



**An evaluation of a national
network of projects to support children
and families who have experienced sexual
abuse**

Esther Coren and Jemeela Hutchfield



as long as it takes



Acknowledgements

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Aims

- To evaluate the work of eight Action for Children projects around England and Wales that form part of a child sexual abuse network ('Safe and Secure')
 - Supporting service development
 - Supporting funding applications/tenders
 - Identifying and demonstrating good practice

Elements

Four elements to be discussed in detail:

- Systematic meta-review
- General evaluation
- Child-outcomes focused evaluation
- Children's perspectives element

Systematic meta-review

- Systematic review of findings from reviews of published literature on interventions for child-sexual abuse
 - Rigorous but only of limited help as the material included only reflects researched and published work
 - Some clear messages about some types of direct therapeutic work and the field in general
 - Evidence patchy
 - Outcomes measured in studies do not entirely reflect practice priorities
 - Difficult to strike a balance between being useful in practice and being academically sound
 - Work has been peer-reviewed

General Evaluation

- All eight projects visited by research team staff
- Detailed information collected about referral patterns, resources and service delivery in each project
- Detailed report produced about each project as well as points for celebration and development for the network as a whole, including:
 - Large number of children, young people and families provided with services despite understaffing
 - Demand far outweighs supply
 - Most projects have waiting lists
 - General feeling that much more could be done with greater funding
 - Service provision for girls outweighed that for boys in all cases
 - Recruitment of sufficiently qualified staff within budget is difficult

Child-outcomes focused evaluation

- Audit of data routinely collected by projects
- Demographic and outcomes data and the Goodman (1997) Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)
- Pre-post intervention design
- Designed to investigate the possible impact of therapeutic interventions on behavioural outcomes for children and young people who have been affected by sexual abuse including:
 - Sexually inappropriate behaviours
 - Violence/aggression
 - Self-injurious behaviours
 - Eating disorders
 - Sleep
 - Bedwetting

Child-outcomes focused evaluation continued.....

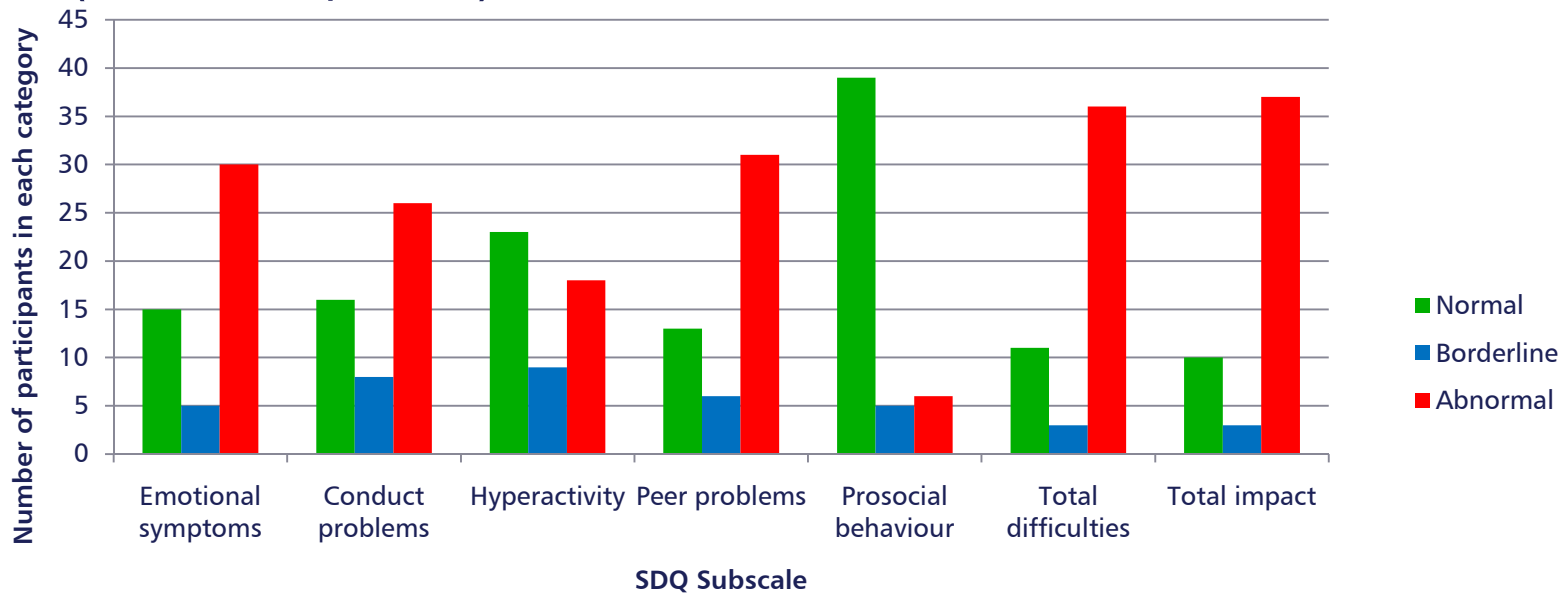
- Baseline data collection was carried out May – Oct 2008
- Eighty-six children and young people included
- Outcomes data available for 52 children and young people who received a service
- These 52 cases will be followed-up at 12 months (currently underway) and 24 months

Child-outcomes focused evaluation continued.....

- Whilst baseline data provide pre-intervention information for comparison with post-intervention outcomes there are some findings which are interesting in their own right:

Child-outcomes focused evaluation continued.....

- E.g., as expected, a high proportion score in a clinically abnormal range for five out of seven SDQ subscales (Goodman, 1997)



Child-outcomes focused evaluation continued.....

- The report cannot be seen as a description of all children and young people who have been affected by sexual abuse but as a subset that have been referred for specialist services.
- There are more girls than boys in the total sample, which reflects the actual demography of service users referred to these services.
- However, there is a gender bias represented within some outcomes with more boys than girls exhibiting sexually inappropriate behaviours, violent and aggressive behaviours, hyperactivity and abnormal prosocial behaviour as defined by the SDQ and more girls exhibiting eating disorders.

Child-outcomes focused evaluation continued.....

- Correspondence between the SDQ and standard referral information indicates that the framework for collection of referral information may be a useful mechanism for the agency for future self-evaluation in this area.
- Further focused work will be done on this.

Children's perspectives element

- To incorporate children and young peoples' perspectives into the evaluation
- Additional request from Action for Children with additional funding
- Children and young people who have been in therapy for min six months selected at random and invited to participate
- Twelve children and young people were invited to take part across the network.
- Mixed-methods activity book designed to be accessible to children and young people of all ages
- Currently 3 activity books have been returned to research staff

Children's perspectives element continued....

- Extensive and careful work has been carried out in collaboration with Action for Children management and therapeutic staff:
 - To develop the processes of informed consent from children/young people and parents/carers
 - To develop procedures for data collection in a way that safeguards children and young people and ensures they are comfortable with what is being asked of them or with withdrawing their participation if they are not.

Ethics

- CCCU faculty ethics checklist completed for audit of information already collected by projects.
- All information anonymised at project prior to being sent to CCCU
- Internal peer-review of qualitative element via CCCU Director of Research
- Wider approval and permission obtained from ADCS, individual Directors of Children's Services and research approval groups from up to eight local authorities

Ethical considerations

- Anonymity
- Confidentiality
- Consent
- Safeguarding
- Child/young person – therapist relationship
- Location of completion of activity book
- Sensitivity of issue
- Vulnerable and traumatised population
- Right to withdraw
- Data storage and ownership of data
- Dissemination

Learning points

- Ownership of data and reports
- Ethics and research approval procedures
- Commissioners and Stakeholders
- Funding levels
- Meta-review - costs of corner cutting

Dissemination

- Reports to funders, childrens' services departments and local research approval groups (in up to eight local authorities)
- Funders own dissemination
- Articles are being prepared for submission to peer-reviewed journals
- Presentation at a child sexual abuse research methods conference