

Appraisal of published guidelines in European countries addressing the medical management of childhood sexual abuse: a systematic review

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Citation

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Review question

Primary research question:

- In comparison to the World Health Organization's 2017 and 2019 clinical guidelines on the health sector response to child sexual abuse (CSA), what are the completeness, clarity and consistency of healthcare guidelines published by countries within the European Region addressing childhood sexual abuse?

Secondary research question:

- How do the included COST ACTION 19106 Network Countries (CANC) guidelines compare with one another in content consistency?

Searches

Searches:

• The systematic review will entail a search of MEDLINE, EMBASE, PsycINFO, CINAHL, TRIP, WHO Global Health Library, Web of Science, Google Scholar, SUMSearch, and Guidelines International Network. References of the guidelines included in the review will be searched for additional guidelines. Search of the grey literature will include the Health Management Information Consortium (HMIC), the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE, UK), as well as the websites of government health agencies and academic societies within the European Region. In addition, members of the Multi-sectoral Responses to Child Abuse and Neglect in Europe (Euro-CAN; COST Action 19106, a network of experts in child maltreatment and relevant stakeholders representing 34 countries) will be contacted and asked to identify additional relevant guidelines. In addition, paediatricians, forensic physicians, gynaecologists and other physicians in the CANC engaged in the care of vulnerable children will be included in the search via snowball strategy.

Search strategy:

• Search terms will be developed using medical subject headings (MeSH) and text words related to forms of childhood sexual abuse, and healthcare professional guidance. After finalization of the MEDLINE search strategy criteria, the latter will be adapted for the remaining electronic databases.

• A panel of international experts will be contacted, outlining the purpose of the review and requesting their support to identify any unpublished and ongoing clinical guidelines.

- Language: All languages.
- Countries: COST ACTION 19106 Network countries.
- Years: 2012 to 2022.

Additional search strategy information can be found in the attached PDF document (link provided below).

Types of study to be included

Clinical Guidelines on CSA.

Clinical Guidelines will be eligible for inclusion in the systematic review if they meet all the following criteria:

- Include specific guidance for healthcare professionals to recognize and appropriately respond to children (<18 years) who have experienced child sexual abuse
- Are published in peer-reviewed journals or in the grey literature (including government or health professional society websites)
- Represent the product of a national agency or an academic society of health professionals located within the CANC
- Are published between Jan 1, 2012, through Jan 1, 2022
- No language restrictions.

Condition or domain being studied

The aim of this systematic review is to critically appraise existing clinical guidelines addressing the medical management of child sexual abuse (CSA) used in the COST Action 19106 Network Countries (CANC) (as March 2022 Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Moldova, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom).

Participants/population

Children and young people aged under the age of 18 years who were exposed to CSA.

Child sexual abuse is defined according to the formulation by the 1999 World Health Organization (WHO) Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention which stated that:

- the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;
- the exploitative use of a child in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;
- the exploitative use of children in pornographic performance and materials.

Intervention(s), exposure(s)

Exposure: to CSA.

Comparator(s)/control

Clinical Guidelines published in CANC countries will be compared to the WHO 2017 and 2019 clinical guidelines.

Context

Any setting.

Main outcome(s)

- Alignment with WHO guidelines. Completeness, clarity and consistency of national guidelines compared to the gold standard.

Additional outcome(s)

- Consistency between the included clinical guidelines of the CANC.

Data extraction (selection and coding)

Two independent reviewers will extract data from included guidelines. A customised data extraction sheet will include the following information: country, year of dissemination, guideline development process with the report of the group membership involved, search method, and specific content and characteristics of guidelines as they relate to the good practice statements and recommendations from the "Responding to children and adolescents who have been sexually abused: WHO 2017 clinical guidelines" and the sections on identification and prevention of recurrence of CSA included in the "WHO Guidelines for the Health Sector

Response to Child Maltreatment: Technical Report, 2019.” Key findings from each guideline will be summarised and presented in descriptive summary tables.

Dealing with lack of information:

If after the full text assessment it is still unclear whether a guideline fulfils the inclusion criteria, or if we require clarification of any details relating to the data we will attempt to contact authors by email for further relevant information. If we fail to make contact/retrieve this, we will list the respective guideline as “potentially relevant guideline”.

Dealing with duplication:

Multiple guidelines may be published for a number of reasons including updates with revisions, a focus on different aspects of the medical management of CSA, results at different follow-up periods or reporting of different outcomes. We will treat a guideline with multiple reports as a single guideline but draw on and make reference to all the relevant publications. For guidelines with one or more updates, we will consider the most recent version.

Risk of bias (quality) assessment

Eligible guidelines will be critically appraised by two independent reviewers working in duplicate. The quality, methodological rigour and transparency of included clinical guidelines will be assessed using Appraisal of Guidelines for Research & Evaluation AGREE II tool.

Strategy for data synthesis

Descriptive statistics will be employed to characterize content similarities and differences between the gold standard “Responding to children and adolescents who have been sexually abused: WHO 2017 clinical guidelines” and included national guidelines for the diagnosis of Child Sexual Abuse issued in European countries.

Quantitative data will be summarised using counts, frequencies, proportions, and the percent agreement between country-specific guidelines and the WHO 2017 guideline.

A systematic narrative synthesis will be provided with the information presented in text and tables to summarize the findings.

Analysis of subgroups or subsets

Subgroup analysis will be conducted by country.

Contact details for further information

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Organisational affiliation of the review

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Type and method of review

Epidemiologic, Narrative synthesis, Service delivery, Systematic review

Anticipated or actual start date

02 May 2022

Anticipated completion date

01 May 2023

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Conflicts of interest

G. Otterman no conflicts of interest.
U. Nurmatov no conflicts of interest.
W. Karst no conflicts of interest.
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M. Chalumeau no conflicts of interest.
J. Greenbaum no conflicts of interest.

None known

Language

English

Country

Austria, France, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, United States of America, Wales

Stage of review

Review Ongoing

Subject index terms status

Subject indexing assigned by CRD

Subject index terms

Adolescent; Adolescent Health; Child; Child Abuse, Sexual; Child Health; Child Protective Services; Delivery of Health Care; Europe; Guidelines as Topic; Humans; Practice Guidelines as Topic; Sex Offenses

Date of registration in PROSPERO

29 March 2022

Date of first submission

25 March 2022

Stage of review at time of this submission

The review has not started

Stage	Started	Completed
Preliminary searches	No	No
Piloting of the study selection process	No	No
Formal screening of search results against eligibility criteria	No	No
Data extraction	No	No
Risk of bias (quality) assessment	No	No
Data analysis	No	No

The record owner confirms that the information they have supplied for this submission is accurate and complete and they understand that deliberate provision of inaccurate information or omission of data may be construed as scientific misconduct.

The record owner confirms that they will update the status of the review when it is completed and will add publication details in due course.

Versions

29 March 2022

PROSPERO

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