Consensus building on definitions to improve recording and surveillance of child maltreatment in Europe: Protocol for a multi-sectoral, European e-Delphi study

Ulugbek B Nurmatov[1], Lisa Hurt[1], Laura Cowley[2,3,], Leonor Bettencourt Rodrigues[4], Sakis Dinapogias[5], Taina Laajasalo[6], Andreas Jud[7], Gabriel Otterman[8], Virginia Soldino[9], Alison Kemp[1], Vaska Stancheva[10], Ravit Alfandari[11], Geoff DeBelle[12], Diogo Lamela[13], Rachael Vaughan[14], Claudia Cappa[15], Katarzyna Drabarek[16], Aideen Naughton[17], on behalf of the COST Action 19106 team.

E-mail addresses:

Ulugbek Nurmatov: NurmatovU@cardiff.ac.uk
Lisa Hurt: HurtL@cardiff.ac.uk
Laura Cowley: l.e.cowley@swansea.ac.uk; laura_c24@hotmail.co.uk
Leonor Bettencourt Rodrigues: Leonor.Bettencourt@prochildcolab.pt
Sakis Dinapogias: ntinapogias@ich-mhsw.gr; dinapogias@gmail.com
Taina Laajasalo: taina.laajasalo@thl.fi; taina.laajasalo@helsinki.fi
Andreas Jud: Andreas.Jud@uniklinik-ulm.de
Gabriel Otterman: gabriel.lutra@gmail.com
Virginia Soldino: Virginia.Soldino@uv.es
Alison Kemp: KempAM@cardiff.ac.uk
Vaska Stancheva: v_stancheva@abv.bg
Ravit Alfandari: ravit103@gmail.com
Geoff DeBelle: g.debelle@nhs.net; geoff.debelle@bch.nhs.uk
Diogo Lamela: diogo.lamela@ulusofona.pt
Rachael Vaughan: VaughanR5@cardiff.ac.uk
Claudia Cappa: ccappa@unicef.org
Katarzyna Drabarek: katarzyna.drabarek@fdds.pl
Aideen Naughton: Aideen.Naughton@wales.nhs.uk; aideenn1@gmail.com

[1]School of Medicine, Cardiff University, Wales, UK
[2]Research and Evaluation Division, Knowledge and Research Directorate, Public Health Wales, Cardiff, Wales, UK
[3]National Centre for Population Health and Wellbeing Research, Swansea University Medical School, Wales, UK
[4]ProChild CoLAB, Against Child Poverty and Social Exclusion, Portugal
[5]Department of Mental Health and Social Welfare, Institute of Child Health, Greece
[6]Center of Expertise for Work Against Violence, Special Services Unit, Department of Health and Welfare, Finland
[7]Clinic for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry/Psychotherapy, University Clinics Ulm, Germany
[8]Child Protection Team, Uppsala University Children's Hospital, Sweden
[9]University Institute for Research in Criminology and Criminal Sciences University of Valencia, Spain
[10]Department of Medical Social Sciences, South-West University, "Neofit Rilski", Bulgaria
[11]School of Social Work, University of Haifa, Israel
[12]Birmingham Children's Hospital, Safeguarding Team, England, UK
[13]HEI-Lab, Lusófona University, Porto, Portugal
[14]Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE), Wales, UK
[15] Data and Analytics Section, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring UNICEF
[16] Children and Family Center, Warsaw, Poland
[17]National Safeguarding Team (NHS Wales), Public Health Wales, Wales, UK

Abstract

Background: Child maltreatment is a complex global public health issue that can have devastating and pervasive effects on physical and mental health and wellbeing across the life course. Consistent measurement of child maltreatment is needed but is hampered by a lack of agreement on definitions and the essential information that should be measured within surveillance and research.

Aim of the study: To reach a consensus on operational definitions and types of child maltreatment for use in surveillance and multi-sectoral research in 34 COST Action countries.

Methods: This is an e-Delphi study using standard methods. A working group from the Euro-CAN (Multi-Sectoral Responses to Child Abuse and Neglect in Europe) multidisciplinary network of researchers and child protection practitioners from a range of European countries have developed the Delphi questionnaire, based on background work (a scoping review; a comparison of major child maltreatment classifications; and a survey of definitions already in use). An International Multidisciplinary Expert Panel will be purposefully selected to participate (n~40 individuals) to assess the statements in the questionnaire. The Delphi process will comprise three rounds, conduced electronically. Participants will score the importance of a range of questions on specific essential components and operationalised definitions of child maltreatment, with refinement between rounds. In all three rounds, the participants will be asked to independently rank questions across several domains, using a 4-point Likert scale ('strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree'). Consensus on each statement will be defined a priori as 70% or more agreement ('strongly agree' or 'agree') after the third round. Ethical approval will be sought.

Results/Conclusions: The current lack of uniform definitions limits communication, and hinders attempts to identify, measure, respond to and prevent child maltreatment. This study will address these limitations, to improve data collection and surveillance of child maltreatment across different sectors and countries in Europe.