

Children exposed to violence, abuse or neglect by a female or male caregiver – does gender matter based on social workers' perceptions

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Introduction

Limited research has been presented exploring potential differences in how practitioners deal with a female vs a male perpetrator of maltreatment. We currently analyze data of a systematic literature review that explores potential differences described in research of interventions when the perpetrator of abuse or neglect is female and male respectively. To complement the review, we wanted to explore how clinical social workers reflect on potential differences in interventions offered to male vs female offenders of maltreatment.

Methods

We conducted four group interviews with social workers working with children and families. The social workers were all employed by social welfare offices in charge of child protection cases or interventions for children being maltreated. The focus of the interviews was what kind of interventions the social welfare offers children who have been abused or neglected and the perpetrators of the acts, respectively. Further, if gender of the perpetrator affects the choice of interventions. Data were analyzed with qualitative content analysis.

Results

The preliminary results identified that participants initially described that they have an awareness of not valuing and acting differently if it is a female or a male who committed the maltreatment when assessing the seriousness and valuing the need for different types of interventions. During the interviews, more perspectives became visible for the participants, such as being less judgmental towards fathers who fail in parenting and that fathers' attempts to improve their parenting are more confirmed by social workers than mothers' corresponding efforts.

Conclusions

The study identified more or less subtle differences in how professionals treat men and women who have exposed children to maltreatment. The participants reflected that there is an unawareness in how gender affects them that need to be further discussed in their teams.