases]. A second group [59 out of 190 cases] followed other reflective behaviours indicating that the client holds the floor and is being encouraged to expand his/her ideas. In a further 49 cases, reflections of feeling were preceded by other behaviours including information, direct guidance, supportive and challenging statements. These tended to refer to the clients' feelings or state of mind.

Table 23 - Verbal Behaviours Preceding Reflections of Feeling

Open questions	28
Closed questions	54
Reflection of content	24
Reflection of feeling	35
Other	49

N =	190

Examples

Where open questions were used these did not necessarily refer directly to the client's feelings. A general

question could provoke a feeling response which the worker might decide to encourage the client to develop by using a reflective intervention. For example, in interview 12 the worker asks a general open ended question near the end of the interview. The client responds with a practical problem and an indication of his feelings about it. The worker decides to develop the feeling response [although he later returns to the practical problem].

Worker: "Is everything more or less OK?".

Client: "I think it's more or less OK. I'm not going to go into the Giro syndrome. That hasn't come and that makes me a little bit, not uptight - but it hasn't come. I haven't had one since I've been here. I keep waiting and waiting but it don't come. There's a difference. I'd have been climbing the wall once".

Worker: "That must make you feel good, knowing that something which has been perhaps you know, your prime concern in the past is - you are being able to deal with it quite so well".

Where reflections of feeling were preceded by closed questions, these were often direct requests for feelings. In interview 9, the client has just described a disturbing day at work in which a meeting to discuss possible redundancies had been announced. The worker probes her

feelings about this:

Worker: "So what state were you in by the time you got home? I mean was that as usual - did you have all this anxiety? Did you have your anxiety under control?"

Client: "Well, I think so because I had someone to go home and tell. I wasn't going home to...say, someone living on their own, they'd have no-one to tell".

Worker: "So it's an important thing to be able to share with someone else".

In this interview, the worker uses a series of precise closed questions to construct a detailed account of the client's state of mind throughout the day. The client's response is followed by reflective statements which she is invited to confirm or deny:

Worker: So what's happening between 4.30, and the time you go to bed in terms of your anxiety level? I mean, are you feeling OK during the evening or do you feel increasingly anxious as the time goes by?"

Client: "Well, to a certain extent, I've been out to work you know and there is nothing to conquer really. I don't get any confidence staying in the house. Quite the reverse. It depresses me. So when

you've been out to work you sort of build up the confidence that you've done a day's work and you've fulfilled what you are supposed to have done....".

Worker: "The way you're describing that, it's almost as if at the end of every day's work you are saying 'Well, I've got through another day and that's a good thing. I've done all the jobs necessary, I've met people and tomorrow is another day. I'll start again'".

[Closed questions were commonly used to elicit feeling data from clients throughout the sample interviews. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 15].

Where reflections of feeling were used in sequence, this usually had the effect of drawing out the client's feelings and helping them to express their ideas. In interview 19, the client is a divorced mother with severe financial problems. The worker is probing her attitude to work:

Worker: "You liked that sort of job?".

Client: "Well, I like factory work. I've always been used to factory work".

Worker: "You like the people".

Client: "I like the people, I think, you know, they are a

nice set of people in a factory".

Worker: "It's good company".

Client: "Well, it is, yes. Because they have nearly all got the same problems as you. You know what I mean. There is no snobbiness. They don't try and put you down".

Worker: "You are all working hard and doing your best for your families".

Client: "Well, this is it. I like factory work".

Where reflection of feeling is used in sequence with reflection of content, this is usually to encourage the client to continue with his/her narrative. The two verbal behaviours may be used interchangeably to demonstrate attending and following on the part of the worker. In interview 21, the client who is recovering from a mastectomy is describing how two friends had been to the bank for her and managed to get her bills paid:

Worker: "Really! So it's all sorted out" [Reflection of content].

Client: "Yes. And no problem whatsoever. You see, if they hadn't come on Thursday....".

Worker: "Yes. They offered to help" [Reflection of content].

Client: "I thought if they hadn't come I'd have been hanging on 'till Saturday and asking my cousin. She said she would have done it for me".

Worker: "I know she would. Well, often these things are not as difficult as they seem. I know you get worried about it" [Reflection of feeling].

6. Reflection of Feeling and the Client

Clients' responses to reflections of feeling were universally positive. Even when workers' reflections were perceived as inaccurate, these were not challenged or denied. Clients tended to correct misapprehensions in a spirit of enlightenment designed to enable the interview to move forward.

For the purpose of analysis, [see Appendix 44] two forms of response to reflection of feeling were identified:

a] clients confirmed the accuracy of the intervention with a word or a short phrase;

b] clients took the reflection as a cue to expand on their feelings. A response of 15 seconds or more was taken to indicate that the client had been encouraged to talk more about feelings by the worker's intervention.

Clients chose to respond by a confirmation or by expanding on their ideas irrespective of the level of the worker's

reflection. They were no more likely to explore their feelings at length after a secondary level intervention than after a simple primary reflection.

Examples

a) Client Assent or Confirmation

The client in interview 13 is a boy in trouble for assaulting a teacher at school. He thinks that none of the teachers like him now. Despite the tentative exploratory nature of the worker's reflections, she fails to draw him out. However, his responses indicate that her comments accurately reflect his state of mind:

Worker: "And you mean that when you see them you are sure they are thinking awful things about you".

Client: "Yeah. Unless I do something good to suit their style".

Worker: "You have been doing a lot of that lately - like the jumble sale and stuff - you mean that doesn't work very well".

Client: "It doesn't work very well. Why should it anyway?".

Later in the interview the subject of the client's relationship with his mother is discussed. Once

again, the client's response confirms that the worker's perceptions of his feelings are correct:

Worker: "So it isn't that you are frightened of a beating or anything like that. It's just that you don't want her to disapprove of you. You don't want to let her down".

Client: "I don't want her to disapprove of me. I don't want to let her down".

The value of the reflective statements in this context seems to be in helping to create an empathetic relationship by letting the client know that his feelings have been understood and that they are acceptable.

b] Encouraging the Client to Talk

In interview 12, the client is an alcoholic who is about to leave hospital for a dry house. In comparison to the previous example [interview 13], the worker's reflection is at a primary level: it simply aims to summarise the client's feelings. Nevertheless, it stimulates the client into expressing new areas of emotion:

Worker: "It does sound as if you are fairly worried in some respects but that on the whole you have got a fairly sound approach at the moment. You seem to have been able to identify one or two areas you want

to change and also as time goes on, you'll find more areas you want to work on".

Client: "The thing is when you say 'you'll be able to'. I've got to the stage now with my drinking that I've got no choice. I mean, it don't get mentioned very often in the groups but people die from alcoholism. If they're lucky. Otherwise, they get a wet brain. There's a posh name for it isn't there - korsikov syndrome or something. We were talking last night, me and another guy - I mean, people die and if I carry on drinking I'm either going to die or I'm going to get a wet brain. I've got no choice. I've got to stop it. And I want to. That's the important thing. I want to stop".

The client in interview 4 is a nurse who has recently suffered a leg injury. The relatively superficial reflection by the worker here encourages the client to express herself more freely about the injury in relation to her job:

Worker: "That's going to be a real problem. Caring work of any kind - it's very hectic".

Client: "I'm alright now really. They tell me it's going to be five to ten years before I get any real problems with it. I hope it will be ten years. But the way I'm going at the moment, I'm not really doing

myself any great good with it by using it as much as I am doing. Running up and down stairs, running up and down the ward a hundred times a day".

The data show that reflections of feeling were fairly successful in encouraging clients to talk more about feelings. In just over half of all cases [55%], clients used the worker's reflection as a stimulus to express their own ideas. The level of reflection did not seem to be directly related to the level of response.

Summary and Conclusion

Reflection of feeling was little used by social workers in the sample but where it was employed it was shown to be useful and effective. It could encourage clients to talk more about their feelings and it was important in helping to develop understanding and empathy. Clients in all cases responded positively to this mode of intervention.

Two types of reflection of feeling were identified. Primary level interventions articulated the client's expressed emotions while secondary reflections reached beneath the surface to suggest more deep seated feelings.

Clients responded to reflections of feeling either by confirming or assenting to the worker's intervention or by taking it as a cue to expand on their feelings. These responses were not associated with the two types of

reflection. Primary reflections could be taken as a cue to expand ideas and feelings while secondary reflections sometimes only produced monosyllables or short phrases.

As expected, reflections of feeling occurred most often in a discussion of the client's own feelings. As this topic was discussed in 32 of the 40 interviews, it is perhaps surprising that the incidence of reflective behaviour was not higher. Given the prominence of worker reflection in the counselling literature, together with its effectiveness, where used, in the present study, it would seem that the sample workers tended to underemploy this method of intervention.

There is research evidence to suggest that other modes of verbal intervention may be equally effective in encouraging clients to talk. An early study by Merbaum [1963] compared the effects of reflective behaviours with non-committal encouragers to talk such as "mm" and "uh-huh", and with more positive encouragers such as "good" and "yes". Although reflection of feeling was found to be the most effective, all three types were judged to be effective in varying degrees. A study by Highlen and Baccus [1977] compared the effectiveness of reflections of feeling with probes [questions] in encouraging the client to talk about their feelings. The results indicated that both were effective but that neither was more effective than the other. Both these sets of results are interesting in the context of the present study in which

reflective behaviour was generally little used while both probes [questions] and minimal encouragers to talk were used a great deal. [See Chapter 15, Closed Questions and Chapter 25, Listening].

Chapter 25

Listening

"If thou art one to whom petitions are made, be calm as though listenest to what the petitioner has to say. Do not rebuff him before he has swept out his body or before he has said that for which he came. The petitioner likes attention to his words, better than the fulfilling of that for which he came. It is not necessary that everything about which he has petitioned should come to pass, but a good hearing is soothing to the heart".

Visier Ptah-Hotep. Circa 2700-2000 B.C.
[Kadushin 1972, p.56].

Around 4000 years on, the importance of listening is still not seriously disputed by those in the helping professions. Discussion centres on the way in which we listen, the amount we listen, the function of listening and ways in which listening may be conveyed to the client.

Listening in the social work interview is an active skill. Benjamin [1981] suggests that the worker must listen not only to the words of his/her client but also for how the client thinks and feels about him/herself and about others; how he/she perceives the material under discussion and what is involved; for the aspirations, ambitions and goals of the client; for his/her values and philosophy of life; for his/her defence mechanisms and coping mechanisms.

At the same time, workers must attend to their own feelings and responses. It is possible for workers to become preoccupied with their own internal processes to

the detriment of the clients. It is also possible for workers to become over-involved with the client's inner world so that they are unable to stand back and evaluate material objectively.

Kadushin [1975] emphasises that all listening is selective. The worker must have some idea of what he/she is listening for. There is a need to screen out the redundancies which occur in speech such as repetitions, accents or impediments as well as tangential comments or irrelevant remarks.

There are both internal and external barriers to effective listening. External noise, constant interruptions or the physical properties of the room may make it difficult to listen. Internal barriers include the worker's own assumptions and prejudices which can act as filters through which he/she hears the client's words. Most of us try to fit what we hear into preconceived patterns and it often requires considerable effort to listen in an open way with a readiness to accept what challenges our perceptions.

For Ivey [1971], listening is part of the worker's basic repertoire of attending skills. He maintains that all successful interviewers have basic attending skills which include being good listeners, being relaxed, maintaining appropriate eye contact and verbal following. Ivey and Authier [1978] see attention used in this way as an active

reinforcement technique. Listening shows interest and concern, therefore clients are rewarded by attention. They are more likely to pursue themes if the worker is prepared to listen.

Listening and Talk Times

It was not possible to "count" listening in the sample interviews in the same way as it was possible to count questions or supportive statements. A crude measure was obtained by timing the amount of client talk and timing the amount of worker talk in each interview with a stopwatch. From these figures the ratio of worker talk to client talk was calculated.

The figures have to be interpreted with caution. It cannot be assumed, when the worker is not talking, that he/she is actively listening. Workers may be preoccupied with their own thoughts or their attention may be distracted by external factors. It is sometimes difficult to assess the quality of listening from audiotape where visual cues are not available. It could be that, while the researcher assumed the worker to be listening, he/she was actually rummaging through the files or looking out of the window.

While such possibilities cannot be ruled out, there is sufficient evidence on the tapes [tone of voice, paralinguistic utterances, verbal following] to suggest that workers were engaged in active listening for most of

the time their clients were talking. On this basis worker/client talk time ratios were held to be a valid indicator of the relative amounts of talking and listening in the sample interviews.

Kadushin [1975] suggests that workers should be doing one-third of the talking at most. Benjamin [1981] considers that if the worker talks as much or more than the client, communication from the client is effectively blocked; the worker is acting as a superior who must be respectfully listened to and the client is likely to perceive him/her in this way.

The results of talk times for the present sample are set out in Appendix 33. It can be seen that in the research interviews there were only 5 cases in which the client talked at least three times as much as the worker. In 8 out of the 40 interviews, the worker talked more than the client and in a further 3 interviews the talk times were the same. In general the results show a very wide spread of talk times with a tendency for clients to talk more than workers in 29 out of the 40 interviews. Overall, it was felt that workers in the sample talked more and listened less than was expected. Some possible explanations for this finding are discussed below.

Possible Factors Associated with Talking/Listening

1. Personal Characteristics of the Worker

There was no evidence that the personality of the social worker was an important variable in determining how much they talked within the sample interviews. Twelve social workers recorded more than one interview but there was little consistency in talk times across interviews. For example, interviews 13 and 15 are by the same worker and both are with teenage boys in trouble at school. In interview 15, the worker talks three-and-a-half times as much as the worker. Similarly, interviews 16 and 17 are by the same social worker. In one, the worker talks over four times as much as the client, while in the other the client talks over one-and-a-half times as much as the worker [see Appendix 36]. This finding is encouraging as it indicates that workers adapted their style according to the needs of the client or the business of the interview.

2. Personal Characteristics of the Client

The personality of the client may be a more important factor than that of the worker. There were some clients who did not seem very articulate and in these interviews the workers tended to talk more. For example, in interview 15, the client's responses were often monosyllabic and it was clearly difficult for the social worker to encourage him to say more. The client is a 14

year old who has been a non-attender at school. Recently, he has been attending more regularly:

Worker: "Good. And did the headmaster congratulate you or anything?"

Client: "No".

Worker: "No. But you really feel happy there? You feel like you did last time?"

Client: "Yeah".

Worker: "And you feel really confident that you'll get back on Monday alright?"

Client: "Yeah".

Worker: "What's it been like since M got back?"

Client: "It's been alright".

There could be a number of factors which affect the amount the client is willing to contribute to an interview. The style of questioning may not leave much room for expansion; the client may be nervous or over-awed by the authority of the social worker, especially in an adult/child interview; the client may feel hostile or unco-operative. Nevertheless, the sample interviews suggest that while these factors may play a part, some clients are distinctly less articulate than others.

3. Normative Factors

It is difficult to assess the contribution of normative factors. They are derived from many sources including previous contact with social workers, contact with authority figures in general, media presentation and hearsay among the general population. As none of the interviews in the sample were first interviews it is likely that expectations about how to conduct the exchange would have been built up over a period of time.

There was some evidence from the sample that workers and clients were guided by normative expectations. For example, the worker in interview 3 expressed concern that she allowed clients enough space to express what they had to say. In fact, interview 3 had the highest score for client talk [a ratio of over eight to one]. In contrast, the worker in interviews 22, 23 and 24 said he preferred to think of the interview as a two-way exchange. In his interviews, the client talked between one-and-a-half and two-and-a-half times as much as the worker.

Some clients indicated that they had certain expectations regarding the interview. The client in interview 25, asserts her view that her social worker will be available to listen to her troubles even when there is no specific problem:

"....if you get in a mess and then ring your social worker, well, that's not fair. You come to see your

social worker when you are not in a mess, not just use her. I think that's using you, just coming when there is something wrong. You know what I mean? That's why I'm here really. That's why I like to have a little talk with you sometimes".

4. Special Circumstances

There was some evidence from the sample interviews that special circumstances can affect talking/listening time. For example, interview 13 takes place immediately after the client, a 13 year old boy, has assaulted a teacher at school. The boy is eager to tell his side of the story and talks almost without interruption for the first third of the interview. The social worker commented later that she had put aside her former plans for the interview as the client had such an urgent need to talk about the incident.

In interview 18, the social worker found her client quite depressed. It was difficult to draw him out and get him to talk at all. The client is a West Indian and on former occasions they have discussed the possibility of his returning home. All utterances are punctuated by lengthy pauses:

Worker: "Are you still thinking about the same problem of how to go back to your country?".

Client: "Yes. I don't mind".

Worker: "You would like to go?".

Client: "Yeah".

Worker: "Can you tell me about your life here? How do you feel about it?".

Client: "Well. I'm not very healthy and I don't think I'll be able to find a job".

Worker: "Mm".

silence

Worker: "Do you meet other people during the day?".

Client: "No".

silence

Worker: "Not at all?".

Client: "No".

Worker: "Do you go any place for walks?".

Client: "To the park".

Worker: "So your little dog is your only companion is she?".

Client: "Yes".

The social worker is having to do most of the work here.

Later she gives up and begins to do most of the talking herself. She talks more than two-and-a-half times as much as the client over the interview as a whole.

5. The Business of the Interview

This may be an important factor in determining the amount of listening versus the amount of talking in the sample interviews.

For example, in interview 28 the client talks over three times as much as the social worker. The worker is helping him to construct a curriculum vitae in order to help with job applications. This involves the client in giving a detailed account of his work history and, as he has had a great many jobs, this takes up the entire middle section of the interview. The client talked while the worker listened and took notes.

Conversely, in interview 6 in which the worker talks and the client does most of the listening, the worker has to convey a good deal of complex information to the client regarding procedures to be followed by adopted children who wish to trace their natural parents.

In other interviews, workers talk more in some parts and listen more in others. For example, in interviews 4 and 5 [both by the same worker], the first third of each interview is taken up by the worker explaining the complexities of a taxation form to the clients who are

respite foster mothers. Later in the interviews, the worker says relatively little and allows the clients to expand on their own particular themes of concern.

The business of the interview cannot be said to determine the amount of listening as opposed to talking in all cases. Interviews containing relatively similar types of problems and similar categories of clients often differed greatly in this respect. For example, interview 12 and interview 40 are both basically assessment interviews with men who have drink problems but they are tackled in very different ways by the workers involved. In interview 40, the worker takes a back seat and the client is encouraged to talk. [He talks seven times as much as the worker]. Interview 12 is much more of a dialogue and client and worker talk for roughly the same amount of time.

Conclusion

The amount of listening and the amount of talking in the sample interviews did not seem governed by any one variable. Listening seems to be regarded along with forms of verbal intervention as one option in the range of possible responses which are open to the social worker. In most interviews [29 out of 40], there was more listening than talking which suggests that it was a popular and frequent form of response amongst the sample workers.

Ways of Listening

The key characteristic of listening responses is that they do not interrupt the flow of client talk. The client continues to talk through them without acknowledgement and without changing tack.

Listening responses in the sample ranged from silence through a series of paralinguistic noises to short comments. The listening rarely seemed neutral. Responses were not only in keeping with the tone and content of the client's remarks but also conveyed something of the worker's own attitude. It proved impossible to count listening responses in any meaningful way as many must have been inaudible on tape but some of the more common types found in the sample interviews are listed below:

1. Minimal encouragers to talk [paralinguistic utterances] - "Mm". "Mm - Hmm". This simply seems to mean "Go on" or "Please continue" but may be said in a variety of tones of voice.
2. Simple verbal encouragers - "Yes". "Right". These are possibly more encouraging than 1.
3. Interrogatory encouragers - "Did you?". "Was he?". "Are they?".
4. A rapid series of encouragers - "Yes, yes, yes". "Mm, Mm, Mm". May indicate either intense interest

- or a desire for the client to hurry up and finish.
5. Selective repetition of key words used by the client.
 6. Adding a few words to the client's remarks.
 7. Indicating approval - "Good". "Great". "That's marvellous".
 8. Indicating disapproval - "Oh no!".
 9. Indicating surprise - "Oh really!".
 10. Indicating understanding - "I see".
 11. Indicating sympathy - "Oh dear". "What a pity".
 12. Indicating agreement - "That's right".
 13. Laughing [with, not at the client].
 14. Silence. This can indicate many things such as incomprehension, thought or hostility, but in this context it indicates a desire for the client to continue speaking. In an early piece of research on interviewing, Matarazzo et al. [1965] found that if interviewers in their sample did not respond immediately, 60% of the interviewees began speaking again.

Non-Verbal Behaviour

Non-verbal behaviour could not be observed in the context of the present research. Facial expression, posture, eye

contact, nods of the head and manual gestures were all lost in this method of analysis. Yet, as Argyle [1972, p.50] points out, one of the key roles of non-verbal behaviour is to signal attentiveness:

"For an encounter to be sustained, those involved must provide intermittent evidence that they are still attending to the other. They should not fall asleep, look out of the window, or read the paper; they should be at the right distance, in the right orientation, look up frequently, nod their heads, adopt an alert congruent posture, and react to the speaker's bodily movements".

It can only be assumed that workers in the sample, in addition to using verbal and vocal cues, also signalled the fact that they were listening to clients non-verbally, through such means as leaning slightly forward, eye contact, smiling, nodding and raising their eyebrows as appropriate.

Examples of Listening Behaviour

It was found that vocal expressions of listening tended to be personal and idiosyncratic. Workers who recorded more than one interview were generally consistent in the type of listening behaviour they employed both across and within interviews. Conversely, types of listening behaviour varied greatly from one worker to another. For example, in interview 20, the worker uses a wide selection of responses as she listens to the client recounting the story of how her husband lost his bus pass:

Client: "I'm just waiting for the bus place to 'phone me

back. They took his bus pass off him last night....".

Worker: "Last night?" [repetition of client's words].

Client: ".....yesterday morning. Well, I washed his jeans and I didn't know his bus pass was in them....".

Worker: "Oh dear!" [expression of sympathy].

Client: "....but I'd just got him his new pass...".

Worker: "Mm". [Go on].

Client: "....so the picture was a bit distorted....".

Worker: "Mm". [Go on].

Client: "....but you could see his name....".

Worker: "Yes". [Showing understanding].

Client: "...and they took it off him on his way to work yesterday morning and they didn't give it him back so he had to borrow £1 to get home and I had to give him £2 this morning to get to work and back...".

Worker: "Tut, tut" [expression of disapproval aimed at Transport Authority].

Client: "....and she 'phoned me back this morning and she

said the only thing to do is to get another bus pass...".

Worker: "Oh, goodness me!" [exclamation of surprise].

Client: "I just can't afford another £6...".

Worker: "Oh dear" [sympathy].

Client: "...so they said they would 'phone me back, so I'm just waiting now".

In contrast to this interview, the worker in interview 14 uses a limited range of expressions to indicate to her client that she is following and attending. The client is discussing her relationship with her 13 year old daughter. The worker's interventions are in brackets:

Client: "The only thing I did try to say to her the other week was, I know I shout at you a lot and I know you irritate me a lot and I know that sometimes we really do not see eye to eye and it is pretty hard for you to accept this

[yes]

but I wouldn't get half so irritated about someone I didn't care as much about.

[yes]

Almost, that that is one product of being very involved

[yes yes]

with somebody. I said to her, if you had a

girlfriend staying

[Mm]

or somebody I didn't care about particularly

[Mm]

one way or another, I probably wouldn't lose my temper with your friend but you

[yes yes]

that would really rankle".

Listening and the Client

Listening was not a one-way process in the sample interviews. Over one-quarter [11] of all social workers talked as much or more than their clients, so clients could be expected to engage in a great deal of listening. Like the workers, they expressed their listening and attending in many ways but tended to be consistent in style throughout the interview.

For example, the client in interview 20 exhibits a wide range of empathetic listening skills while her social worker is describing the progress she has made in finding a play school for her small son:

Worker: "Well, there are toddler groups around. There aren't many...".

Client: "No" [agreement].

Worker: "....but there are a few...".

Client: "Ah" [surprise].

Worker: "...which I have tried to find out...".

Client: "Yes" [please continue].

Worker: "...but I'm waiting for a new leaflet about them".

Client: "Yeah' [showing interest].

Worker: "There is one in the church hall on Brownly Road".

Client: "Oh - yeah" [showing recognition].

The fact that clients exhibit a similar range of verbal and vocal listening skills to the social workers suggests that these are culturally rather than professionally acquired. The ways in which clients and workers listen may well be part of their personal baggage which they bring with them into the interview, and are probably identical to those used in everyday conversation.

Summary and Conclusion

Given the importance afforded to listening to clients in the literature, workers in the sample talked more and listened less than had been expected.

It was difficult to determine the reasons for one interview containing more listening than another. There was some evidence that workers were guided by professional mores and, within these, adapted their style to the particular client and the business of the interview.

Although non-verbal behaviour was lost through the use of audio-tape, there was a rich variety of verbal and vocal skills displayed. Listening style is, perhaps, the most personal of all the interview behaviour discussed here, but there seemed no particular merit in one style as against the other.

Clients too had a great deal of listening to do in the research interviews. If the vast majority of workers proved to be good listeners, then so did the clients.

Chapter 26

Verbal Behaviours. An Overview

Types and Sub-types of Verbal Behaviours

1. Open Questions

Open questions such as "How are things going?" or "What did you feel about that?" allow the client considerable freedom of response. They are commonly associated with encouraging clients to talk about feelings and attitudes. In the sample interviews they were also used to elicit factual data and data about events in the clients' lives. General enquiries were used at the beginning of interviews ["How are things going?"] and at the end ["Anything else?"]. The question "Why" was considered to be an open question but it was largely unsuccessful in eliciting information of any sort from clients.

2. Closed Questions

Closed questions define the subject matter more narrowly than open questions and also limit the nature of the response: "How many children do you have?", "Do you like children?". Closed questions dominated the sample interviews. In contrast to open questions they were used most commonly to elicit factual data but they were also used extensively to elicit feelings, opinions and attitudes.

Sub-types of closed questions comprised requests for

clarification and requests for confirmation ["Is that OK with you?"] but both these sub-types were rare in the sample interviews.

3. Giving Information

A great deal of information was given on a wide variety of subjects in the sample. Information on practical matters predominated but information was also given on feelings and relationships. Other types of information included statements on the purpose of the interview, the role of the worker and arrangements for future meetings. Workers gave direct feedback on the client's progress and also reported on work done between meetings.

In addition, much "informal" information was given during the interviews which reflected the workers' own views and opinions. This did much to set the conversational tone of the exchange.

4. Direct Guidance

Guidance differs from information in that it is intended to influence the client's behaviour or decisions in a certain direction.

For analytical purposes direct guidance was divided into practical guidance on such matters as welfare rights or housing, and moral guidance on such matters as feelings and relationships.

Forms of guidance consisted of directives, requests, advice and suggestions. Reassurance, "Don't worry", was considered to be a special form of guidance.

Advice was by far the most common form of guidance, all others making up only a small proportion of the whole.

5. Offers of Practical Help

Practical help took place outside the context of the interview, but offers of help were considered to be a separate type of interview behaviour. Offers of help chiefly concerned the provision of services [home helps, meals-on-wheels], liaison with other agencies [Housing, Social Security] or offers to contact a third party such as another professional or a relative of the client.

6. Interpretation

Interpretations are interventions designed to increase client self-understanding and insight. In the sample interviews this behaviour was divided into "here and now" explanations which provide new ways of looking at events in the client's life and the more reflective "linking" explanations in which the worker attempts to find patterns of experience in the client's past which help to illuminate the present.

Interpretation in general was a rare category in the sample interviews, but "here and now" explanations

occurred more frequently than "linking" explanations.

7. Worker Self-Revelation

In this type of intervention the worker chooses to reveal personal feelings or aspects of his/her own life to the client.

Workers' self-revelation took four main forms in the sample. Some workers told the clients a little about their own backgrounds in order to create a feeling of sharing and reciprocity within the interview; others told clients about experiences they had had which were similar to the client's own and thus conveyed understanding and a feeling that the client did not stand alone; in some cases workers held up their own experiences as a model for the client's to emulate [this was not always accepted]; in one case a worker described his immediate feelings as a form of feedback during the process of the interview itself.

Workers' self-revelation was the least used verbal behaviour in the sample.

8. Support

Support for the client was implicit in all interviews but overtly supportive behaviours were rare in the sample interviews.

Supportive statements were divided into sustaining behaviours and reinforcing behaviours. Sustaining

behaviours offered emotional comfort or evidence of caring on the part of the worker - "Oh, gosh that's marvellous" or "I'm so pleased". Reinforcing behaviours endorsed the clients' ideas or actions. Reinforcement varied in degree from acquiescence, through agreement, to enthusiastic encouragement.

9. Challenging Behaviour

A statement by a social worker that questioned or doubted the validity of a client's statement was taken to be a challenge. Three main types of challenging behaviours were identified in the sample interviews: challenges which were aimed at correcting client misconceptions, those which were intended to promote discussion and debate by providing a counter-argument, and those which aimed to change attitudes or behaviour which the social worker considered to be maladaptive.

In practice these three categories overlapped: a confrontation might lead to a discussion while a rational debate might bring to light certain misconceptions in the client.

10. Reflection of Content

Reflection of content consists of picking up the client's statement and reflecting back the whole or part of the content in the worker's own words.

Two main types of reflection of content were identified in

the sample interviews; reinforcement and acknowledgement.

Reflection of content used as reinforcement is a selective behaviour in that the worker chooses to reflect that aspect of the client's speech which he/she wishes to endorse and to hear more about. It is a directive statement that has been described as "steering from behind" [see Chapter 10].

Reflection of content, used as acknowledgement, indicates attention, following and understanding. It leaves the initiative with the client to continue as he/she chooses.

Reinforcing reflections were much more common than acknowledgements.

There were also two sub-types of reflection of content. These comprised summarising the client's discourse or ideas at key points in the interview, and references to past events or previous meetings outside of the interview. Neither of these behaviours was much used by workers in the sample.

Reflection of content in general was a key interview behaviour in the present sample and ranked next to closed questions and giving information in order of frequency.

11. Reflection of Feeling

Reflection of feeling involves reflecting back the feeling component of the client's statement in the worker's own

words. This behaviour has a tentative quality as the worker can never be sure what the client is really feeling.

For analytical purposes, reflection of feeling was divided into primary and secondary reflections. Primary reflections reach for the feeling component of the client's statement but do not go beyond what is verbally expressed. Secondary reflections, which were far less common in the sample, are more exploratory and suggest underlying emotional themes of which the client may or may not be aware.

By stressing the feeling rather than the factual component of client speech, reflections of feeling can encourage clients to express emotions and may lead to the ventilation of suppressed feelings. They are commonly held to be important in creating rapport during interviews and in expressing understanding and empathy [see Chapter 11].

12. Listening

Listening is seen in this context as an active skill. It is also selective: the worker attends to what he/she wants to hear.

A willingness to listen can convey not only attending and following but also interest and concern.

Although much listening behaviour is expressed non-verbally, workers in the sample exhibited a wide variety of individualistic listening patterns which ranged from grunts and murmurs to expressions of enthusiasm, sympathy, relief, incredulity and joy. The length of time workers spent listening [or at least, not talking] also varied greatly across interviews.

Frequency

The frequency with which each verbal behaviour occurred within the research sample is shown in Appendix 29. The table below summarises this information and sets out the verbal behaviours in descending order of frequency. It also shows the number of interviews in which the behaviour was present.

Table 24 The Number of Verbal Behaviours per Interview and the Number of Interviews in which each Behaviour Occurred

<u>Behaviour</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>No. of Interviews</u>
Closed Questions	1304	40
Information	799	40
Reflection of Content	473	38
Open Questions	373	40
Direct Guidance	340	34
Challenging Behaviours	234	20
Supportive Behaviours	194	34
Reflection of Feeling	190	32
Offers of Practical Help	68	22
Interpretation	55	16
Worker Self-Revelation	30	14

Total Worker Intervention = 4060

Total No. of Interviews = 40.

Asking closed questions and giving information dominated almost all the sample interviews. Reflection of content, the next most frequent behaviour, was used to follow up closed questions and encourage the client to continue until the worker once more gained the initiative by asking another question or adding a piece of information. Together these three forms of worker intervention accounted for almost two-thirds [64%] of all worker interventions over the sample as a whole.

The predominance of closed questions, information giving and reflection of content set the pattern for the sample interviews and meant that other behaviours appeared to be relatively under-used. For some behaviours, a high frequency would not be expected. The number of interpretations and worker self-revelations was predictably low as only one or two of these types of behaviour are needed to be effective in any one interview. Supportive Behaviours were also little used but this is well documented in the literature [see Chapter 8].

The low use of open questions and reflection of feeling was more surprising as these are forms of intervention associated with client-centred counselling methods. These techniques have been given considerable prominence in the literature and on training courses in recent years.

The low frequency of challenging behaviours could be taken to indicate the low priority placed on discussion in the sample interviews. Arguments and counter-arguments are the stuff of rational debate and these can take place only if the participants are prepared to challenge one another.

Relationships Between Variables

Each of the verbal behaviours used by workers in the sample interviews was tested against other behaviour in order to search for correlations between them. The Pearson test for correlation co-efficients was selected as

the most suitable procedure, given the characteristics of the sample.

The test was run through the computer twice; once to search for correlations between the numbers of behaviours per interview and once to search for correlations between the percentage use of each variable per interview. Using these procedures, clusters of behaviours became apparent which were generally in line with expectations.

A correlation was found between open questions, interpretations and reflections of feeling in terms of raw numbers. The correlation between open questions and interpretations was also confirmed in terms of percentage use per interview. These three behaviours are traditionally associated with client-centred counselling techniques. The evidence from the sample confirmed the expected relationship.

The only variable to be correlated with closed questions was reflection of content. This was a strong correlation in terms of raw numbers and it reflected one of the main techniques used in the sample interviews, that of asking a question and following it up with a reflective comment in order to encourage the client to continue with his/her theme.

The other cluster of behaviours which were found to be associated in terms of raw numbers could all be termed directive or worker-centred techniques. Information

giving correlated with worker self-revelation, supportive behaviours and challenging behaviours. Direct guidance was independently associated with these same three variables although no correlation could be found between giving guidance and giving information.

Interesting associations were also found between certain categories of verbal behaviour and the sex of the social workers. Male social workers were more likely to use directive behaviours such as self-revelation [directive in the context of the sample], challenging behaviours and direct guidance. Female social workers were more likely to use the "softer" behaviour, reflection of feeling. Although these correlations conform to popular stereotypes, it would be dangerous to read too much into them because of the low numbers of social workers involved.

Verbal Behaviours and the Content of Interviews

The main categories of content [events, feelings, relationships, health, practical matters and day-to-day activities] were all dominated by closed questions, information giving and reflection of content which formed the backbone of most of the sample interviews.

When individual behaviours were considered it was found that some were more closely associated with certain categories of content than others. The correlations

proved to be largely in line with expectations.

There was an increased use of open questions in matters related to the clients' personal lives such as their feelings, relationships, health and significant events and a corresponding drop in the number of open questions when practical matters were discussed.

The incidence of closed questions was highest when practical matters were discussed. This also held true for information giving.

The only significant use of interpretation was in the discussion of feelings and relationships. Reflections of feeling were most common in discussions about the clients' feelings and health problems.

On the whole, however, differences within categories of content were not as significant as differences in the overall use of behaviours across the sample. Frequent behaviours such as closed questions figured highly in all categories of content while rarer behaviours such as support or challenge had a low incidence in all categories.

Ways of Using Verbal Behaviours

1. Open Questions

Workers in the sample commonly used general enquiries at the beginning of interviews but the line of questioning

typically became narrowed down to a series of closed questions quite soon. This pattern was repeated throughout the interviews where open questions were used to introduce new topics. Open questions were sometimes employed at the end of interviews - "Anything else?" - to check that there was nothing else the client wished to say. Open questions tended to be used more in a discussion of client feelings, attitudes and emotions and were slightly more effective than closed questions in encouraging the client to talk for longer on these issues.

2. Closed Questions

Closed questions dominated all the sample interviews. This behaviour was used to begin interviews, to initiate topics and to change direction within topics. Closed questions were used by workers as the chief means of gathering information and to this end, long sequences of questions [up to 17] often appeared in the transcripts. Closed questions were also used extensively with reflections of content which encouraged the client to continue talking until the worker asked another question. The hypothesis that closed questions were likely to produce only short, sharp answers was not borne out; clients frequently gave quite expansive answers to closed questions.

3. Giving Information

Information in the sample was often delivered with little

evidence of thought or care in presentation. It tended to be leaked out to clients in a random way during interviews. Some information was meant to be informal and made up part of a normal conversational exchange but the bulk of information giving on practical matters, feelings and relationships appeared poorly planned and, on occasion, unclear or imprecise. While there is no reason to doubt the validity of any of the information given by workers in the sample, the source of data was seldom stated. This makes it difficult for clients to evaluate its worth. In some cases this difficulty was mitigated by a willingness on the part of the workers to subject information to further discussion.

4. Direct Guidance

Direct guidance differs from information in that it attempts to influence the client to change his/her attitudes or behaviour. Although guidance comprised advice, requests, directives and suggestions, advice was by far the most common form in the sample interviews. The main bulk of the advice concerned moral rather than practical issues and consisted of the social worker telling the client what he/she "ought" to do.

As with information, the source of the guidance offered to clients was not often apparent from the sample. Some may have stemmed from legal considerations or general cultural expectations with regard to acceptable behaviour but most

of it appeared to be an amalgam of personal views, professional knowledge and homespun wisdom. This makes the quality of the guidance difficult to evaluate.

Although for the most part, the sample interviews were liberally sprinkled with suggestions and advice on each and every issue, there was also evidence of direct guidance being used to help clients reach difficult decisions. Some social workers were prepared to make tentative suggestions and debate alternatives with clients; other social workers challenged client resistance to advice and encouraged a rational argument on the issues involved.

5. Practical Help

In general, there was no reluctance to offer practical help amongst the social workers. The way in which it was offered had to take into account the realities of the situation, the circumstances of the case and the client's own capacity to help him/herself. Some workers gave clients the necessary information and left them to make the practical arrangements for themselves. In certain circumstances, some workers found it necessary to take over the client's affairs completely.

6. Interpretation

Interpretations are designed to help the client gain further insight into his/her attitudes or behaviour. It

is not a behaviour which lends itself to frequent use and one or two interpretations per interview was the norm. For the most part, interpretations were offered in a tentative and sensitive way. There was no evidence of workers employing any particular theoretical orientation beyond a general appreciation of developmental factors and human relations.

7. Worker Self-Revelation

Although this was a rare behaviour, only appearing in 14 interviews, it was used in a variety of ways. Some workers offered details of their personal lives to clients as a way of encouraging reciprocity in the relationship. Others revealed aspects of their lives which were similar to the client's own to help convey that the client's experiences was not unique and could be shared. Self-revelation was also used to express immediate feedback within the interview [feelings of anger, frustration or sympathy]. In some cases, self-revelation was used by workers to hold up their own behaviour as a model for the client to emulate.

8. Supportive Behaviour

Supportive behaviours were not common within interviews; most cases contained only one or two examples. These behaviours could be used either in a worker-centred or a client-centred way.

Worker-centred support consisted of the worker consciously reinforcing certain actions or ideas of the client which the worker wishes to encourage. The worker shows approval by telling the client that he/she is pleased or by praising the client's action

Client-centred support was used to endorse the independent actions of the clients. It conveyed to clients that their ideas were valued and helped to create the impression that they could play an active role in helping to solve their own problems.

It was assumed that much support, in the sense of sustainment, was communicated by non-verbal means during the interviews but it is not possible to comment on this within the parameters of the research.

9. Challenging Behaviour

Challenging behaviours occurred in only half the interviews. Where it was used, it tended to be aimed either at correcting client misconceptions or at influencing behaviour and attitudes through confrontation.

Challenging behaviours were rarely employed to promote discussion by producing arguments and counter-arguments. For the most part, workers seemed to fight shy of rational debate with clients.

10. Reflections of Content

This behaviour was used extensively across the sample. It served a variety of purposes.

It was commonly used to pick up and keep the client talking on themes raised by the social worker. Closed questions followed by reflections of content formed the backbone of many of the interviews in the sample.

Sequences of reflective comments were used to encourage clients to expand on the themes and keep them talking for longer.

Reflections of content were also used to convey following and understanding, to acknowledge new pieces of information and to check out the meaning of certain of the client's statements. Through the use of reflections, workers could communicate different reactions such as surprise, sympathy or doubt.

This was an extremely well developed behaviour in the sample interviews and the social workers used it with considerable skill.

11. Reflections of Feeling

This form of reflection was far less common than reflection of content.

Reflections of feeling were used to convey empathy and understanding. By reflecting back the feeling rather than

the factual component of the client statement, it was also used to help clients to explore their feelings in some depth. In some cases clients were helped to ventilate suppressed emotions.

Simple primary reflections rather than the "deeper", more exploratory, secondary reflections were more common in the sample interviews.

Given the prominence of this form of behaviour in the literature, it is surprising that workers did not put this key variable to wider use.

12. Listening

Listening is probably best thought of as one of a variety of responses open to the worker. It is a difficult variable to discuss because so much of it is conveyed non-verbally and is not available on audio-tape.

Listening was used by all workers to a greater or lesser extent but there was great variation in listening times between the interviews. Ways of listening were idiosyncratic, with some workers remaining silent, some using verbal following techniques such as "uhm" and "Mm", and others using brief comments to register surprise, disbelief, sympathy or amusement.

Listening was one way of conveying respect for the client. It can show that the worker is paying attention and

following the client's speech. By remaining silent, the worker can encourage the client to talk. For these reasons, listening in the social work interview is thought of as an active rather than a passive skill.

Verbal Behaviours and the Client

1. Open Questions

Open questions allow the client a greater degree of freedom in the manner of his/her response than do closed questions. Open questions also allow the client more freedom to define the subject matter. They are commonly regarded as client-centred behaviours which encourage the client to talk, especially about attitudes and feelings.

In the research sample, a series of closed questions usually followed an open question so that the client's freedom of response became quickly curtailed.

Although, overall, open questions were more successful in encouraging clients to talk than closed questions, individual open questions were not necessarily effective in achieving this end. Evidence from the sample suggests that a variety of techniques facilitated emotional expression including listening, supportive and reflective comments.

2. Closed Questions

Workers' over-reliance and the use of closed questions was

not as negative as expected. Although, in general, closed questions were less effective than open questions in encouraging the client to talk, in just under one-fifth of all cases taken from a sub-sample, the client talked for 15 seconds or more.

Closed questions were most effective in eliciting factual information from clients but at least one-quarter of all closed questions referred to feelings. Clients did not seem to be inhibited by workers asking about feelings in a fairly direct way.

Examples from the sample tapes showed that closed questions were least successful in eliciting client opinion and in promoting discussion. Closed questions narrowed down the frame of reference, making a wider discussion of the issues difficult.

Clients themselves rarely asked any questions and seemed happy to collude in a style of interviewing in which they expressed their concerns in response to workers' questions.

3. Information

Clients rarely asked for information directly. They tended to express their views and feelings or state their problems in such a way that the worker responded by giving information. This gave the impression that the information arose naturally out of the conversation. This

was evidently a successful format as a great deal of information was imparted by workers in the sample. It is, however, a pattern of behaviour that tends to confirm the worker as the controlling partner in the dialogue. In general, clients did not question the information they received although, on occasion, they might be afforded an opportunity for further discussion.

4. Direct Guidance

As with information, clients rarely asked for guidance but they were more likely to question advice and suggestions than they were to question information.

Clients' reactions to advice ranged from complete acceptance to outright rejection with a strong bias towards the latter. Initial resistance was a typical response. This could be expressed by offering counter-arguments, offering excuses, ignoring or avoiding the subject or by verbally attacking the social worker. The response did not seem to be affected by the type of guidance or the way in which it was offered. It was probably the case that clients were accepting the guidance they could use and rejecting the rest.

5. Practical Help

As with information and guidance, clients did not usually ask for practical help. They did not seem grateful for the help when offered, but seemed to expect it. They

accepted it as of right. [This was a point of view which social workers appeared to share].

6. Interpretation

Interpretation was an infrequent form of verbal behaviour in the interviews but it was possible to identify three main types of client response.

The interpretation could "hit home" and lead to an expansion of the client's understanding; the interpretation could "hit home" but the client might not wish to expand on it at that time; the client was unable to use the interpretation either because it was incorrect or because he/she did not recognise it as correct.

7. Worker Self-Revelation

This was the least used verbal behaviour in the sample but there was a small body of evidence to suggest that clients might welcome a more personal approach.

Certain clients encouraged workers to reveal more about themselves. This may have been an attempt to develop closer rapport. In some cases, it may have been an attempt to satisfy their curiosity.

8. Supportive Behaviours

Clients actively seek support. Not surprisingly, they find praise and encouragement rewarding. Clients in the sample would proudly announce their achievements,

deliberately down-grade their behaviour in order to "fish for compliments" and try to win workers' support by rational arguments.

9. Challenging Behaviours

Clients were for the most part able to accept genuine corrections on matters of fact. They showed themselves willing to enter into a rational debate with workers and to produce counter-challenges if given the opportunity to do so.

It was rare, however, for a client to concede a point when confronted by a worker in a way which challenged attitudes or behaviour - although a challenge was likely to be more effective if the outcome or change in behaviour was immediately appealing to the client.

10. Reflection of Content

Reflection of content can be seen as either a worker-centred or a client-centred behaviour. It was used in the sample both to encourage clients to continue with their own particular themes and to "steer from behind" by reinforcing certain themes in the client's speech selected by the social worker. To judge by the frequency with which the sample workers used reflections of content, they found it effective on both counts. Reflective behaviours almost invariably encouraged the client to talk.

11. Reflection of Feeling

Reflections of feeling received a universally positive response in the sample interviews. Clients either confirmed the accuracy of the worker's reflective comments [45%] or took the reflection as a cue to expand on their feelings [55%]. The type of client response was not determined by the "depth" of the reflective comment - quite superficial reflections could lead clients to expand on their feelings at some length.

12. Listening

Clients did a great deal of listening in the sample interviews. In more than one-quarter of all interviews, the client did more listening than the worker. Clients exhibited the same range of listening skills as workers: some remained silent, some used "uhm's" and "mm's", and some had their own little phrases for conveying their reactions to what the worker was saying.

Findings from the Sample in the Context of the Practice Literature

1. Open Questions

The literature on interview skills generally favours an open style of questioning when the object is to encourage the client to talk and expand on his/her views and feelings. [Ivey, 1972, Ivey and Authier, 1978, Kadushin, 1972]. In the present study open questions were used

relatively little. An open style of questioning typically became narrowed down to a series of closed questions.

Open questions were only slightly more likely to encourage the client to talk than were closed questions or other behaviours such as reflection of content or listening. A series of studies by Hopkinson et al. [1981] support this finding. The authors suggest that "interview set" or overall interview style is probably more important in determining the extent of client talk than any one variable.

2. Closed Questions

If open questions are prescribed in the literature, then closed questions are proscribed [Kadushin, 1972, Egan, 1975, Ivey and Authier, 1978]. In the present sample closed questions were clearly the dominant mode of intervention.

Although closed questions were more commonly found in discussion of practical or factual matters, they also accounted for over a quarter of all interventions on the subject of the client's feelings. This finding supports the studies by Cox et al. [1981] who found that direct requests for feelings could be successful in eliciting emotional responses in the psychiatric interview.

Baldock and Prior [1981] found that social workers commonly used closed questions to initiate topics. In the

present sample, this was true in about one-third of all cases.

3. Information

There is very little written in the social work literature on giving information. It is often included with advice and other forms of direct guidance [BASW, 1977, Goldberg, 1979, Davies, 1981]. The sample demonstrated that giving information as opposed to advice was the most common form of workers' intervention after asking questions.

The literature often assumes that information is about practical matters such as money or housing [Stevenson et al. 1978, Barclay, 1982]. Workers in the sample gave information on a wide variety of subjects from feeding babies to the state of the world.

Such discussion of information giving as exists in the literature tends to centre on the issue of clarity [Hargie, 1983, Gambrill, 1983]. Workers in the sample did not score highly in this respect. Information was often ill thought out and poorly presented.

4. Direct Guidance

Earlier literature [e.g. Hollis, 1968] eschewed direct guidance as it encroached on the client's right to self-determination. Later work [Reid and Shapiro, 1969, Mayer and Timms, 1970], indicated that clients both expected and

welcomed advice. Later British studies [Sainsbury, 1970 and Sainsbury et al. 1982], found that workers were increasingly willing to provide that guidance. The evidence from the sample interviews confirmed these trends.

5. Practical Help

Studies over the last decade show social workers taking on an increasing amount of practical work on behalf of their clients [Goldberg et al. 1977, Stevenson et al. 1978, Sainsbury et al. 1982]. This trend was confirmed by the level of practical interventions in the sample interviews.

6. Interpretation

The literature suggests that social workers have moved away from the insight oriented approach to casework exemplified by Hollis [1968]. Stevenson et al. [1978] found workers in their sample ambivalent about using an "in-depth" approach. The evidence from the present sample reflects this ambivalence. Some workers were committed to the use of interpretive interventions while others did not use them at all.

7. Worker Self-Revelation

Although most commentators advise caution, the literature suggests that workers can enrich their interviews by the skillful use of self-revelation. Used appropriately, this behaviour helps to break down barriers between worker and

client. The worker is revealed as a genuine person and the client feels more confident about sharing the intimate details of his/her life [Egan, 1975, Shulman, 1979, Gambrill, 1983].

Workers in the sample showed little awareness of the benefits of this form of intervention and made little use of it.

8. Support

Early casework studies stressed the importance of supportive statements but could find little evidence of these behaviours in real interviews. [Hollis, 1967 and 1968, Reid, 1967, Mullen, 1968]. These authors concluded that support was implicit rather than explicit. The low use of this variable throughout the sample tends to confirm this view.

9. Challenging Behaviour

The views expressed in the literature are divided on challenging interventions. For some commentators challenging is a negative form of behaviour that should be used only with extreme caution. [Egan, 1975, Berenson and Mitchel, 1974]. For Shulman [1981], it is a necessary form of intervention if obstacles to effective work are to be tackled. For Ellis [1974], challenges are the cornerstone of a particular form of therapy.

Workers in the sample tended to take a cautious approach. Half the interviews contained no challenging behaviours at all.

10. Reflection of Content

One school of thought sees reflection of content as a client-centred behaviour which is supportive and faciliative [Ivey, 1971, Ivey and Authier, 1978, Kadushin, 1972]. Other commentators have seen reflections of content as a much more directive behaviour which is used to reinforce certain client themes and so lead the interview "from behind". [Hackney and Cormier, 1979, Benjamin, 1974].

There was evidence in the sample interviews of workers using reflections of content in both these ways. Indeed, it proved the most versatile of behaviours and was used a great deal by almost all workers.

11. Reflection of Feeling

Reflection of feeling is a prominent variable in the counselling literature. It is used to convey understanding and empathy and can help to build rapport between client and worker. [Ivey, 1971, Carkhuff, 1971, Fischer, 1976].

Workers in the sample employed reflections of feeling very little. When used, the reflections tended to be at a superficial level. The data suggest either that workers

were unaware of the value of this form of interview behaviour or that they considered it inappropriate in the context of their interviews.

12. Listening

All social work literature stresses the importance of listening behaviour. [Ivey, 1971, Kadushin, 1972, Benjamin, 1981, are mentioned in the text]. Active listening conveys attention and interest and confers value on the client and what he/she is saying. Given the prominence of this variable in the literature, some workers in the sample talked more and listened less than expected. Over one-quarter of the sample talked as much as or more than the clients.