

Fathers and child protection: evaluation of a training intervention for social workers.

Several studies have shown that child protection workers tend to engage much more successfully with mothers than fathers (by which we mean any men with significant involvement in children's lives). There have been a number of different criticisms of this tendency, but relatively little evidence to indicate how father engagement can be improved and whether better engagement of fathers by services would improve child welfare. To begin to address this evidence gap, by first attempting to improve the engagement of fathers, an evidence-based training intervention was developed, based on findings from practitioner and service user interview data and a review of research evidence on barriers and facilitators in relation to father engagement.

The aim of the training intervention was to improve the quality and quantity of father engagement in the child protection process. A two-day course was designed, consisting of one day of awareness-raising about the issue and one day which was primarily focused on micro-level practice skills training, based on aspects of motivational interviewing. Experienced trainers delivered the course to fifty social workers from two Welsh local authorities between January and April 2011. The conference presentation will include a brief overview of training intervention design before examining the results of a mixed method process evaluation. Quantitative evaluation data were collected via pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, focusing on social workers' self-efficacy in engaging fathers, the readiness of social work teams to work with fathers and self-reported engagement of fathers on current caseloads. Questionnaires were completed at the start of the training course and two months after the end of the course. Qualitative evaluation data included observation of training and follow-up semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of participants.