

LSCB Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) Audit (January 2018)

The aim of this audit was to explore the extent to which professionals recognise the signs of sexual abuse; collectively assess / investigate circumstances associated with CSA and effectively plan interventions to ensure children are protected and their needs addressed.



About the Audit

This three part audit was commissioned by the LSCB and undertaken by an independent consultant.

Stage one involved an in depth review of agency documentation associated with five cases (including siblings) and the production of a comprehensive chronology of key events which detailed the services children and their families had received.

Stage two facilitated a multi-agency panel to discuss the cases and involve frontline staff in identifying emerging themes and areas for improvement.

Stage three is work in progress and aims to involve children and their families (where appropriate) in order to ascertain the views of the services they received.

Key Findings

- Indicators of risk and/or abuse were evident from the chronologies of this audit in 4/5 of the cases.
- For most the presenting indicators of neglect often disguised or distracted from the CSA committed.
- There is evidence of staff working hard, usually collaboratively, to safeguard against presenting risks.
- CSA was a known feature in only two cases at the start of the intervention. For the remaining families, it remained unidentified until the victim(s) spoke out.
- Overwhelmingly the professionals interviewed felt that opportunities to identify CSA were not missed although in 4/5 of the cases, children had exhibited behaviour symptomatic of such abuse. However, plausible alternative explanations for the behaviour had often been given by the child's parent.
- 3/5 of the social workers expressed concern at the length of time criminal investigations had taken for CSA, with communications problems experienced during this time.
- Two workers highlighted that the abused children and their families were limited in the support they were able to access due to concerns of contaminating criminal evidence, impacting on both the child and their whole family recovery.
- In 3/5 families, sibling to sibling sexually harmful behaviour or abuse had been disclosed.

What does the research reveal?

- Professionals must be equipped to recognise and respond to indicators of abuse including CSA which can be challenging given the largely hidden nature of the problem and stigma associated with it.
- The [Children's Commissioners Inquiry into CSA, 2015](#), identifies that there may be considerable numbers of children who are experiencing neglect who may also be subject to intra-familial sexual abuse.
- Parents can find it challenging to support a child whilst struggling to cope with their own emotions. This [complex dynamic](#) can compromise their support reducing recovery and resilience.
- A [sibling's emotional and behavioural response](#) can be similar to the victim and this can increase family distress post-abuse, whilst a supportive sibling can contribute to a victim's recovery.
- Services that involve the entire family have been found to be especially beneficial in reducing the negative impact of child sexual abuse.
- Investigation process for CSA cases in England took considerably longer than sexual offences committed towards adults (median 248 – 147 days for adults).
- Age, development and legal status have been found to be factors associated with differing forms of sexually harmful behaviour (SHB) and can present differently within adolescence. (Hackett, 2004)
- [Current research](#) emphasises a combination of factors including the presence of physical abuse, family violence, neglect, poor parenting and exposure to sexually explicit media (ATSA, 2006) that influence SHB and that support for younger children exhibiting problematic sexual behaviours should address their experiences and broader concerns.
- In general, males are more likely to externalise their trauma through aggression directed towards others, while females are more likely to internalise their feelings, for example through self-harm (Gonsiorek et al, 1994)
- Female adolescents with abusive sexual behaviours more frequently experience problematic relationships with parents and have chaotic and dysfunctional family background. Females experience higher levels of sexual victimisation and other forms of abuse (including exposure to family violence) than males.

Audit Conclusions

- At least one other form of abuse or neglect was evident in addition to intra-familial CSA for all those families subject to this audit.
- All family members can be affected by intra-familial CSA, with such abuse adversely impacting on relationships and family dynamics.
- It is crucial to recovery that agencies work together to support children and families affected by intra-familial CSA.
- Understanding the causes of and triggers for behaviours in children who display harmful sexual behaviour can aid suitable treatment and manage risk.
- Treatment for children who perpetrate acts of sexual harm should address the child's own unresolved experiences, as well as broader concerns within the family and wider influences.

Audit Recommendations for partner agencies:

1. Review current practice relating to seeing children alone when treating them at outpatient clinics such as those treating enuresis.
2. Review the working guidelines to support multi-agency communications during criminal investigations.
3. Review funding arrangements by the LA and CCG to ensure timely intervention and treatment.
4. Emphasise the importance of unannounced visits.
5. Review whether service providers are able to keep children safe when they exhibit sexually offending behaviours.
6. Ensure professionals are aware of the [YOS](#) early intervention programme.
7. Ensure increased focus on 'step-down' from Children's Social Care with safeguards in place to ensure full information regarding risk is passed onto the new lead agency.
8. Ensure information sharing is timely and appropriate.

1. Audit Recommendations for the LSCB:

2. Develop a [LSCB multi-agency training](#) programme to support and enhance professional understanding of the ongoing exposure of neglect for children.
3. Delivery of CSA training via the LSCB that enhances professional understanding of CSA including the impact on siblings and parents.

Key messages for improved practice

Ensure staff receive adequate training to understand CSA and its links with other forms of childhood adversity

Collaborate with partners to ensure children have every opportunity to disclose

Adhere to information sharing guidance and ensure planning is properly informed

Work systemically with families so children are protected and needs addressed