

Scottish Child Interview Model for Joint Investigative Interviewing

Evidence Based Interviewer Practice – Research Series

Topic: Evaluation of Interview Practice

Joint Investigative Interviewer Evaluations - What does the research tell us?

The Scottish Child Interview Model includes evaluation of practice as a key component integral to the success of the model. It takes account of the extensive research that tells us that training programmes are unlikely to be effective in supporting improvements to practice unless complemented by extensive practice opportunities and regular practice-focused feedback. In addition, research suggests that interviewers may need some time to consolidate learning following completion of their training and consistently integrate this into their practice.

The Evidence and Procedure Review, the original driver for change in Scotland, recognised and stressed that the role of Joint Investigative Interviewer involves specialist skills, therefore requiring “dedicated training, regular practice and on-going evaluation and feedback” and recommended that “on-going assessment and evaluation of interviewer’s practice should be built into the National Curricula as a training requirement.”¹ This recommendation is endorsed by the supporting research internationally which highlights the range of factors that are influential in improving forensic interview quality for children. The research notes that ‘only when training moves beyond the classroom, spaced over time, and involves extensive opportunities to consolidate learning and practice skills in contexts that ensure prompt feedback and guidance’ do we see the benefits of learners and tutors investment in the process of improving practice operationalised. (Lamb et al 2018)

Research has consistently evidenced that interviewers benefit from good intensive training which improves aspects of their practice. However, intensive training alone was correlated strongly with improved knowledge about what interviewers *ought* to be doing rather than it resulting in them being able to translate this consistently over time into what they *actually* do when interviewing. (Lamb et al 2018, Johnston et al., 2015, Korkman et al., 2008, Wolfman et al., 2016)

¹ Recommendation number 8, Evidence and Procedure Review, Child and Vulnerable Witnesses Project, Summary of Recommendations from the Joint Investigative Interview work-stream project report June 2017

It continues to be the case that departures from recommended practices exist, even in the context of specialised teams and where there are increased resources for interviewers, so it is important to acknowledge that even in these types of supportive conditions, interviewers must be engaged in a process of evaluating their practice to enable learning to take place (Johnson, Magnussen, Thoresen, Lonnum, Burrell & Melinder 2015).

Development of the Scottish Child Interview Model took account of the literature which strongly supported the combination of a 'knowledge transmission model that is complemented by extensive practice opportunities and regular feedback' (Lamb 2016) when developing the new training for interviewers.

What influences interviewer behaviour to effect change and improve practice?

Interviewer behaviour is influenced by a number of factors. The first, quality of the initial training provided, has been addressed above. Secondly, interviewers need to have a structured interviewing model/protocol available to them that they can operationalise. This is now a central component of the Scottish Child Interview Model. Interviewers are required to follow the principles of the NICHD protocol which is evidence based and importantly was developed to take account of children's development, linguistic age and stage, context and relational experiences. It provides a framework for interviewers to structure their questioning effectively.

Building on this, interviewers need to learn to critically reflect on their practice, with objective feedback made readily available from others. Regular access to continuing professional development opportunities and practice focused supervision (different from workload management) supports the interviewer's ability to change their behaviour in the interview environment to create optimal conditions and deliver best practices for interviewing. These factors, when available with a backdrop of support, give individuals the best chance of making and sustaining improvements in their approach.

What is recommended for effective evaluation processes?

Studies have helped us to see that there is measurable value in providing interviewers with written and verbal feedback on interview practice, both in the training environment and beyond, into the workplace when undertaking real interviews with children.

The application of the NICHD interview protocol strongly supports the need for supervision, evaluation and feedback that is ongoing for interviewers practising in the field of forensic interviewing. These research findings are the result of repeated experimental demonstration of the impact of failing to do this, contrasted with findings of an improved picture when this quality control measure is applied. 'A key component of training with the NICHD protocol is the emphasis on continued supervision and feedback about interviewing performance' (Lamb, 2016; La Rooy et al., 2015)

A number of different studies have focused on interview review and feedback processes with results offering learning in relation to effectiveness in evaluation models. Working to improve interviewers' learning and development will ultimately translate to improved practice and experiences for children being interviewed.

Importantly, the greatest improvements in practice were seen when different forms of training were distributed frequently, immediately following the robust initial training. This "training over time" concept involved monthly day long peer sessions, supported by trainers, during which real life interviews were evaluated and analysed and both strengths and areas for development were discussed, with verbal and written feedback provided (Lamb et al. 2018).

Over time, examination of interviewers' performance showed that in response to these evaluative training opportunities, interviewers performed better. (Price and Roberts 2011, Rischke et al. 2011) This was evidenced by their increased use of open ended prompts when trying to illicit information from children. Interviewers were also noted to significantly delay their use of recognition prompts, which, in itself, leads to less option posing and suggestive questioning practices or the 'delay of allegation related information by the interviewer'. This is important because these specific factors are crucial in improving the overall quality of the interview. Consistent application of this strategy increases the degree of credibility in the child's account.

What do interviewers need to do in practice to undertake effective evaluations?

Critical reflection involves the experience of looking at one's practice and having practice objectively reviewed by others. By assessing interview techniques using agreed criteria that supports the development of best practice, alternative techniques that are crucial for maintaining and developing interviewing skills can be kept in mind. To illustrate this point, an example of an "alternative technique" would be adjusting how a particular question is framed to improve its degree of openness or pairing a less open question type, for example a necessary option posing question, with an invitation.

However, critical reflection is more than just thinking about Joint Investigative Interview practice and technique. It is a way of critiquing practice in a systematic and rigorous way – helping interviewers to carefully consider their own practice and identify what could be improved and how. Critical reflection is essential for effective evaluation, learning and development and the process of change.

When supervision and feedback to forensic interviewers' ceases, research shows clearly that there is an adverse effect on interviewer performance. Quality is notably affected with fewer open ended prompts employed. Open ended questioning practice adherence to the interview protocol diminish and the impact of this is that the child's account contains fewer details and more inconsistencies.

Research shows that interviewer's poor adherence to recommended questioning strategies may also be affected by the difficulties they seem to have accurately monitoring their own practices. (Agnew, Powell & Snow 2006, Wright at Powell 2006)

Various studies show that investigative interviewers find it hard to recognise their application of appropriately questioning strategies to their interview practice and there is often a difference between what type of questioning strategy they think they are applying and what, in reality, they are actually applying. Importantly they can lose sight of the impact of their overall questioning strategy applied to their interview practice. It is important that interviewers come to understand that there is an impact on the quality and quantity of evidence obtained from the child or young person directly relative to their application of questioning structure and type.

Therefore, learning to self-evaluate one's own interviewing practice effectively includes being able to correctly identify the types of prompts used and then building upon this by learning to increase the use of more open prompts. Being able to do this is essential if good interviewing practice is to be maintained.

Drawing on research which examined the best approaches to support interviewers in recognising and improving their questioning strategies, two approaches are evidenced. The first is the opportunity to undertake mock interviews post initial training, because practicing using open prompts is strongly correlated with an ability to identify different prompts and question types when evaluating. The second is reviewing their own interview transcripts and highlighting the various types of questions used. Both these approaches support interviewers to achieve greater adherence to open ended questioning practice.

The challenges for effective evaluation

One key challenge that interviewers experience is accessing experienced and trained supervisors and evaluators (La Rooy, Lamb, & Memon, 2001; Powell & Barnett, 2015; Wolfman et al. 2016c). Another key challenge is time for learning, development, and supervision opportunities. Studies by Benson and Powell in 2015 and Wolfman et al in 2016 identified that managers often did not provide sufficient opportunities and protected time and space to complete activities such as self and peer evaluation, not recognising the positive impact in both the short and longer term this would have. Managers were often focused on the operational needs of their business area in the immediacy of the situation, and perhaps less able to see the benefits in a tangible way of both improving the effectiveness of the interview team and improving outcomes for children and young people.

Summary

Research is very clear and continues to demonstrate that experience, workload, and training background do not act as protective factors against undesirable practice. It has been shown that it is not sufficient to simply watch the interview recording and make comment on performance. The significance and complexity of the interview means that, to truly learn from one's practice, learners must be able to consider it in more detail than a few passing seconds

(as they watch themselves ask a particular question on video) and must actively evaluate the impact of their question on the child's response.

In summary, evaluation is effective when there is a structure and guidance on how to undertake this. When interviewers have been asked to comment too generally on their practice there is no impact on interviewing performance. Interviewers who are able to objectively critique their interview by following a structured format, one that prompts them to consider particular aspects in detail, will ensure their self-evaluation is robust and likely to provide rich material to inform the individual's learning and development. Adherence to interviewing protocol, quality of questioning strategy, sufficiency of evidence gathering, knowledge of essential elements to inform prompts, overall interview structure and application of trauma informed principles are important features that must be considered in each evaluation. This rich material can have even greater impact when shared with peers and the extent of the learning is both deepened and more widely shared.

Therefore, in response, the National JII Team have proposed a model of evaluation that has several components. Included is comprehensive training in methodologies and approaches that support interviewers to undertake effective evaluations and offer constructive feedback on their own and their peers' practice. The Interviewer Practice Development Model has also developed to address the needs of managers involved in evaluation with an emphasis on opportunities for shadowing available for advancing skills development in this area beyond initial training.

The recommended combination of individual, peer, and manager evaluations, in addition to ongoing access to the National JII Team and relevant experts in the field, will support improvements in practice stemming directly from evaluation activity. Interviewers, managers, and trainers will need to collaborate effectively, with the shared aim that investment in evaluation activity is valuable in pursuit of developing best practice in the field of Joint Investigative Interviewing for children in Scotland.

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