

Round Table discussions

after

Panel # 4: *Counselling and Therapeutic Treatment for Children, Adolescents and their Families*

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Child Advocacy Centres Knowledge Exchange, Ottawa

Tuesday morning, March 1, 2011

Panel # 4: *Counselling and Therapeutic Treatment for Children, Adolescents and their Families*

Lucie Joyal, Directrice Générale, Centre d'expertise Marie-Vincent, Montréal, QC

See presentation:

[Joyal] [Montreal – Centre d'expertise Marie-Vincent – Services for young sexual assault victims](#)

Karyn Kennedy, Executive Director, BOOST Child Abuse Prevention & Intervention, Toronto, ON

See presentation:

[Kennedy] [Toronto – BOOST – Support, Assessment, Treatment](#)

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

Question # 1) How can counselling and therapeutic services be made a more integral part of seamless services for children and their families? What barriers must be overcome to achieve this?

There are significant waiting lists in different communities across the country, for counselling for children who have been sexually abused -- e.g. a 5 to 7 month wait is not unusual for many children.

Public funding for counselling

Several provinces provide various levels of funding that help young victims and/or witnesses to receive counselling from approved professional practitioners.

Different jurisdictions target the counselling funding to specific needs. For example: in Ontario, funding is directed to children who are victims of internet-facilitated crimes; Nova Scotia targets counselling funds to children who have witnessed intimate partner violence; New Brunswick funds trauma counselling and short term counselling..

Where a well-established CAC is in place, counselling services are either part of their in-house services, or, they facilitate a seamless referral to counselling services for the child/youth and family. For many young victims and witnesses in Canada, their first opportunity to find counselling is often through victim services.

Are waiting lists the problem – or cultural discomfort?

Some delegates suggested that, for some children and their families in need of counselling, a key problem that hampers access to counselling may not be waiting lists, but may have more to do with cultural issues. Some immigrant groups may have no history of using counselling in their culture, and these families may not want to participate in counselling from “mainstream white professionals” whom they believe won’t understand their culture.

Aboriginal families often prefer to seek healing within their own communities.

In remote communities, families may accept counselling in the direct aftermath of a crisis or high risk situation. But families become less motivated to continue with counselling when their current crisis is over. In communities dealing with major problems such as clean water, housing, nutrition and education, counselling may be viewed as less important than these basic needs. As well, there is a lack of financial resources to support long-term therapeutic interventions and counselling.

Parent readiness to access counselling for their child

In her presentation about case management, Tracy Hannah, Manager of Provincial Victim Services in Nova Scotia, discussed the issue of parent readiness to access counselling for their children, who were exposed to domestic violence. She reported a significant drop-off rate between the number of families who apply for, and qualify

for, counselling -- and those who actually take advantage of funded counselling services. It was suggested that we need to gain a deeper understanding of this issue.

The table below refers to children who have witnessed intimate partner violence in their families.

	Applications Received	Applications Approved	Accessed Counselling
2008	13	12	9
2009	52	48	24
2010	121	99	19

This table is from the presentation by Tracy Hannah, Manager, Provincial Victim Services Program, Nova Scotia.

There are complex reasons why children and their families do not follow through with counselling services– even when the services are free.

Several delegates commented that a parent’s personal history of abuse may affect their willingness to seek counselling services for their child, or to participate in family counselling, when their own child is abused. In some communities, there may be long histories of inter-generational abuse.

When parents are unwilling to send their child to formal counselling, other, more informal support services in the community might be helpful to the child and family.

When child care is provided for child A, a parent may be more likely to bring child B to a counselling session.

Some children may not be ready to engage in counselling immediately after the investigation. It is important to ensure that counselling and therapeutic services continue to be offered and made available to a child at a future date.

Negative attitudes toward counselling – by various justice professionals

It is obviously not in the best interest of any child or youth to be involved in an adversarial court system for 2 years. There are many ways to ameliorate this situation: make early referrals to victim/witness services and counselling; provide child-centred court preparation; provide seamless services through strong coordination and collaboration among justice professionals that expedite the process and avoid adjournments.

Some delegates reported that a small number of crown attorneys may not want the child/youth to receive counselling before they testify. This attitude persists, despite the fact that it has been discredited by best practice studies. It is now widely recognized that the emotional needs of the child must be addressed quickly. It can take up to 2 years for a case to make it to court, and that is too long for a child victim or witness to wait for counselling.

Some delegates discussed the problem that if a child is in counselling, a defense lawyer may try to use this information to challenge or discredit the child's testimony. While such tactics may now be rare, if the defense gets a court order to see records from counselling sessions, these documents may become part of the public record.

After-court support is important

Support and services to the child and family can sometimes be even more important after the court's decision has been made – especially if the child and family are unhappy with the outcome of the case. (For example – if the accused is acquitted; or when a parent or close relative is sentenced.) It's important to offer a de-briefing session after the court outcome, and, when needed by the child and family, to continue to provide or facilitate supports after the court process is over.

Preliminary study (Hébert, 2010)

Satisfaction of children

Enjoyed participating in the parent-child intervention?	Change or improve the intervention?	Learned something new?	Recommend participating in the intervention?
74% A lot	85% No	88% Yes	92% Yes
22% A little	15% Yes	6% No	4% No
4% Not at all		6% I do not know	4% I am not sure

This table from the presentation by Lucie Joyal, of the Centre d'Expertise Marie-Vincent in Montreal, shows how children who have received counselling at the centre feel about the treatment they received. The Centre serves children age 12 and younger.

Multicultural –newcomer community attitudes toward counselling

Several delegates from urban centres with large immigrant populations report that many immigrant families have no understanding at all of the concept of therapy after traumatic events. The challenge in these cases is to find skilled therapists who are experienced and sensitive to the culture in question.

Delegates from jurisdictions with large immigrant populations talked about some depressing cases in which they were involved, where they were unable to support a child in need of serious help, usually because the family closed ranks to avoid charges being laid against an offending family member. In extreme cases, children have been sent back to relatives overseas in order to prevent him or her from testifying.

Aboriginal-First Nations attitudes toward counselling - other concerns

In Aboriginal/First Nations communities, there may be considerable resistance to counselling through mainstream models, that may not be relevant to their culture.

Unfortunately, it may be necessary, in some cases, to remove a child on a temporary basis from a remote community, in order to provide essential intervention. This remains a controversial issue.

Another problematic issue in Native communities may occur if the abuser's family rallies around to provide strong support for the accused, which can re-traumatize or silence the victim.

If band council approval is needed to get services to a victim – and the abuser's family is influential on council – this can introduce other problems.

Delegates agreed that the CAC model that works in urban communities will need to be adapted substantially to respond to the unique social realities -- and physical infrastructure -- of aboriginal communities.

Throughout this Knowledge Exchange, several people suggested that the needs of Aboriginal child and youth victims and witnesses may be unique enough to require a completely separate Knowledge Exchange. Solutions that will work in larger cities may not be appropriate in small remote communities where family and community alliances play a major role.

Whose client – funding worries

Delegates agreed there can be problems when different agencies may be vying for the same “client base,” and funding is an issue. Budget cuts make this situation more intense.

As one delegate explained: *“less resources make collaboration more difficult.”*

Can schools play a role?

Saskatchewan has had success delivering services to victims and witnesses through the school systems.

Delegates agreed that teachers can often be effective partners to bring on-board, to help direct children to counselling and other services.

Accessing the right counsellor – suitable for each child

It's important to follow-up with clients to see whether they benefited -- or not -- from counselling sessions. These inquiries can also be helpful in learning how effective different counsellors seem to be, with different clients.

Victim services often have a hard time figuring out how to refer children to the appropriate counselling agency. Many delegates said they could benefit from a well



Dawn McInnes (Yellowknife, NWT), Kim Conboy (Ottawa) and Tanya Smith (Toronto) share views on victim services in different parts of the country.

annotated list of local counsellors in their area – with details about who has specialization in working with children, and in treating trauma.

In the end, the key message on counselling is – if the first therapist isn't a good fit – move on to another.

Several delegates mentioned Kids Help Phone

<http://www.kidshelpphone.ca/teens/home/splash.aspx> as an excellent resource.

It's free, always available, and the people speaking to the children / youth who call in are well trained in children's issues.

Timing of counselling

Delegates reported cases where some therapists did not want to become involved with a child victim or witness until after the court process is over. Some therapists may be concerned that they or their records may be subpoenaed.

Use of trained volunteers

Volunteers can play a wide range of roles in a CAC or similar type service. Some organizations will allow volunteers to interact directly with children and families; while other organization limit volunteers to helping with administrative functions.

A well-established CAC such as Zebra Child Protection Centre in Edmonton uses a large roster of carefully screened, well-trained volunteers, who are willing to make a long-term commitment to help families in a variety of roles. See the Zebra website for a description of what their volunteers may do:

<http://www.zebracentre.ca/training-commitment/>

Many hours of specialized training are essential before any volunteer should become involved directly with children and their families. Zebra requires at least 30 hours of basic training, with opportunities for more advanced training.

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