

Round Table discussions

after

Panel # 5: *Research, Monitoring and Evaluation*

Child Advocacy Centres Knowledge Exchange, Ottawa

Tuesday afternoon, March 1, 2011

Panel # 5: *Research, Monitoring and Evaluation*

[Susan McDonald](#), Principal Researcher, Department of Justice, Ottawa, ON
Research on Child and Youth Victims and Witnesses in Canada: What do we have? What do we need?

[Tracy Hannah](#), Manager, Provincial Victim Services Program, Halifax, NS
Child Victims and Witnesses: A Case Management Model

See Presentation: [Hannah] [Case Management Model](#)

[Milco de Graaf](#), Program Coordinator, Child Victim Support Services, Government of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB
Tracking Child Victims and Witnesses through the Justice System

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

Question # 1) How do you collect data on services provided to child and youth victims and witnesses? What challenges have you encountered with data collection and monitoring? Who do you share this data with?

One delegate summed up the issue: *"It's a shame to let good data go to waste."*

Every agency collects different kinds of data

Discussions at the round tables showed that police services, child protection agencies, victim services and crown attorney offices across Canada collect different

types of data. Many different data collection systems are in use, from highly sophisticated to the most basic manual counting. Delegates suggested that there is little analysis on the collected data, and information is often not shared.

Some agencies track detailed information about the age and gender of child victims and witnesses; the nature of the alleged crime; types of charges, and length of time that the child was in the justice process, from first interview to court outcome. Other agencies document less detailed information about a child's trajectory in the justice process.

Delegates discussed the challenges of documenting data and also many shared that they do not have the capacity to collect and capture detailed information.

Some delegates reported that they input their data manually, and analyze manually – using what Milco De Graaf of Manitoba Victim Services described as the “kitchen table” method.

Incompatible computer software often makes it difficult to share data across agencies in the same jurisdiction. Agencies tend to prepare data in a format that is compatible with their direct partner-agencies or directed by the Ministries that fund them. See below for more on the data-to-funding connection.

Because of incompatible data collection systems, or narrow focus in collecting data, (and sometimes a definite policy NOT to share data), it is rare for agencies in one area to share their data. Reports rarely give a full sense of the complete experience of children as they move through a local justice system.

Delegates provided some examples of info-sharing protocols: between police and victim services; between police and child protection agencies; and between victim services and crown attorney's offices. In some jurisdictions, specific protocols have been developed (examples shared at the KE included Quebec, Manitoba, Newfoundland/Labrador, Ontario).

A majority of delegates agreed that one item high up on their wish-list would be a comprehensive, national database that captures useful information about many details of how child victims and witnesses move through the justice systems in different parts of Canada. The challenge will be how to:

- a) identify what information should be collected; then

- b) get all the involved organizations to agree to provide their (non-identifying) data into that system; and then
- c) design a software program that is simple enough for everyone to use

It was noted that some jurisdictions may need to update their computer systems.

Case not referred = case not counted

The key to accurate tracking of children in the justice system is referrals from police.

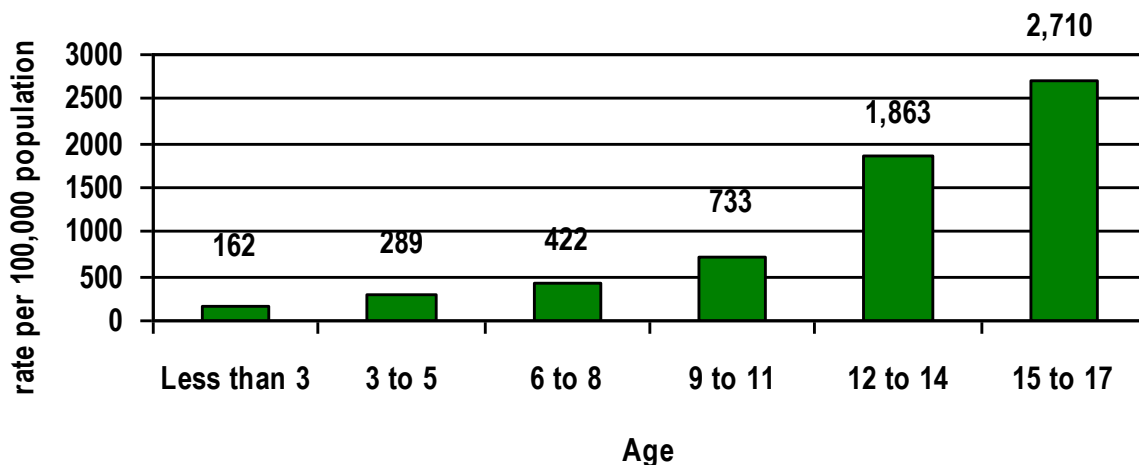
Data cannot be collected on children who are not referred.

It was noted that many police services are alert to the needs of child victims and witnesses, and that they make the appropriate referrals. However, in some jurisdictions, delegates reported that they know too many child cases are not being referred by police. Those children will not get access to the special services they need to help them through the court system.

Gaps in service – youth often missed

Very little data is collected on victims or witnesses who are aged 16 and 17. Some agencies, because of legislation or policy, serve only children and youth under age 16; while other agencies may limit services to children age 12 and under.

As the table below shows, youth aged 15 to 17 experience the highest rate of victimization of violent crime. They are over-represented in the victims-of-crime statistics, but they are under-served by the justice system.



In 2008, rates of violent victimization against under 18s in Canada were highest among youth aged 15 to 17. The table comes from the presentation at this Knowledge Exchange by Susan McDonald, principal researcher at the federal Department of Justice.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey

Reluctance to share data

There are many reasons why agencies will not share data. While police in some jurisdictions have positive reciprocal relations with local victim services, other delegates reported that they receive little information from their local police. Delegates suggested that police services sometimes operate from a “territorial” perspective, which impacts on how they work with all other community agencies. The message has to be emphasized that such collaboration is beneficial and effective and productive.

It was noted that some agencies only share data with their official partners.

Other agencies encourage wider dissemination of data that is statistical, in order to shed light on the general needs children and youth victims and witnesses in the justice system. Crown attorneys can benefit from data information describing the experience of child witnesses

There was discussion around the sharing of identifying versus non-identifying data.

1The RCMP – issue of referrals

Several delegates pointed out that RCMP are the least likely to share information about victims and witnesses. There is a significant discrepancy, in some places, between the number of charges laid in cases that involve children, and the actual number of referrals received by child victim services, when the RCMP investigates. Many delegates, in several provinces, noted this telling discrepancy.

First Nations agencies

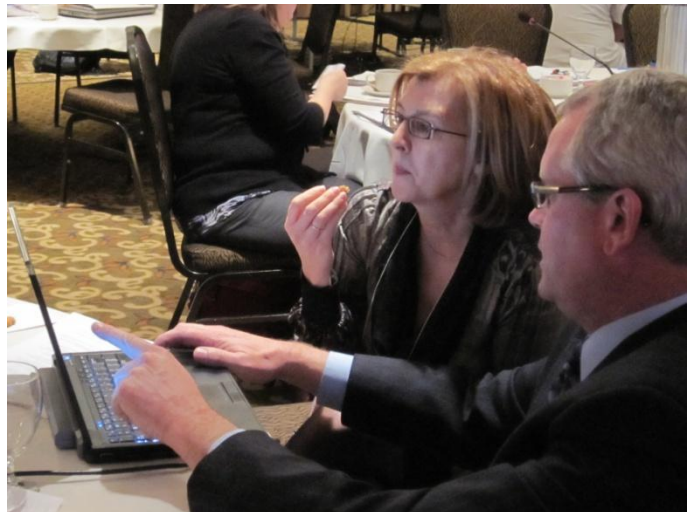
Delegates from jurisdictions with Aboriginal child protection agencies or Aboriginal police services report that First Nations communities are often reluctant to share information about their children with mainstream services.

It is also difficult to track Aboriginal children who become involved with the justice system, if the family lives off-reserve.

Who does share information and data?

Examples of agencies that report their data include:

- Centre d'expertise Marie-Vincent (Montreal) shares its data with their partner agencies. They also publish a newsletter every 3 months. Their data describes children aged 12 and under.
- The SCAN clinic at Toronto's SickKids Hospital submits its data to the Ontario Ministry of Health, their funder.
- Victim services and specialized child victim witness programs submit data reports to their provincial and territorial government funders.



Lucie Joyal, of the Centre d'expertise Marie-Vincent in Montreal and Chris Newlin of the National Children's Advocacy Centre in Huntsville, Alabama. Both agencies collect data and are involved in on-going research.

Funding needs drive data collection

Many delegates commented that the type of data collected, and with whom it is shared, tends to be driven by funding requirements. Some organizations expand the scope of data collection, as required by the mandate of their own organization and for research purposes.

As one delegate explained: *“Data collection is often geared to getting info that will help you to get money in the next round of funding.”* Data collected for those reasons may not provide insight on some key issues relating to children in the justice system.

Many delegates suggested that their own organizations did not have enough staffing/time to collect as much information as they would wish, or to enter it into a data system and to analyze the data.

Data collected to support collaboration efforts

Some delegates remarked the kind of data collected has an impact on the relationships a particular agency has – or is trying to build – with other agencies.

A delegate mentioned that, in their province, the funding for some projects is directly tied to the degree to which you can demonstrate that you share data with other agencies.

Good data supports progressive collaborations and CACs

In order to be more persuasive with governments, we need to know what works.

Establishing a culture of information-sharing amongst agencies can be an essential first step to building momentum for a CAC in any community. Data, combining information from several agencies on the needs of child victims and witnesses in a community, can be useful in providing a rationale to support the development of a CAC, to both government and private funders.

Some research should focus on the cost benefits of a CAC to a community.

It was emphasized that we need to find ways of getting impartial feedback from children and families.

Some agencies have found it useful to collaborate with universities in research projects.

The need to disseminate research findings was emphasized. Research, including data collection and evaluation, should be built into the development of every CAC.

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