

Need Refers to the requirements for healthy development. The *basic* needs of all human beings are physical health and autonomy, which in turn require that *intermediate* needs for shelter, nutrition, significant primary relationships, basic education and so on are met. When basic needs are not met they result in *harm* to the individual. Needs can be met by a range of satisfiers: just as nutritional needs can be met by various types of food, so social needs can be met by different types of service. With these points in mind, a child can be defined as 'in need' if his or her health or development is actually impaired or likely to become so without some kind of specialist remedial intervention.

Service A technology or mechanism for alleviating people's problems; in the present context, the activity intended to meet a child's needs and so achieve desired outcomes.

Further reading

Doyal, L. and Gough, I. (1991) **A theory of human need**, Macmillan Press LTD, Basingstoke, pp.247-273.

Percy-Smith, J. and Sandersen, I. (1992) **Understanding Local Needs**, IPPR, London, pp.5-14.

Ware, A. and Goodin, R.E. (1990) 'Introduction', in Ware, A. and Goodin, R. E. (eds), **Need and Welfare**, London, Sage.



Connections

connecting modules

'What is development?' - understanding normal development is essential to identify need.
 'What is an outcome?' - establishing need is the step that precedes agreeing desirable outcomes.

exercises with this lecture

- Exercise 1 - Identifying need in individual cases
- Exercise 2 - A qualitative analysis of need



most relevant Practice tools

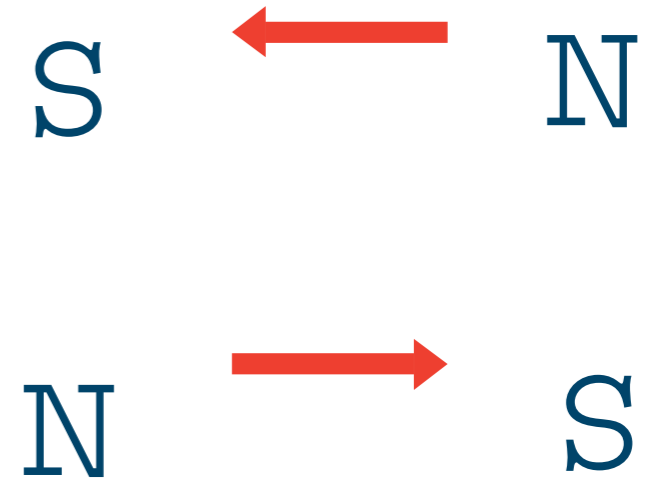
Paperwork: identifying need is a key component of the assessment process.
Matching needs and services: the tool provides a method for aggregating individual need to establish patterns of need to inform service design.

the other lectures in this module

- 5.2 What are universal and relative needs, and lists?
- 5.3 What are the challenges with respect to children's needs?
- 5.4 What are children's needs for improved health and development?
- 5.5 What is the difference between needs and rights?

- The concept of need connects the gap between a person's current and desired state.
- Need is concerned with the whole child and encapsulates all aspects of development and risks to healthy development.
- The technology/interventions to meet need and those things that constitute need change over time.
- In most systems the volume of need outstrips supply to meet that need.
- The common language approach requires that need is assessed before services are considered, thus ensuring needs-led decision-making.

The question of the order in which aspects of children's development and children's services are considered is a recurrent theme in the Common Language. The 'S' and the 'N' in the illustration indicate services and need. One of the reasons for the wide take-up of need as a concept in public sector services generally, and in children's services in particular, is its potential to encourage reflection on what will lead to better outcomes instead of relying on what has appeared to have worked before. The first representation of the 'S' and the 'N' has needs fitting into available services - a classic supply-led arrangement. In the second representation, services are supplied to meet identified need - a needs-led arrangement.



- 1 As a concept, need provides a way for connecting the gap between a person's current state and a desired state. Generally the desired state represents an absolute minimum requirement for living in a society, but sometimes it represents what is typical for others in that society. The concept of need has been particularly useful in public sector services because it connects impairments with the state-supported response to that impairment (with services being just one dimension of that response).
- 2 The concept of need makes the connection between a person's current state and a desired state in a way that does not leap directly to a currently available set of services or, indeed, a requirement to provide services at all. The concept makes policy-makers, practitioners and researchers think carefully about whether, and if so how, to respond.
- 3 The idea has been used effectively with respect to individuals and groups of individuals. For example, we may say that a child needs more stability at home if she is to do well at school or that there needs to be greater equality of wealth in order to improve the behaviour of children in a society.
- 4 Need is concerned with a moment in time. For example, the concept can be used to answer two questions: (a) at this particular point in a child's life what is needed in order to reduce an impairment to social development? (b) at this moment in history what is needed to improve the educational attainments of children in society? This 'snapshot' feature of need is explored further in later presentations.
- 5 Need is concerned with the whole child, so it provides a mechanism for encapsulating all aspects of children's development and the risks to that development (the subject of previous parts of the training). For example, in some jurisdictions, need is used to capture impairment to health or development (the legal definition of a child in need in England) alongside the socio-economic and other environmental risks to development (for example poor housing or family relationship problems).
- 6 Need has long been used as an organising concept in public sector services. Barnardo and Stephenson used the word as they and others worked to create a safety net for the most impoverished children, and the concept underpins legislation for children in several jurisdictions. It is also used extensively as a mechanism for rationing other forms of public sector services.
- 7 The use of the concept has permitted a shift from categorical approaches to rationing, on the one hand, to holistic assessment, on the other. For example, in England twenty years ago taking a child into care involved demonstrating that he or she was 'in moral danger' or 'beyond parental control' or one of several other categories. These categories have been replaced with a single threshold of impaired development (which permits provision of a range of services, and not just removal to substitute care).
- 8 A criticism of the concept of need is that its holistic qualities, particularly if applied in the absence of a tool to link the idea to practice, create woolly thinking and inconsistencies in service response. In other words, one person looks at a child and sees need but the other person sees no need, or two people see the same need but have very different ways of addressing that need.

- 9 To be useful need must adapt to changes in society. For example, in 19th century Europe, illegitimacy (being born out of wedlock) was considered a need to the extent that residential centres known as Foundling Hospitals were established to shelter the children. In contemporary Europe, rates of children born outside of marriage run at between 22% and 55%. What was a need is now considered normative.
 - 10 The technology to meet identified need also changes over time. Previous presentations charted the extraordinary decline in infant mortality. Aspects of infant ill-health that would have counted as life and death even two decades ago now fall under the category of routine care, so shifting the pattern of need from one aspect of well-being to other aspects.
 - 11 A constant application of the concept has been for government organisations and their staff to conceive of need as greater than the resources (fiscal, personnel and organisational) available to meet that need. There has been little exploration of why this is. It may reflect a feature of the human condition to always seek to do more; it may simply be impossible for state structures to organise to provide for a finite quantity of need.
 - 12 The concept of need has the potential to overcome the problem of what are called 'supply-led' systems, where 'cases' are found to fill the supply of an existing service. For example, if 100 foster beds were supplied, 100 children would be found to 'need' that service. The 'S <- N' illustration refers to this 'supply-led' formulation. The opposite is a 'needs-led' service, where need is calculated and services designed accordingly. The 'N -> S' illustration refers to this 'needs-led' formulation.
 - 13 There has been a drive in recent years to better match the needs of children to services. This partly requires moving away from a 'supply-led' approach. But it also rests on the idea that a failure to achieve good outcomes is partly the result of children's services offering children (and their families) the wrong provision.
- Conclusion**
- 14 This brief introduction to the concept of need has demonstrated some of its potential and explained how and why the concept has become pervasive in children's services, particularly in Europe. However, the concept is also subject to considerable criticism and for it to be useful at least two major problems have to be overcome. First, those using the concept have to agree on exactly what need is. As following presentations make clear, need can mean different things according to the kind (e.g. what people want versus their objective situation against the norm for a society) and type (e.g. housing, health or social relations) of need being measured, whether seriousness of need is at issue and whose need (e.g. children or families) is under consideration.
 - 15 Second, for the concept to be useful, it must make sense to a range of people surrounding the child (family members, community supports and professional staff). As the following presentations illustrate, one reason why the concept of need holds such potential in children's services is that it can facilitate healthy discussion about a child's situation that generally produces consensus among diverse groups of people about how to support a child effectively.