

Serious Case Review

Family M

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**Wiltshire Safeguarding
Children Board**

Outline of case

- 5 siblings – aged 4, 6, 8, 10, 12 (at time of review period)
- Historic concerns regarding neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and domestic abuse
- Mr W found to have downloaded video images of children being sexually abused and sharing with others in chat rooms
- MR W arrested, admitted offences and released on bail; with conditions not to have any unsupervised contact with children
- Joint investigation started
- Delay in reviewing images due to volume of serious police investigations at the time

Outline of case

- Further assessment by children's social care and ICPC planned but then cancelled; case held at child in need (CiN)
- Mother separated from Mr W
- CiN plan ceased after 12 months, despite ongoing concerns about neglect and physical abuse
- Various anonymous allegations that Mr W had been seen at the family home – not substantiated
- Forensic examinations established that sexual images provided evidence that one of the children had been subject to sexual abuse (17 months after images first found)
- Mr W convicted and substantial prison sentence imposed

Practice features of the case

- Practitioners found it hard to challenge Mother, in relation to a number of issues - for example Mother said that she was treating persistent headlice in one of the children despite the evidence suggesting otherwise
- Concerns about neglectful behaviour by mother were consistently raised however information often focused on the presenting issue rather than an analysis of the gaps in parental care and impact of this on the child
- The interviews of the children were not well planned and did not involve relevant school staff who may have helped the children to feel able to “tell their story” ; there was an overreliance on them disclosing
- Women are not always considered as perpetrators of abuse - Mother was complicit to the abuse

Multi-agency findings: Finding 1

1. The exponential increase in the number of men who view online child sexual abuse images is not matched by the development of knowledge of best professional practice leaving professionals uncertain how to respond and children at continued risk of harm.

For consideration...



- How confident are you as a professional in understanding, assessing and responding to the risk from men who view online child sexual abuse images?
- What would increase your confidence?

Finding 2

2. Children need professionals to provide the best opportunity for them to be able to talk to professionals about any abuse they have experienced. The absence of a clear framework when these interviews take place outside of the established ABE process alongside the pressures to balance the requirements of evidence gathering with the need for child sensitive approaches can lead to inconsistency and unclear interview approaches.

For consideration...



- What does your agency put in place to support children to talk about abuse? Do staff have necessary skills to help children communicate and be able to say if harm is occurring?
- Are staff equipped to notice the behavioral signs that can indicate abuse? How do you know?

Finding 3

3. Appropriate routine professional challenge and the use of escalation processes is insufficiently embedded in the multi-agency network in Wiltshire leaving differences in professional opinion unaddressed and causing feelings of “learned helplessness” which in turn makes resolution less likely. This undermines the safety and wellbeing of children and does not support action to address concerns.

For consideration...



- How confident are you as a professional to challenge decisions made by other agencies which you feel are unsafe for a child or young person?
- How do you know that staff within your agency are confident about professional challenge and ‘difficult conversation’?

Finding 4

4. There is a tendency for professionals to uncritically accept what parents tell them about their children in the mistaken belief that this is “working in partnership”, resulting in an inaccurate description of children’s needs and circumstances which are left unaddressed as a result.

For consideration...



- Do you retain ‘respectful uncertainty’ or ‘healthy scepticism’ in your practice? How do you know? What does it look like in practice?

Finding 5

5. The lack of an effective practice framework for working with neglect in Wiltshire has left professionals deskilled in their response and inconsistent in how they explicitly name child and adolescent “neglect”.

For consideration...



- The assessment of neglect needs to be transparent and systematic and should consider both historical and current evidence. Do practitioners in your agency have the necessary skills and knowledge to support this?
- Are the links between neglect and other forms of abuse well understood within your agency? How do you know?

Finding 6

6. Although there have been changes to the way in which Child in Need processes are delivered in Wiltshire there appears to be continued evidence that they lack the rigour and focus seen in child protection processes with the result that there is insufficient analysis of children's needs. This can result in plans which are incident-led and not focused on addressing the concerns they were tasked with. In addition, there is insufficient care or thought given to the role and place of parents within the CIN meetings which has the capacity to undermine their effectiveness.

For consideration...



- How does your agency monitor their contribution to the child in need process?
- Is this contribution appropriate and sufficient?

Learning from SCR Family M

- What is the learning for you as a practitioner?
- What is the learning for your agency?
- What is the learning for how you work with other agencies?