

## The 'Childhood Experience of Care and Abuse Interview' for Child Safeguarding practitioners: An evaluation in Kingston Safeguarding Services

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### Executive Summary

Joint funding from West London Life Long Learning Network, and the Royal Borough of Kingston's Learning and Children's Services provided for social worker training in a new assessment tool on child maltreatment, and evaluation of its use in assessing families. A 6-month project involved a series of 6 one-day workshops for 8 social workers nominated by the Child Safeguarding and Looked After Children (LAC) Services. The workshops were run by the Lifespan Research Group, Royal Holloway, University of London, by Professor Bifulco (TB) and Catherine Jacobs (CJ). Both have extensive experience of using the standardised Childhood Experience of Care and Abuse (CECA) interview in research studies, and have been offering training to health and social care workers in evidence-based assessments for over 10 years. Training workshops on the CECA are held regularly in London for health, social care and criminal justice workers, but these have not yet been mainstreamed in to child safeguarding services. The training and evaluation held in Kingston was used to establish the fit of the CECA to ongoing child care practice and care planning as a preliminary to more widespread training in its use. The Parenting Role interview was additionally used as a means of engaging parents and eliciting their views of their parenting competence. This measure too is a standardised research tool which has only recently been offered for practitioner training. The fit between PRI and cases was also examined. The evaluation part of the study looked at the impact of the learning in assessing ongoing cases in the Safeguarding services. This report details a description of the training workshops and their impact on ten case assessments.

### Background

There is increasing need for standardised means of assessing abuse in families to help with Safeguarding services. Tools that can aid with assessing and analysing the range and severity of abuse or negative parenting experiences can therefore aid best practice in the interest of children and families. Such tools are also useful in the Integrated Children's System to summarise or quantify characteristics of abuse for the Core Assessment. There is increasing requirement on social workers for evidence-based practice, and to utilise standardised assessment tools where possible to provide greater transparency, reliability and grounding for social work judgements. This is underlined in the recent attention given to child protection services since the Every Child Matters Legislation<sup>1</sup>, in addition to the recent Laming

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup>Every Child Matters – Change for Children <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/>

response to the Baby Peter case<sup>2</sup>. This has led to greater accountability and audit both internally and externally of social worker case files and quality of assessment to identify childhood neglect and abuse accurately. Kingston Safeguarding Services has an 'outstanding' record for best practice, and is committed to provide the best possible assessment tools for care planning for children and families at risk. The CECA rating scales and definitions can be useful for such purposes as well as for aiding assessment in family support programmes.

**The CECA** is an evidence-based, standardised interview and scoring measure developed in research work on childhood maltreatment over more than two-decades. It is a reliable and valid tool and includes a range of care and maltreatment scales including Neglect, Physical, Sexual and Psychological Abuse as well as the family context, including discord and violence. As a full interview measure it is used for research with adults and adolescents as a retrospective assessment of childhood. However, for practice contexts, the scoring system and benchmarked rating system used to systematise case record material, or to inform categorisation of information collected from varied sources (child, family, teacher, witnesses etc). The scales are scored according to a set of definitions, rating rules and precedent 'benchmark' examples. The workshops covered CECA definitions, scoring procedures and practice use.

At the request of social workers, a further assessment tool, the **Parenting Role Interview** was also included in the workshops. This is an evidence-based, standardised interview which engages parents in talking about their views of their own parenting, the difficulties with their child/ren and the day-to-day interactions. Whilst the interview is not investigative in terms of detecting neglectful or abusive behaviour, it does provide a clearer view of what the parent considers to be good parenting and their view of their own competence. From this it is possible to gauge more objective indicators of parenting in terms of the quality of poor care, control and interactions. A global scale of good-poor parenting capacity is scored.

### **Phase 1 – Workshops:**

The workshops covered Neglect (including Antipathy and lax Supervision), Physical abuse (including discipline and domestic violence), Sexual Abuse, Psychological Abuse, CECA for chronologies and the Parenting Role Interview. Social workers were encouraged to bring their own cases and examples from cases for discussion and CECA application. In addition to being shown research findings with the CECA interview, the attendees were all provided with CECA schedules outlining definitions, key indicators of maltreatment and benchmarked examples for severity ratings. Attendance at the 6 workshops was good. Three particular findings from the research on the CECA were emphasised in relation to case analysis and threshold decisions between Child Protection and Child in Need categories. Whilst these might seem intuitive, the relationship between the scales and poor outcomes were formally quantified. The summaries below refer to adolescent or adult psychiatric disorder, but similar associations were found with other poor outcomes such as relationship difficulties or attachment problems<sup>3</sup>:

First, the more severe the experience of neglect or abuse the higher the rate of negative outcomes (for example, for those with 1-marked neglect 65% developed disorder, those with 2-moderate neglect, 50%, those with 3-some neglect 40% and 4-little/no neglect 22%).

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<sup>2</sup> <http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/HC-330.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> A. Bifulco & P Moran (1998) *Wednesday's Child*, Routledge, London.

Second, different experiences of maltreatment have a different likelihood of causing disorder – (eg for example odds-ratios of likelihood of disorder given severe experiences of poor parenting result in 1.7 for lax supervision and 1.94 for antipathy from mother compared to 2.85 for psychological abuse, 3.00 for physical abuse, 3.18 for neglect and 7.00 for sexual abuse.

Third, the more types of neglect or abuse experienced in childhood, the higher the rates of later difficulties including lifetime disorder. For example 73% of individuals experiencing all four experiences of severe neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse and psychological abuse had adult disorder, 65% with any three, 53% with two, 35% with one such experience and 23% with none.

These findings were used to help categorise ongoing cases in terms of Child Protection versus Child in Need, as well as aiding with care planning. For example to aid in understanding that low level neglect or abuse, or experiences of poor supervision or parental antipathy, were more likely to be child in need level of poor parenting and potentially amenable to benefits of support. This is in contrast to severe neglect or abuse, and multiples of abuse which would require immediate protection of the child.

### **Phase 2 – Case studies:**

Each of the social workers was asked to provide one or more ongoing case example which they could use to apply CECA scoring and thresholds to aid with assessment and care planning. This applied to 3 Child Protection cases and 7 Child in Need cases. In two instances the new learning was applied to chronologies for court assessment. Analysis of the cases provided clear indications of where the utilisation of CECA definitions and severity scorings provided unique aids to analysing the cases. The Parenting Role Interview was also undertaken in two cases and recommended in a few others, to aid parental engagement and the additional information gleaned instructive in care planning.

### **Findings:**

**The workshops:** The social workers participated well and all achieved satisfactory levels of understanding of the CECA scales and reliability in their scoring. They were able to score the material from case chronologies provided. Evaluations of the workshops were all good, with particular appreciation of the neglect and psychological abuse scales as well as the CECA for chronologies and the Parenting Role interview. The sessions on Physical abuse and Sexual abuse were considered less instructive because (i) the social workers are less involved in threshold issues since once referred any physical or sexual abuse immediately becomes a child protection issue, (ii) the police tend to take the lead in the sexual abuse cases and direct the ABE interviews (iii) it is very difficult to get any assessment of chronicity of physical or sexual abuse, or domestic violence history from parents, so CECA criteria are harder to apply. Subsequent feedback showed that Role Reversal (young carer) should be included as one of the core scales for the workshops, since this was a frequent child experience in Children in Need cases.

**The cases:** Analysis of the 10 cases confirmed there is a clear role for the CECA and PRI in various aspects of child Safeguarding and Looked After services. The report identifies specific gaps filled by the CECA scoring in assessment procedures. From the 10 cases analysed, a matrix showing which aspects of the CECA and PRI contributed to the cases was established. This showed multiple advantages for each case and across the whole group of cases. The CECA was particularly vital for the following:

- (i) enhancing court chronologies by highlighting severe instances of neglect./ abuse and parental risk,
- (ii) for differentiating severity levels of neglect and abuse to clarifying child protection/child in need thresholds;
- (iii) to point to most pressing areas for intervention. In at least one case it was felt that adding CECA thresholds and definitions confirmed the presence of severe neglect which influenced the court decision to remove the child.
- (iv) For clarifying areas of missing information, in relation to checklists of important indicators for each type of neglect or abuse.

The PRI was invaluable as a tool for encouraging parents to talk about their parenting role and to be able to establish their subjective view of their parenting in line with their behaviour in parenting. In one case the findings of the PRI confirmed the presence of good parenting and a case was closed, after referral to child psychological and educational services.

### **Recommendations:**

It is important to build upon the advances made in Kingston Safeguarding and LAC services from the training opportunities provided in this project. This involves consolidating the training already provided so it retains its usefulness and social workers become practised and 'smart' in its application, as well as extending the learning to other team members as well as managers and practice supervisors who need to underline the practice implications of the tools. RB Kingston Safeguarding service has shown itself to be innovative in its commissioning of this work to improve practice, and needs to consolidate in order not to lose the important advances made. There are alternative ways in which training can be implemented and supervision provided for using the tools in analysing cases, and these need to be examined in order to maximise the benefits of the new methods developed.

- **Consolidating trainee knowledge:** It is recommended that additional workshops be held for the 8 trained social workers to consolidate their knowledge of the assessment tools and oversee their application, as well as providing meetings and workshops for practice supervisors and managers to gain better understanding of how the ECA/PRI tools work.
- **Rolling out training across the service:** It is also recommended that CECA/PRI trainings are rolled out to other social workers in the Child Safeguarding team in order to provide best practice across the agency. These workshops can be provided in single day, or in a block week, either on the agency site or in the universities Central London premises.
- **Fine-tuning training workshops:** Key areas of focus for a shortened training, are on Neglect (with Antipathy) care experiences. The cases showed that many of the children investigated are involved in role reversal (taking on premature parenting roles in relation to housework, sibling care or care of parent). Therefore role reversal needs to be added to the care workshops. In addition, an important focus is on Psychological abuse and complex abuse, together with the CECA for chronologies and the the Parenting Role Interview. These could be delivered as 4 one-day workshops or a 4-day continuous training.
- **Further exploring accreditation issues.** The issue of accreditation is still not resolved and needs further exploration. Whilst the current Post Qualifying

child care courses have a fairly rigid curriculum which doesn't currently allow for courses like the CECA to take up a module, it will be important to explore whether some elements can be combined. (At present sessions are held in RHUL PQ on CECA and parenting, but these are briefings rather than training to use the measures). An applied Masters is currently in development at RHUL for which the CECA and PRI are being considered as a module. Validation is currently underway, and this is not yet finalised. However, RBK Safeguarding will be kept in touch with any developments.

- **Using CECA/PRI routinely in case assessments:** It is recommended that the CECA/PRI is used throughout the service for cases where it can gather and analyse key information on parenting and child maltreatment, help in threshold decisions, and inform care planning. Additional cases of its success in aiding with court reports, informing case closure and care planning are needed to indicate its continued success after the study is finished.

### **Input to Munro Review**

At the end of July 2010 Lifespan Research Group, RHUL, submitted 'case studies' to the new governmental review on children's services headed by Professor Eileen Munro to highlight the need for standardised assessment tools for social workers. This included a case study on the work reported here carried out with RBK Safeguarding and LAC teams using the CECA measure. A case study was also submitted on the PRI. It is hoped that drawing government attention to the evidence-based tools described will help to mainstream these in training offered to social workers, and that the measures will be routinely incorporated into child and family assessments. This has showcased RBK Safeguarding services as being in the vanguard of such activity to improve practice for children and families.