Using vignettes as a 'safe space' for low-income children to discuss sensitive topics in social work assessment

Charmaine J.M. Lee[a], Esther C.L. Goh[b,*]

[a] Medical Social Work Department, Singapore General Hospital, Singapore
[b] Department of Social Work, National University of Singapore, Singapore

ABSTRACT

Summary: Children's voices are rarely heard in the social work assessment process, with their opinions often missing in decisions made about their lives, despite them being key contributors of their lives. As such, this paper aims to examine the usefulness of vignettes in eliciting and discussing sensitive issues, such as the lack of financial resource, with children to aid the social work assessment process. Vignettes are defined as short stories, embedded in a tangible context, about a fictional individual or situation that is relevant to a specific theme.
Method: Ten children aged seven to 12-years-old from economically disadvantaged families were invited to participate in this study. A two-pronged data collection method was used where (1) interviews incorporating vignettes was conducted with children followed by (2) small group discussions with social workers. Vignettes were crafted that placed the children in hypothetical dilemmas namely, (1) childcare responsibility versus desire for peer activities and (2) tight family finances versus personal wants. Preliminary findings from interview data with children guided small group discussions with social workers on the applicability of this method in the social work assessment process with children in Singapore.
Findings: Findings of this research provide evidence that vignettes seem to enable access to children's viewpoints regarding sensitive topics and provide insights on how they make meaning of and construct solutions to cope with their difficult circumstances in a relational context. It further provided insights into children's ability to exercise agency in a relational context.
Application: This study proposes vignettes as a potentially useful tool that can enhance the social work assessment process, providing an avenue for children to be heard. Beyond being merely a research tool, vignettes can potentially be a useful social work assessment tool as it creates safe spaces to access children's experiences, aiding social workers to engage in child-centered social work practice.

1. Introduction

Despite growing evidence that children's voices are necessary for policy and social work practice (Foote, 2011; McDonald, 2009), their opinions are routinely missing in decision making about their lives (Goh & Baruch, 2018). Particularly, children are seen as needing protection and often excluded from this process; instead relying on parents' or practitioners' observations of them to determine their well-being. Consequently, children's voices are lost in the assessment process - with children being "seen but not heard" (Simpson et al., 2017, p. 186) and practitioners merely understanding the "what" of children's circumstances rather than the "why" (Ferguson, 2017, p. 1017). Despite social workers' best intentions to ensure children's safety, it is often overlooked that the removal of threat does not equate to the child's

experience of safety, and decisions are often made about children instead of with children. Thus, this study seeks to provide a practical means for practitioners to account for children's voices and acknowledge them as experts of their lives with unique insights regarding their own situation (Goh & Baruch, 2018). The usefulness of the specific tool of vignettes to elicit children's subjective experiences and views on sensitive topics is explored, and consequently the applicability of this tool for social work practice in Singapore.

1.1. Children's voices in social work assessment process

Literature has highlighted how children's voices are increasingly lost in social work assessment and intervention (Balsells, Fuentes-Peláez, & Pastor, 2017; Vis, Holtan, & Thomas, 2012). Children's views

---

are often minimized in social work practice, where they are viewed as "subjects of protection" rather than "collaborators" in crafting interventions to improve their well-being due to their age, lack of maturity and perceived vulnerability. Children's opinions are thus regularly missing in decisions made about their lives (Goh & Baruch, 2018) and their perspectives limitedly represented in assessments of their needs (Holland, 2011).

Despite being the "key source of information about their lives" (Bruce, 2014, p. 516), it is often parents or adults around children who are consulted (Bruce, 2014; McDonald, 2009). Critical decisions regarding children's safety and wellbeing, according to some research (Vis et al., 2012), are not uncommonly made based on assessments of practitioners and adults, with children being talked about and talked over due to the fear of involving them in "adult issues".

Lastly, there is a rise in risk assessment tools such as the Children & Adolescents Needs & Strengths (CANS) tool, which provide a structured, empirically rooted approach to determine children's well-being. These risk assessment tools, while aimed at helping practitioners comprehend clients' problem holistically, unintentionally results in labelling and influences the diagnosis of risk in children (Silver & Miller, 2002). When used unreflectively, these tools may limit practitioners to quantifiable assessments on a mechanical checklist of factors and symptoms (Gillingham, 2006), overshadowing the child's unique context and voice.

1.2. Emerging evidence of children's abilities to provide solutions

Research evidence showed that children in poverty are cognisant of the family's financial difficulties, routinely take up increased responsibilities in the household (Bruce, 2014; Chee, Goh, & Kuczynski, 2014; Cheang, & Goh, 2018; Odenbring, 2018) and adopt unique strategies to cope with and make meaning of their limited material and social resources (Andresen & Meiland, 2019; Odenbring, 2018; Redmond, 2009). Hence, it can be conceived that children in poverty are not passive subjects to their circumstances, but actively navigate their social realities, possessing capacities to exercise their cognitive agency to attain their individual well-being (Hong & Goh, 2019). Their views and resourcefulness thus serve as potential resources for practitioners to tap on, particularly since they provide alternative, knowledgeable (Goh & Baruch, 2018) and expert viewpoints of their unique circumstances (Bruce, 2014). Consequently, the recognition of children's experiences as valid would enable the gradual shift beyond the child rescue or paternalistic form of service provision, towards viewing children as able, agentic beings who are partners in decision-making about their lives (Goh & Baruch, 2018).

1.3. Potential of vignette as a complement tool in social work assessment with children

Vignettes are defined as short stories, embedded in a tangible context, about a fictional individual or situation that is relevant to a specific theme (O'Dell, Crafter, De Abreu, & Cline, 2012). They have been widely studied in literature as effective in accessing the voice of children. Vignettes creates distance between the story in the vignette and the participant (Kandemir & Budd, 2018), enabling children to discuss difficult issues in a "non-personal and therefore less threatening perspective" (O'Dell et al., 2012, p.2), without the fear of judgement (Kandemir & Budd, 2018; Palaiologou, 2017). Vignettes thus aid practitioners in reaching children's beliefs and opinions that would otherwise be inaccessible due to children's discomfort of the topic or inability to articulate thoughts. Furthermore, vignettes empower children, granting them control on how their story is told. Vignettes' non-directive nature enables children to guide the process of defining the problem (Palaiologou, 2017), encouraging children to interpret the vignette in their own terms (Barter and Renold, 2000) and tap on their individual stock of knowledge (Jenkins, Bloor, Fischer, Berney, & Neale, 2010) to respond.

Fundamentally, vignettes position practitioners *beside* rather than *above* children, seeking to explore the world through their eyes and interpretation, rather than using expert knowledge to systematically dissect, explain and categorize their lives. Practitioners then become participants, rather than spectators of children's lives, immersing themselves in children's experiences and seeking their opinion on matters concerning them. This consequently enables practitioners to understand not only what is happening in children's world, but also why.

The usefulness of vignettes has largely been evaluated based on its usefulness as a research tool with children (Barter & Renold, 2000; Holland, 2011; O'Dell, Crafter, De Abreu, & Cline, 2012; Palaiologou, 2017), yet, little has been studied about its potential effectiveness as a social work assessment tool. The similarities between social research methods and social work assessment have been explored by numerous social work writers (Clifford, 1998; Hong & Goh, 2019; Sheppard, 1995), especially since the rigour of research could be transferred to assessment, which is likened to conducting research with an individual or family (Holland, 2011; Hong & Goh, 2019). With extensive literature on vignettes' usefulness in eliciting children's opinions in social research, there lies value in exploring the feasibility and applicability of utilizing this research tool in an assessment context, to engage, connect and understand the often-silent voices of children. According to Holland (2011), the use of a range of assessment methods, including interviewing, observation and scales facilitate triangulation of data and a well-rounded assessment. Thus, vignettes can further be explored as a potential assessment method to triangulate and complement existing assessment tools in social work assessment with children.

2. A dynamic theory for accessing children's voice in relationship context

Social Relational Theory (SRT) (Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015) is an appropriate theory to guide this study as it considers children and their adult caregivers as equal agents. Instead of viewing children's sense of self-efficacy and agency as individual, SRT uniquely proposes that agency is exercised and developed in a relationship context. Human agency is a "relational concept" as it depends on the "social and relationship context in which individuals enact and experience their agency" (De Mol, Reijmers, Verhofstadt, & Kuczynski, 2018). Particularly, children's experience of agency and ability to influence parents is aided and restricted by the "distinctive social context of a long-term, interdependent, asymmetrical, parent-child relationship" (Kuczynski, Pitman, & Twigger, 2019, p.2). This interdependent parent-child relationship is thus a context where parent and child are both receptive and vulnerable to the other's influence (Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015). Despite separate goals, parents and children are both assumed to cope with or resolve conflicting views due to the interdependent relationship (Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015).

Furthermore, SRT further postulates that people need a sense of "relational agency" (p.56), especially in close relationships, to establish intimacy and interconnectedness (De Mol et al., 2018). Possessing a sense of relational agency means that an individual is aware that they can make a difference in the relationship. Particularly in parent-child relationships, parents and children are viewed as equally agentic, with the ability to add meaningful aspects to the construction of the other person's sense of relational agency (De Mol et al., 2018). Thus, children are not passive and powerless recipients of mothers' decisions but can exercise agency and influence mothers' sense of relational agency in the interdependent parent-child relationship.

Lastly, SRT promotes a relational view of conflict where conflict is viewed as an unavoidable component of close relationships (Dunn & Munn, 1985; Shantz, 1987). Despite the asymmetrical power relationship, children adopt various expressions of agency within the constraints of a close parent-child relationship (Kuczynski & Hildebrandt,

1997; Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007). This includes various forms of conformity and resistance in conflict situations such as "negotiation, accommodation, unwilling compliance or passive noncompliance" (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007, p. 19). Additionally, a study by Kuczynski et al. (2019) reported that children in middle childhood adopted overt and covert strategies to resist parental requests, suggesting that children's behavioural compliance does not necessarily equate to cognitive compliance. Despite so, children still engage parents relationally, accounting for their opinions while pursuing their autonomous goals (Kuczynski et al., 2019). Thus, a relational view of conflict highlights how parents and children co-construct, negotiate and interpret expectations, goals and behaviours, providing a window to investigate the nature of agency between parent and child.

In sum, SRT proposes that children are not passive recipients to their environment and relationships. Rather, they are active agents capable of exercising agency in various relationship contexts to influence and maintain relationships. While parental and adult perspectives on children's behaviours are prevalent, children's perspectives on how they exercise agency in conflict are limited (Kuczynski et al., 2019). Thus, this study seeks to explore children's capacity as actors to negotiate, make sense of and influence their challenging circumstances when confronted with realistic scenarios of conflict and dilemma in the mother-child relationship context.

3. Method

3.1. Research objectives

This study aims to explore the usefulness of vignettes in accessing the subjective experiences of children from low-income families in social work assessment. It seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How do children make meaning of being in a situation of poverty? (2) To what extent are vignettes useful in eliciting children's subjective opinions on sensitive issues such as the lack of financial resources?

3.2. Research design

A two-pronged data collection procedure was used. First, utilizing vignettes that were carefully crafted, the first author conducted interviews with ten children from low-income households. These vignettes sought to elicit children's perspectives, interpretations, goals and strategies in response to living with financial constraints. To explore more in-depth recounts from participants (Kandemir & Budd, 2018), the vignettes placed children in hypothetical dilemmas, namely, having to shoulder childcare responsibility for younger siblings versus desire for peer activities, and balancing tight family finances versus personal wants.

Second, Small Group Discussions (SGD) with frontline community-based children and family social work clinicians was conducted. It is an established research practice that expert panels are invited to review and critique instruments for data collection and development of measurements to assess the content validity of the instruments (Davis, 1992). In this study, we mirrored this method by inviting community based social work clinicians as experts in working with children from low-income backgrounds to assess the relevance of using vignette in social work assessment. Essentially the role played by the SGD can be likened to expert panel for instrument development research (Davis, 1992). The purpose of SGD is not to attain content or structural validity as in measurement development. Instead, social workers' professional judgement was elicited to assess the key findings from the vignettes administered with the children as a credibility check to the relevance of the findings and recommendations in working with children in Singapore.

3.3. Sample

3.3.1. Children

Ten children were selected based on several sampling criteria. Firstly, the child's family had to be recipients of the Community Care Endowment Fund ("ComCare Fund"), a fund that provides social assistance to low-income Singaporeans who are facing financial or other difficulties. This fund is commonly disbursed through several schemes such as the Ministry of Education Financial Assistance Scheme (MOEFAS),[1] ComCare Short-to-Medium Term Assistance (ComCare SMTA)[2] and ComCare Child Care Subsidies.[3] The eligibility to receive the aforementioned assistance was indicative of the family's limited resources and low income. Secondly, children selected were aged seven to 12 years old as children of this age range are thought to have sufficient communication skills to adequately respond to vignettes. This range also provided adequate scope to obtain insight into the usefulness of vignettes in eliciting children's voices at various developmental stages. Next, all ethnicities and family structures were accepted. Lastly, children had to be able to communicate in simple English or Mandarin, as the researcher who conducted the interviews was only proficient in these languages. The sample demographics are illustrated in Table 1.

3.3.2. Social work clinicians as proxy expert panel

Clinicians invited as expert panels must fit into the following criteria: Firstly, social workers should have, in the past two years, had experience working with children in need in Singapore. This ensured that participants had relevant knowledge of the landscape of social work assessment and intervention with children in Singapore; Secondly, social workers had to be practicing in community-based service agencies, vis-à-vis residential or hospital settings. The key rationale is that children participants in this study were residing with their families in the community. Hence, community based social workers would understand children from low-income families who are not in care but residing in the community. In addition, recruiting experts from community based agencies would ensure consistency both in practice contexts and terminologies shared by experts in their assessments.

Two pairs of clinicians were recruited through personal contacts from two community based agencies, namely, a Child Protection Specialist Centre (CPSC) and a Family Service Centre (FSC). CPSCs manage moderate to high risk child protection cases providing child-centric, family-focused intervention to manage and prevent escalation of child abuse risk. As institutional care is viewed as the last resort for abused children, cases referred to CPSCs generally have reduced risk of significant harm and seek to strengthen family functioning and resilience within the community. There are four such centres based in different geographical regions in Singapore. Social work clinicians from CPSC bring with them specialist knowledge in working with children which is highly relevant for reviewing and assessing the suitability of the proposed vignette method. FSCs on the other hand are the frontline touch point services which are located within different communities in Singapore. Social workers in FSCs serve the low-income and vulnerable individuals and families, providing support and assistance to children and families in need. Currently there are 44 FSCs island wide. The demographics of the expert panels are illustrated in Table 2.

---

[1] Ministry of Education Financial Assistance Scheme is given to needy Singaporean students in Government and Government-aided schools, who have a Gross Household Income not exceeding $2750 per month, or Per Capita Income (PCI) not exceeding $690 per month.

[2] ComCare Short-to-Medium Term Assistance providestemporary financial support to low-income individuals or families who are temporarily unable to work, are looking for a job or are earning a low income and require assistance.

[3] ComCare Child Care Subsidies provides low-income families with extenuating circumstances with child care financial assistance for childcare and enrolment fees.

Table 1
Overview of children's demographics.

Name (child)	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Parent's Marital Status	No. of siblings	Flat Type	Financial assistance received by family
Anika	10	F	Indian	Divorced	2	Purchased 4-room	– MOEFAS
Benjamin	11	M	Chinese	Divorced	3	Rental 2-room	– MOEFAS
							– ComCare SMTA
							– ComCare Child Care Subsidies
Cayla	8	F	Chinese	Divorced	1	Rental 2-room	– MOEFAS
Daphne	12	F	Chinese	Married	1	Purchased 4-room	– MOEFAS
Elly	7	F	Chinese	Married	2	Rental 1-room	– MOEFAS
							– ComCare Child Care Subsidies
Farhan	12	M	Malay	Married	3	Purchased 2-room	– MOEFAS
Gabriel	12	M	Malay	Divorced	0	Purchased 4-room	– ComCare SMTA
Hazel	7	F	Chinese	Divorced	2	Purchased 5-room	– MOEFAS
							– ComCare SMTA
Kavitha	11	F	Indian	Married	3	Executive Mansionette	– ComCare SMTA
Julia	8	F	Chinese	Divorced	3	Rental 1-room	– ComCare SMTA

Note. Pseudonyms have been given to ensure confidentiality of participants.

Table 2
Overview social work clinicians' demographics.

Agency	Name (worker)	Position/designation	Number of years in practice with children
Child Protection Specialist Centre	Sally	Senior Social Worker	3.5
	Aminah	Social Worker	3.5
Family Service Centre	Evelyn	Assistant Senior Social Worker	8
	Yan Ling	Senior Social Worker	10

Note. Pseudonyms have been given to ensure confidentiality of participants.

3.4. Process of vignette crafting

Five vignettes were initially crafted based on actual experiences and narratives of low-income children that the authors had previously worked with. As such, these vignettes were largely representative of the struggles and dilemmas faced by low-income children. Further, popular games among local children such as the "Kendama", and local neighbourhood environments such as 'void decks'[4] were intentionally incorporated into the vignettes scenarios to ensure relevance and relatability to the children. Visuals were also included to enable greater engagement with the children. Childlike drawings were used as flash cards to aid the researcher in narrating the vignette stories to the children participants. These flash cards were most helpful with younger children as it engaged their visual sense in addition to hearing sense. For instance, vignette one had four characters (the protagonist and three siblings). A simple drawing of four children on a card was used so that the researcher could point to the characters as she narrated the story. Two children from the authors' networks were invited as experts to provide input to the formulation of the vignettes, ensuring that children's views were sufficiently incorporated.

Finally, three vignettes were chosen from the five as they were deemed to provide sufficient scope for the study, and adequately represented common problems faced by lower-income families. In this paper, only two out of the three vignettes administered are presented. These vignettes provided opportunities to elicit children's responses when confronted with dilemmas and sensitive topics such as the added responsibilities posed by the family's financial challenges (vignette one) and coping with a lack of money to obtain their desires (vignette two).

After creating the initial draft of the vignettes, two pilot interviews were conducted with children of similar backgrounds and demographics as the participants to be recruited for the study. These pilot tests were helpful in refining the language used to ensure that the vignettes were understandable and could elicit an appropriate scope of

information from children's point of view. An eight-year-old and a 12-year-old child were invited to pilot test the vignettes. Their feedback was valuable in assisting us to maintain a child-focused stance in the content of the vignette, as well as ensure age appropriateness for children ranged between seven to 12-years-old.

Following the pilot interviews, vignettes were edited for clarity and additional probing questions were added to unpack the questions for the children. This ensured that vignettes could attain sufficient depth of information and that the vignettes and guiding questions were appropriately worded, matching children's level of comprehension. The vignette methods strived to access the agentic qualities of children including their motivation, strategies and actions when faced with dilemmas that are related to money shortage problems. Hence, the interview guide was non-static. Instead it aimed to capture the dynamic nature of how children think about and interpret phenomenon, conceptualize goals and make decisions on what actions to take via a decision-tree-like flow chart model (Brid, 2018). This allowed the children to take the lead in determining the extent of breadth or depth of the vignette discussion. Lastly, the probing questions were carefully edited to remove any sense of threat or discomfort. For example, children in the pilot interview appeared stuck when asked "what would you do in this situation?", but they could respond to the question when it was modified to "what would Hana (the vignette character) do in this situation?". These careful modifications after piloting were intended to achieve clear focus in every vignette as well as ensure the interview guide was useful in in eliciting children's responses to tension points. The two vignettes that are reported in this paper are detailed below.

3.5. Integrating interview questions with vignette narratives to engage children in sensitive topics

In this section, we illustrate how vignette two, together with a carefully designed interview guide the team designed, engaged children in discussing sensitive topics related to financial constraints. First part one of the narrative of vignette was read to the child (see Fig. 1) where the child was presented with a realistic dilemma she might have experienced in her life regarding whether to spend a cash award from

---

[4] Void decks in Singapore are open spaces located on the ground floor of public housing blocks. They are usually utilized for formal and informal community activities.
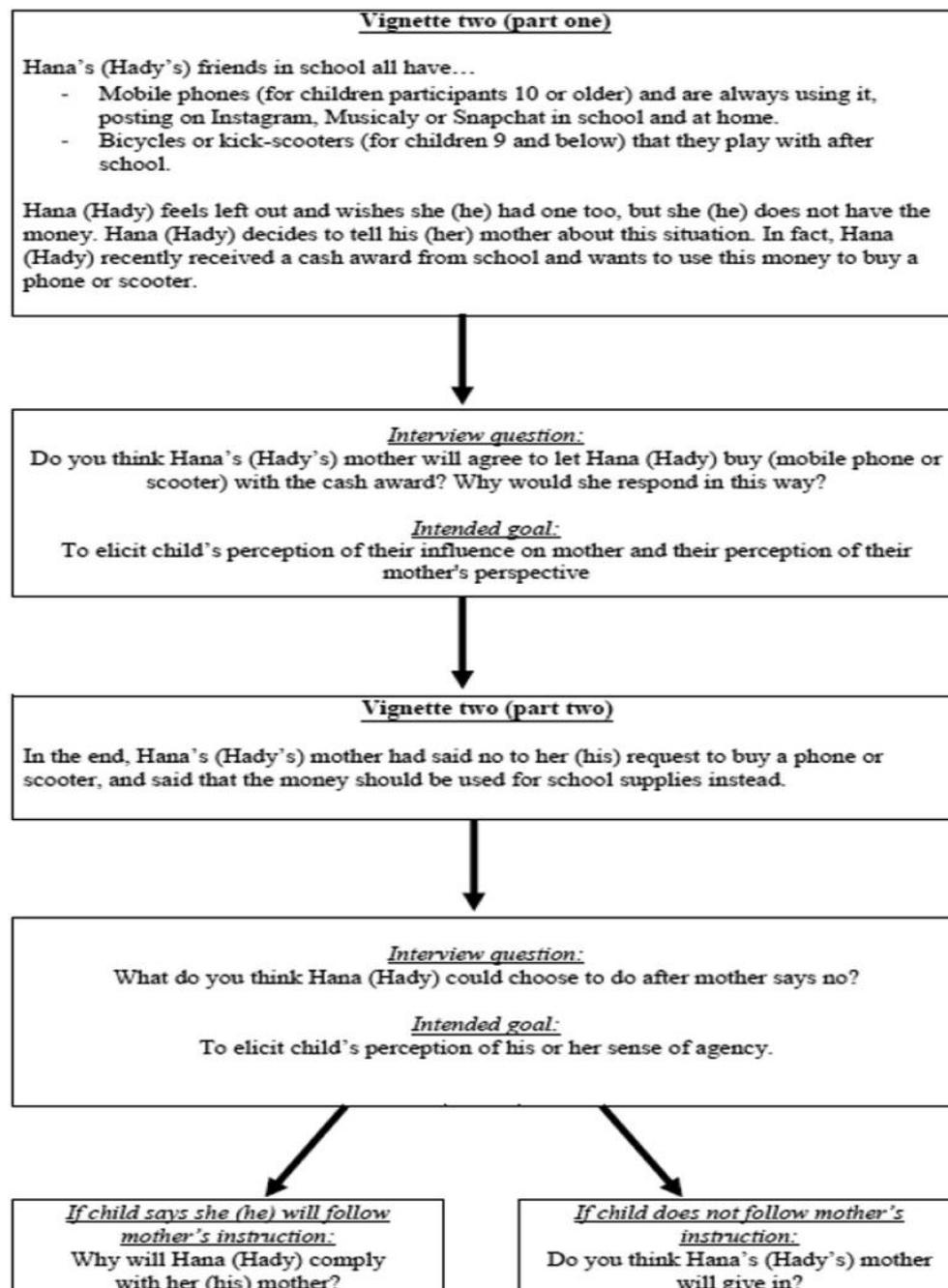
Fig. 1. Engaging children in discussing sensitive topic through vignette and interview questions.

school on a desired item. The interviewer then asked the child if she thought her mother would be agreeable to her request to spend the money on their desired items. The intention behind this question was to access the child's sense of relational agency she has on her mother. The follow up question 'why would mother respond in this way?' served to access the child's construction of mothers' perspective on permissible spending in the light of the family's financial constraints. After the child responded, the interviewer narrated part two of the vignette which stated that the mother of the protagonist ('Hana' or 'Hardy') rejected the request and wanted the child to spend the money on school supplies instead. The question posted to the child was 'What do you think the protagonist could choose to do after mother says no?'. The intended goal of this question was to access the sense of agency of the child in asserting what she wanted. Two pathways of responses from the child were preempted in the interview guide depending on whether the child

chose to comply or reject mother's request. The participant was invited to elaborate on the rationale for the choice made.

3.6. Data collection procedure

3.6.1. Interviews with children

This paper reports part of a larger study which had obtained Ethical Review Board approval (NUS-IRB: S-18-003). While the study consisted of interviews with both mother and child separately, owing to space limitation, this paper reports the only the analysis of interviews with the children. Families receiving government financial assistance were invited to participate in this study via hard copy letter sent to them. Mother-child dyads were then recruited when they contacted the Research Assistant (RA) to express interest in participating in the study. All ten interviews were conducted by the first author according to the

schedules and venues most convenient to the participants. The interviews lasted between 28 and 43 min. Nine interviews were conducted at the participants' homes and one interview was conducted at the void deck of the public housing block where the participant resided. It was intentional to conduct the interviews in the natural settings of the participants to make them feel at ease, as well as enable the researcher to make observations on their living environment and relationships, providing contextual understanding of their responses.

Prior to commencing the interview, informed written consent was obtained from mothers for their child's participation in the research and for the interview to be audio recorded. Written assent was also obtained from the child after the research details were explained to the child in a simplified manner and the child was informed of their rights to accept or reject participation. Simple card games were played with the child before starting interviews to build rapport. When the children warmed up to the researcher, they were invited to share more about themselves, and to describe and draw their family on a whiteboard, providing key contextual information to better understand their responses to the vignettes.

Following the introductory questions, the researcher informed participants that she would be telling them some stories about children who are from similar family backgrounds and their experiences, and they were encouraged to share their thoughts and experiences that might be similar or different from the vignette characters. They were also assured that there were no right or wrong answers. In order to minimize the threat of fatigue to children in the interview process, the researcher inserted short breaks between vignettes or whenever the children appeared restless. Light snacks were provided during the breaks and simple games were played during the breaks. Children were also told that they could pause at any time of the interview if they wished.

While introducing the vignette to the children, some children drew parallels with the scenario in the vignette. For example, when talking about mobile phones (vignette two), one child mentioned that he had recently lost his phone, that opened up opportunity for the researcher to probe deeper into his personal experiences and possible dilemmas since the child had opened up the conversation in that direction. Additionally, being aware of the child's family situation and home environments provided critical clues and insights on the child, enabling the researcher to tailor the vignettes slightly, without changing the vignette's meaning, to suit the child's lived experience. This slight flexibility in administering the vignette enhanced the relevance of the vignette to the child. In addition, the warm up games prior to interview allowed the researcher to observe and gauge the level of maturity and personality style of each child, where the researcher intentionally varied slightly the way she told the vignettes – being more animated with some and providing more suspense with others in order to better engage them. Pacing of each vignette was crucial in ensuring that children did not lose attention and remained engaged.

After completing the interviews, child participants were presented with USD$36.60 as a token of appreciation and a snack bag as tokens of appreciation.

3.6.2. Small group discussions with expert panels

The second part of this study was approved by National University of Singapore Social Work Ethics Review Committee (NUS DERC: ER315-071118) prior to data collection. Two expert panels consisting of two clinicians each were conducted at two separate community-based agencies. Discussions were conducted at the meeting rooms of these agencies, at a convenient time for the experts and lasted for approximately 1.5 h each. The design and procedures of the expert panels could be summarized into the follow seven steps: First, verbal consent was obtained for clinicians' participation as well as for audio recording of the session. Second, prior to commencing the discussion, the purpose of the research was explained to the clinicians so that the experts had a working knowledge of the study and the goals of the research team for

proposing vignette as a complementary method in social work assessment. Third, the researcher introduced the definition of vignette as stated in the literature to the social workers. Fourth, the narrative of the vignettes implemented in this study were presented to the experts through power-point slides. Fifth, to give the experts a sense of how children participants interacted with the vignettes and the corresponding interview guide, a five-minute audio-recording with Farhan (not his real name), a 12-year-old boy, was played to the clinicians. The experts were asked to identify possible assessment points based on Farhan's response. Sixth, the researcher presented the preliminary analysis of data based on interviews conducted with children participants on the two vignettes. Experts were asked to assess the relevance of the preliminary findings in relation to the relevance to social work assessment. Seventh, the clinicians were asked to comment on the potential usefulness, feasibility and challenges in incorporating vignettes in their work with children.

The small size of the panels proved to be beneficial for in-depth discussion among the clinicians as they were at ease in sharing detailed accounts of their experiences working with children. Additionally, as clinician of each panel worked closely with each other in the same agency, they could discuss and brainstorm together the feasibility of using vignettes in their specific practice contexts. USD$21.90 was presented to participants as a token of appreciation at the end of the discussion.

3.7. Data analysis

All ten interviews were transcribed verbatim and contextual information consolidated to provide an accurate understanding of the children and family. Summary thematic recording was also conducted for both SGDs. Data from the interviews and SGD was analyzed and coded using the qualitative software NVivo 12.

Firstly, interviews with the children were analyzed to understand children's responses to the vignettes. Since each vignette contained different scenarios, children's responses were specific to the vignettes, and thus each vignette was analyzed separately. Theoretical coding guided by SRT was utilized to view children as agents who actively contribute to their life circumstances through motivation, cognitive and behavioural features (De Mol et al., 2018; Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015). Within each vignette, open coding was conducted, with several ground level nodes created that preserved children's meanings. Next, utilizing SRT as a lens, these ground level codes were then carefully organized and integrated into themes and categories. As mentioned, preliminary findings from this first round of analysis were presented to social workers in the SGD to solicit their views.

Next, data from the SGDs was analyzed and ground level nodes created independently from the initial round of data analysis. Ground level nodes from the SGDs were then carefully analyzed and grouped into common themes and categories. These main themes identified consequently enabled corroboration with findings from children's responses on the validity and applicability of vignettes in the social work assessment process.

4. Findings

Social Relational Theory was utilized as a lens to investigate children's agency when presented with dilemmas and points of tension in the vignette. While accessing these dimensions of children's agency, the researcher consistently explored how the relationship context between mother and child might have influenced these dimensions of agency, for example, whether mothers would support or hinder children's goals or solutions, and mothers' impact on children's decisions. This enabled the researcher to access the relational agency between the dyad, recognizing that agency is exercised in a relationship context.

The two vignettes in this study presented distinct dilemmas, relevant to the challenges experienced by children from low-income

homes. As such, key findings regarding children's subjective experiences, unique goals, and solutions generated in each vignette would be reported separately in this paper. Following which, key findings regarding social workers' expert opinions on the possible clinical usefulness of vignettes as a tool and its applicability in social work settings will be presented.

4.1. Vignette one: Dilemma between childcare responsibility versus desire for peer activities

This vignette presents to children a dilemma between fetching their younger siblings as their mother is working, versus their desire to participate in a dance or soccer group. It presented competing demands to children, with their goal of participating with peers in an activity of keen interest being blocked by their childcare responsibilities. The SRT lens was utilized to understand children's agency in navigating this dilemma. At the motivational dimension, the vignette sought to understand how children asserted or restrained their autonomy in achieving their goal of participating in peer activities. At the construction dimension, the vignette explored the various meanings children created to make sense of their decision, whether it was to prioritize their younger siblings or to play. At the action dimension, the vignette explored children's cognitive realm of possible solutions and strategies, and their perception of the possibility of implementing these strategies to attain their goals.

4.1.1. Children value the mother-child relationship

In navigating the aforementioned dilemma, children's responses often sought to preserve the relationship between themselves and their mothers. Firstly, children desired to please their mother through making them happy and preventing them from experiencing additional stress. Two children expressed that they would help the mother so that she would experience positive emotions. For example, Benjamin commented that helping his mother would make her happy since "she always looks after and takes care of [him]". Helping his mother thus provides Benjamin with a means to reciprocate what his mother has done for him.

Secondly, six children were observed to display empathy towards their mothers' struggles, recognizing the challenges they face in providing for the family. Children recognized the physical strain that mothers experience from their long working hours. For example, Elly did not agree that the vignette character should leave the problem of fetching the younger sisters to the mother because "…mummy [is] very tired she just come back from work". Furthermore, beyond recognizing the mother's physical strains, children also displayed awareness of their ability to take action and offer their help to alleviate the mother's stressors. For example, Farhan indicated that the vignette character should fetch his sisters because fetching his sisters, while easy for him, would be challenging for his mother.

> Because the mother [referring to the character in the vignette] like… the mother work[s] [for] 12 h? Then Adam [fetching] the sister [home]… like doesn't even take much [effort], like it's not that hard la, but for the mother is very hard. So ya [should not just go play soccer and leave the problem to mother]. (Farhan, 12)

One child also displayed empathy for the mother's financial situation. Gabriel held certain expectations of the mother's role to provide and make sacrifices to ensure the child's well-being, speculating that the vignette character's mother might offer to find another job to enable Gabriel to join the soccer team. He claimed that whilst the vignette character would feel happy that he can play, he would also feel sadness because it would result in a lower income for the mother. Ultimately, Gabriel believed that the vignette character would help his mother. This demonstrates that Gabriel is keenly aware of how his behaviour would potentially influence his mother and family finances negatively. He demonstrates understanding of the complexity that asserting his own

goal (of playing soccer) would result in brief happiness but provoke a sense of guilt – an emotion that usually stems from unmet expectations. This shows that he has in mind the mother's expectation on him, and perhaps his self-imposed expectation to share family responsibilities.

4.1.2. Children develop solutions to attain desires

Children exhibited resourcefulness and creativity when faced with the dilemma between childcare responsibilities and their desire for peer activities. Nine children generated helpful and feasible solutions that enabled them to fulfil their responsibilities whilst partially or fully attaining their goal of joining peer activities.

Firstly, negotiating with mothers and other family members was a strategy formulated by children. Three children suggested asking the 11-year-old brother in the vignette to help with fetching the two younger sisters. Kavitha would request for her brother to fetch when she has dance classes, Farhan suggested taking turns with the 11-year-old brother, and Gabriel suggested making a roster with the 11-year-old brother. Hence, children identified resources within the family that they could tap on and formulated ideas to communicate with them and resolve the problem. Interestingly, despite identifying this resource, none of the children relinquished entirely the responsibility of fetching the sisters to the 11-year-old brother, instead, seeking to establish a balance of responsibilities with him and maintaining connected in the relationship. In all, children were not rigid or resigned to the situation, instead, devising plans to actively negotiate a solution that would allow them to fulfil both their childcare responsibilities and desire for peer activities.

Secondly, children also suggested solutions that would allow them to fulfil their responsibilities and partially achieve their goal. Elly and Benjamin reported that the vignette character should fetch the younger sisters home first before trying to ask the mother if she would allow them to play. While children indicated these solutions as acceptable to the vignette character, they also experienced inner conflict at only being able to participate partially. Julia lamented that the situation was "difficult" and expressed worry that she would fall behind if there was an upcoming competition. Farhan also claimed that while he himself would not feel sad, the vignette character may express some rebellion. Thus, whilst children may see compromising their desires as a solution, they are still aware of the cost of their decision on themselves. Hence, the tension and strain children may experience from forfeiting their leisure activities should not be neglected

4.2. Vignette two: Dilemma between tight family finance versus personal wants

This vignette presents a scenario where the vignette character attained a bursary award and yearned to use the money to buy a popular item such as a handphone or scooter. However, the mother in the vignette seeks to use the bursary money for other household financial needs. Similarly, this vignette presents to children a dilemma between using the bursary money to supplement the tight family finance and mother's spending priority, with their personal wants. The child's goal of using the money to attain their wants is blocked by the family's difficult financial situation. At the motivational dimension, the vignette explores whether children chose to assert or restrain their autonomy on how to spend the money to achieve their goal of buying the desired item. This vignette explored the meaning children constructed regarding their family's financial situation, and their ability or inability to meet their goal. In addition, this vignette explored children's possible solutions and strategies to attain their goal of buying the desired item and whether these solutions could be implemented.

4.2.1. Children's experience of financial hardship

While financial issues are often viewed as beyond the understanding of children, findings from this study reveal that children are aware of the impact of their families' financial situation.

Firstly, children in this study displayed awareness of the parents' financial responsibilities and obligations, and the importance of being prudent with money. Gabriel displayed knowledge of the need to save the bursary award because "their family need that money to pay for the electricity bill… or the school fees". Similarly, Daphne explained how she had begged her parents to buy her headphones for Christmas. When they said no, Daphne speculated that "maybe [it is] because it is very expensive", sharing that her parents have no money. Evidently, children are exposed to financial challenges and struggles, and are acutely aware of the value of money and the need to be sensible on how to spend it.

Despite the material lack, two children still displayed contentment with what they had. Benjamin stated "I'm fine with what I have now" when asked if he had anything he could not buy because of a lack of money. Meanwhile, Farhan commented that despite not having a phone, he could still "go out with [his] friends" which he viewed as more fun than having a phone. Children thus were satisfied with what they had and maintained a positive attitude despite lacking in material possessions.

Secondly, children acknowledged their parent's efforts to provide despite constraints. Five children recognized that despite financial hardship, the mothers in the vignette would provide for the children's wants as soon as they had the financial capability to do so. Children thus believed that parents were working hard to fulfil their desires and expressed patience in waiting and giving the mother time to do so.

4.2.2. Children display self-reliance in attaining own desires

Six children reported that they would respect the mother's decision to use the bursary money for household needs, instead depending on themselves to achieve their goal. Children displayed self-reliance in attaining their goals through making realistic, attainable goals and creating concrete plans to save and attain these goals.

Firstly, children innovated and improvised, setting targets and goals that was attainable for them to achieve their goal. Benjamin excitedly explained how when he was shopping for a phone within his budget, he managed to find one that was broken but free.

> Benjamin: The original price of this phone my father saw was around $114.
> Researcher: $114? Then how did [you all] get it for free?
> Benjamin: Err we got it for free because at first it was broken then the person didn't want it. The screen entire crack[ed]. Then we went to somewhere to fix it for $30… Cheaper what, you buy something broken and you fix it

Benjamin was thus flexible in his plans of getting a phone, recognizing that being innovative and creative could enable him to get something that functioned equally well for a lower price.

Next, children also devised plans that would bring them closer to attaining their goals. Six children expressed that they would save their own money to buy the phone if their mother was unwilling to buy the phone for them. Children had concrete steps on how the vignette character could save. Benjamin and Anika claimed that they would save from their daily pocket money and piggy bank. Farhan hypothesized that the vignette character would "save 50% of the pocket money" or "do chores… to earn", while Daphne speculated that the character would "collect coins and notes and save it together".

Hence, children recognized that they had the ability to devise plans of saving to attain what they wanted. This would enable them to depend on themselves and attain their desires despite the financial circumstances of the home.

4.3. Social worker's opinions about vignettes

4.3.1. Usefulness of vignettes as a tool in social work assessment process

Firstly, social workers commented on the usefulness of vignettes in accessing children's point of view since it provided children with

relevant scenarios that they could relate to, which enabled an exploration of their worldview, values and emotions regarding these scenarios. Yan Ling (FSC social worker) stated that children's responses "are usually guided by their personal emotional world [and would hence] reflect some of their values and feelings if a similar situation [as the vignette] were to happen". Sally (Child Protection Specialist Centre (CPSC) social worker) further highlighted how vignettes that were relatable to children could enable them to talk about their personal experiences, and provide the worker opportunities to probe into their emotions, knowledge and awareness of the situation. Furthermore, social workers also commented that vignettes provided children with an opportunity to externalize, which could aid in more honest conversation with the child. Yan Ling (FSC social worker) stated that children may withhold sharing of information as they may feel that sharing such information about themselves is too sensitive and may fear the repercussions of doing so. As such, social workers seemed to find value in vignettes' ability to create non-threatening platforms of communication with children, and which enables the child to externalize their feelings and thoughts.

Secondly, vignettes also aided social workers to make initial assessments about the child and his family system. An audio recording from the researcher's administration of vignette one (childcare responsibilities versus desire for peer activities) with Farhan (Child, 12) was played for the social workers, who were probed to assess the child and his family. All four social workers formed possible assessment points regarding Farhan and his family relationships, and further identified potential areas of further exploration. Sally (CPSC social worker) and Evelyn (FSC social worker) pointed out that Farhan had the ability to "perspective-take" and "display[ed] empathy for people around him", identifying this as a strength of the child. Next, Aminah (CPSC social worker) and Evelyn (FSC social worker) also assessed that Farhan (Child, 12) could potentially be "parentified" and "feeling a lot of responsibility [for fetching his siblings]". Lastly, the vignette opened up opportunities for social workers to assess the child's view of his family system, and obtain an understanding of the family situation at home. Yan Ling (FSC social worker) identified that Farhan's responses provided opportunities "in which [the worker] can have further conversations with the adult caregiver and [obtain insight] into what is happening in the family". Hence, vignettes provided information and viewpoints of the child that enabled social workers to make an assessment on the needs and strengths of the child and his family system.

4.3.2. Potential challenges in using vignettes

Two social workers reported that the social worker's ability to establish a safe and trusting relationship with the child was crucial for the vignette to be helpful. Evelyn and Yan Ling (FSC social workers) opined that if there was no sense of safety between worker and child, the child would most likely provide a "politically correct" or "model" answer that would not be truly reflective of their feelings or views. Yan Ling further speculated that they may just say what they believe or have been told is the "right thing to do" which could limit the effectiveness of using vignettes.

Next, three social workers viewed vignettes as merely stepping stones for further exploration with the child. Evelyn (FSC social worker) and Aminah (CPSC social worker) believed that more "probing" is needed, so that children's responses could be "further expanded [on] to get a better picture [of the situation]". Similarly, Yan Ling (FSC social worker) postulated that the social worker must relate children's responses to the vignettes with their own experiences and feelings for it to be helpful.

> "If we want to assess how [the child] feels, then we must draw it back [to themselves]. Because I think the few times he says 'sad', he is just giving the 'right' response [rather than what he truly feels]" (Yan Ling, FSC social worker)

As such, social workers seemed to believe that it is crucial for the

social worker administering the vignette to adopt an inquisitive mind, expanding on conversations from the vignette to contextualize conversations with children and relate to their actual situations. This probing would then aid a more accurate assessment of the child.

5. Discussion

This study provided initial evidence of the usefulness of vignettes in accessing children's voices, opinions and considerations in sensitive situations where they are faced with a dilemma.

5.1. Relevance of children's agency within relational contexts in the social workers' understanding of Person-in-Environment

Findings from this study show that children exercised agency in a relational context. How children make meaning of their situation of poverty is influenced by their mothers' perspective and with the knowledge of how their choice would influence their mothers. This is in line with SRT which states that the bidirectional relational context between mother and child consists of mutual influence and contribution (Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015).

Despite being provided with the means to assert their autonomy, children in this study still chose not to, or to minimally assert their autonomy to attain their desires, so as to maintain connected to their relationship with their mother. The vignette narratives provided options or scenarios that would enable children to pursue their own desires, such as requesting for the 11-year-old brother to fetch the younger sisters (vignette one) or using their bursary money for themselves (vignette two). Yet, all ten children prioritized the safety of their younger sisters in the solutions they crafted (vignette one) and six children let the mother maintain control of the bursary money, pursuing self-reliance instead (vignette two). This was despite their negative feelings and the awareness of the cost of that decision on themselves. Instead, children reported that they valued the mother–child relationship and would comply with mother's requests, seeking to please or help their mother, thereby remaining connected to her. Thus, despite not attaining their goals due to financial or family constraints, children still valued and maintained an intimate, respectful relationship with the mother. Children thus displayed a keen ability to prioritize competing goals - while they were unable to achieve their goal of pursuing peer activities or buying what they wanted, they valued the alternative goal of being a responsible child and helping their mother. Further, children also expressed confidence that their mother would acknowledge and reciprocate their behaviour, and reward them to the best of their abilities, mediating their negative feelings. Thus, children's assurance that their goals and actions are recognized by their mother further enable them to remain connected agents. Children's exercise of agency within relational contexts should thus be acknowledged in social work assessment, recognizing them as co-constructors and contributors to positive mother-child relationships, rather than passive recipients of mother's instructions.

5.2. Usefulness and potential challenges of vignettes in social work assessment

The SGDs with social workers, who possess expert knowledge on the social work assessment process, provided key insights on the specific properties of vignettes that can potentially aid their work. This enabled corroboration with the administering of vignettes with children, on the validity and applicability of vignettes, not just as a method of data collection in research, but also in the social work process. For example, the carefully crafted vignettes in this study specifically aimed to explore how children made meaning of their situation of poverty, revealed key insights about the child's sense of agency in financially challenging situations and enabled social workers who participated in the SGDs to make useful assessments about children's needs and strengths (ref to

4.3.1) in the context of financial hardship. Furthermore, social workers noted that well-crafted vignettes that incorporate specific local, colloquial contexts facilitates how children relate to it, and serves as potential prompts for children to recount their personal experiences or emotions, and identify potential untapped resources, enabling access into children's unique conceptualization of their personal circumstances. Thus, findings from administering of vignettes with children, corroborated with social worker's expert knowledge reveals the potential usefulness of vignettes in the social work assessment process. Vignettes provide a platform for social workers to access children's sophisticated worldview, recognizing children as experts of their own lives, and facilitating the incorporation of children's voices in the social work assessment process.

Despite its strengths, one potential challenge that may hinder the usefulness of vignettes is that it does still hinge on rapport between the social worker and child to provide sufficient depth of information to guide social work assessment. Children may feel the need to provide the "right" answers rather than their true thoughts if a trusting relationship is not formed between the social worker and child. Social workers from the expert panel also highlighted the need to draw children's responses back to themselves in order to make an accurate assessment (refer to Section 4.3.2). As such, social workers who use vignettes need to consider children's unique backgrounds and circumstances in order to make sense of their responses. For example, having children draw and share about their family backgrounds was critical in understanding children's responses. Farhan's sharing at the start of the interview of his role in caring for his younger siblings was crucial in allowing us to better make sense of his response that the vignette character may experience some rebellion in having to fetch his younger siblings (refer to Section 4.1.2). As such, while vignettes may be useful in exploring children's views on sensitive topics, it's effectiveness and usefulness to social work assessment is hinged on social workers' rapport with children and ability to relate their responses to the vignette back to children's lives.

This research suggests and highlights the possible usefulness of using vignettes in eliciting child's agency in social work assessment, serving as a potential means to translate the principle of child-centeredness into social work practice (Holland, 2011). Vignettes provided opportunities and a safe space for the researcher to access children's minds, understanding how they formulate solutions, and exercise their agency in a relational context. This potentially provides social workers with an alternative lens to view and elicit children's strengths in solving problems, encouraging workers to enhance and support children in exercising their agency, and balance children's voices and vulnerabilities. Additionally, social workers' choice to use vignettes would itself provide a key shift in their attitude and how they position themselves in relation to children. The use of vignettes by social workers would open a space for practitioners to actively listen to and interpret children's voices, compelling social workers to truly consider children's responses to vignettes and reducing any existing power differentials between worker and child. This would encourage child-centered social work practice, challenging them to listen carefully to and incorporate children's views and subjective experiences on matters concerning them. Nevertheless, further work should be done to explore how vignettes can be more effectively and seamlessly integrated into social work practice.

5.3. Using vignette method to engage children on sensitive topics

The vignette method provides a platform for social workers to engage children on sensitive and difficult topics in a less threatening manner. The design the vignette facilitates the interview process that social workers conduct with children through gently but intentionally channeling children to consider points of tension (e.g. vignette two – when mother does not allow child to buy their desired item), thereby providing a "road map" to guide them to talk about sensitive or

uncomfortable issues without being excessively intrusive.

Furthermore, the vignette method also provides a key entry point for social workers to engage the mother-child subsystem and facilitate discussion about family dynamics by intentionally probing into the mother-child relationship through the vignette questions. While the vertical power relationship between mother and child is often considered in social work assessment, the use of vignettes in this study enabled an assessment of the relational horizontal relationship between parent and child as well by allowing the children to place themselves in their parent's shoes. This allows the social work clinicians to explore children's perspectives and expectation of their parents, thereby providing opportunities for social workers to further engage mother and child in discussion and seek compromise and acknowledgement of deeper level yearnings. Lastly, as highlighted by the social work clinicians, the vignettes provided children with the opportunity to externalize, ultimately leading to more willing sharing. This crafts a safe space for children to present their story, and invites social workers to explore situations through the child's lens, rather than through a problem or risk-focused lens.

6. Conclusion

While this study highlighted the strength of vignettes in eliciting children's capacities to exert agency in sensitive situations, the generalizability of this research is limited due to the small sample size and exploratory nature of the study. Also, the vignettes were limited to three scenarios to cater to a tight research timeline, capturing the usefulness of vignettes only in these specific contexts. As such, findings regarding the usefulness of vignettes hold illustrative and explanatory power, but may not be generalizable to all. Nevertheless, this research has suggested the strengths of vignettes in helping children express their views on sensitive topics, and serve as a preliminary investigation on the possibility of using this tool in social work assessment. Future research could expand the sample size of participants, as well as explore the feasibility of using different vignettes to access different dimensions of children's world such as school or peer relations.

Nevertheless, preliminary findings from this study provided several insights on vignettes' usefulness in enhancing both the *content* and *process* of social work assessment - vignettes potentially enrich and supplement existing objective social work assessment tools through considering children's viewpoints in depth, and provide a safe and comfortable platform for social workers to invite children to tell their stories. While vignettes of date are largely used only as a research tool, this paper provides preliminary evidence of the potential usefulness of translating and utilizing vignettes as a practical assessment tool for social workers to carefully and seriously consider children's voices.

7. Disclaimer

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Acknowledgement

Appendix A. Supplementary material

References

Andresen, S., & Meiland, S. (2019). Being poor from a children's point of view. The potential of childhood theory and qualitative methods for child poverty research: Findings from two qualitative studies of poverty in Germany. *Children and Youth Services Review, 97*, 94–99. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.07.010.

Barter, C., & Renold, E. (2000). I wanna tell you a story: Exploring the application of vignettes in qualitative research with children and young people. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 3*(4), 307–323. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570050178594.

Balsells, M.Á., Fuentes-Peláez, N., & Pastor, C. (2017). Listening to the voices of children in decision-making: A challenge for the child protection system in Spain. *Children and Youth Services Review, 79*, 418–425. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.06.055.

Brid, R. J. (2018). Introduction to Decision Trees. Retrieved 19 June, 2019, from https://medium.com/greyatom/decision-trees-a-simple-way-to-visualize-a-decision-dc506a403aeb.

Bruce, M. (2014). The voice of the child in child protection: Whose voice? *Social Sciences, 3*(3), 514–526. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci3030514.

Cheang, J. Y., & Goh, E. C. L. (2019). Why some children from poor families do well - an in-depth analysis of positive deviance cases in Singapore. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being.* https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2018.1563431.

Chee, L. P., Goh, E. C. L., & Kuczynski, L. (2014). Oversized loads: Child parentification in low-income families and underlying parent-child dynamics. *Families in Societies, 95*(3), 204–212.

Clifford, E. (1998). *Social assessment theory and practice.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Davis, L. L. (1992). Instrument review: Getting the most from a panel of experts. *Clinical Methods,* 194–197.

De Mol, J., Reijmers, E., Verhofstadt, L., & Kuczynski, L. (2018). Reconstructing a sense of relational agency in family therapy. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 39*(1), 54–66. https://doi.org/10.1002/anzf.1278.

Dunn, J. F., & Munn, P. (1985). Becoming a family member: Family conflict and the development of social understanding in the second year. *Child Development. Special Issue: Family Development, 56*(2), 480–492.

Ferguson, H. (2017). How children become invisible in child protection work: Findings from research into day-to-day social work practice. *British Journal of Social Work, 47*(4), 1007–1023. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcw065.

Foote, W. L. (2011). How children's voices were heard "above the din" in family court proceedings in cases where there were allegations of child sexual abuse: The importance of judicial orientation and professional evidence in the discernment of the child's voice. *Child Indicators Research, 4*(4), 707–723. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-011-9123-5.

Gillingham, P. (2006). Risk assessment in child protection: Problem rather than solution? *Australian Social Work, 59*(1), 86–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/03124070500449804.

Goh, E. C. L., & Baruch, H. (2018). Young persons as epistemological agents in social work assessment and intervention. *Children and Youth Services Review, 88*, 88–95. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.02.027.

Holland, S. (2011). *Child and family assessment in social work practice.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Hong, R. T. Y., & Goh, E. C. L. (2019). Using photo elicitation interviewing to access the subjective well-being of children from poor families within an affluent Asian society: Insights for service delivery. *Children and Youth Services Review, 96*, 430–438. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.12.006.

Jenkins, N., Bloor, M., Fischer, J., Berney, L., & Neale, J. (2010). Putting it in context: The use of vignettes in qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative Research, 10*(2), 175–198. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794109356737.

Kandemir, A., & Budd, R. (2018). Using vignettes to explore reality and values with young people. *Qualitative Social Research, 19*(2), https://doi.org/10.17169/FQS-19.2.2914.

Kuczynski, L., & Hildebrandt, N. (1997). Models of conformity and resistance in socialization theory. In J. E. Grusec, & L. Kuczynski (Eds.). *Parenting and the internalization of values: A handbook of contemporary theory* (pp. 227–256). New York: Wiley.

Kuczynski, L., & Parkin, M. (2007). Agency and bidirectionality in socialization: Interactions, transactions, and relational dialectics. In J. E. Grusec, & P. Hastings (Eds.). *Handbook of socialization* (pp. 259–283). New York: Guilford.

Kuczynski, L., & De Mol, J. (2015). Dialectical models of socialization. In W. F. Overton, & P. C. M. Molenaar (Eds.). *Theory and method* (pp. 323–368). NJ: Wiley.

Kuczynski, L., Pitman, R., & Twigger, K. (2019). Flirting with resistance: Children's expressions of autonomy during middle childhood. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being, 13.* https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2018.1564519.

McDonald, C. (2009). Children and poverty why their experience of their lives matter for policy. *Australian Journal of Social Issues, 44*(1), 5–21. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1839-4655.2009.tb00128.x.

O'Dell, L., Crafter, S., De Abreu, G., & Cline, T. (2012). The problem of interpretation in vignette methodology in research with young people. *Qualitative Research, 12*(6),

702–714. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112439003.

Odenbring, Y. (2018). The daily life and reality behind child poverty in Sweden: Children's and adolescents' voices. *Child Indicators Research, 1–13*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-018-9558-z.

Palaiologou, I. (2017). The use of vignettes in participatory research with young children. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 25*(3), 308–322. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2017.1352493.

Redmond, G. (2009). Children as Actors: How does the child perspectives literature treat agency in the context of poverty? *Social Policy and Society, 8*(4), 541. https://doi.org/10.1017/S147474640999011X.

Shantz, C. U. (1987). Conflicts between children. *Child Development, 58*(2), 283–305.

Sheppard, M. (1995). Practice, validity, reflexivity and knowledge for social work. *The British Journal of Social Work, 28*(5), 763–781.

Silver, E., & Miller, L. L. (2002). A cautionary cote on the use of actuarial risk assessment tools for social control. *Crime & Delinquency, 48*(1), 138–161. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128702048001006.

Simpson, D., Loughran, S., Lumsden, E., Mazzocco, P., Clark, R. M. D., & Winterbottom, C. (2017). 'Seen but not heard'. Practitioners work with poverty and the organising out of disadvantaged children's voices and participation in the early years. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 25*(2), 177–188. https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2017.1288014.

Vis, S. A., Holtan, A., & Thomas, N. (2012). Obstacles for child participation in care and protection cases-why Norwegian social workers find it difficult. *Child Abuse Review, 21*(1), 7–23. https://doi.org/10.1002/car.1155.