

Using Governmental data records to understand social care workers referrals to the POVA List in England and Wales



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Background

- Higher profile of adult safeguarding
- Little research on vetting/banning procedures operating in employment
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 sets up Independent Safeguarding Authority covering health, education and prisons too as from 2009

The POVA List

- Introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000
- Mandatory to check and to refer
- Applies to regulated care services (employees and volunteers), eg care homes and home care workers

Aims / Research Questions

- What are the prevalence of different types of abuse among referrals to the POVA list ?
- What are the characteristics of perpetrators and whether any association with different types of abuse ?
- What factors are associated with decisions to place staff onto to the POVA list?
- How are decisions made about whether to place referred staff on the list ?

The methods

- Quantitative:
 - Secondary data analysis of all POVA referral records
 - Data extraction and analysis of 300 detailed random sample of referrals
- Qualitative:
 - Primary data
 - Discussion of Vignettes of referrals
 - Participants asked to make judgements, give reasons and discuss 'suitability' & 'unsuitability'

This presentation is about

- The secondary data analysis of all referral records (5294 records);
 - Anonymous records provided by the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES)
- Analysis of a detailed sample of records (300; 5% of all records)
 - Stratified-randomly selected to contain equal proportions of the three possible outcomes (removed from the list, placed in the list, still being investigated)
- Challenges in extracting, and recoding required information
- Methods adopted to overcome such challenges:
 - Data processing
 - Checking and recoding process
- Summary of findings

The information in the full records

- Some information on the referred staff
 - Age
 - Place of work
 - Job role
- A brief description of the misconduct [text]
- Misconduct coded as one or more of these types of abuse:
 - Physical
 - Sexual
 - Emotional
 - Other
- Status and dates of referrals

Advantages of Secondary data analysis of All POVA records

- Specific advantages
 - Uniqueness of the data
 - Full coverage of records; in this cases a census of all referrals
- General advantages
 - Breadth of data available
 - Fast and relatively inexpensive
 - Provide a comparison base for other samples

Advantages of the detailed sample

- Provides more information on:
 - Additional characteristics of referred staff
 - Gender
 - The process of referrals
 - Involvement of other agencies in the process, including police investigations
 - Overall characteristics of service users
 - Enabled the team to identify further types of abuse; namely 'Neglect'
- Enabled further analysis in relation to the above

Challenges when using the full data records

- Purpose of collecting and coding the data was not exactly the same as the research aims:
 - Data were kept for records and not for research
 - Level of details of information recoded
 - For example: gender and ethnicity of referred staff were not included in the records
- Level of details of coding
 - Some types of abuse were not coded - such as financial, neglect and discriminatory abuse

How the research team dealt with these challenges – identifying financial abuse

- Financial abuse was seen as an important, relatively straightforward to identify, type of abuse
- A computer programme was developed to identify key words in the description text that indicate the prevalence of financial abuse.
 - Key words included: steal, theft, finance, money, credit and their derivatives
- All records identified containing one of the key words were read and checked to see any element of financial abuse and the ‘Other’ type of abuse category was amended

How the research team dealt with these challenges – identifying financial abuse

- An additional random sample of records was drawn and descriptions of abuse were read and any additional key words identified
- Rerun the program with additional keywords
- Recheck identified records
- The process was repeated five times
- This resulted in identifying 1209 records including an element of financial abuse

Identifying Financial abuse- examples

Description of Misconduct	Physical	Sexual	Emotional	Other	Financial
Stole money from service users	F	F	F	T/F	T
Stole money from four service users and defrauding the company of £#,###, by falsifying records.	F	F	F	T/F	T
Financial discrepancies have occurred on several occasions, whilst Mr X was shopping with a service user.	F	F	F	T/F	T
Mr Y was caught stealing from a service user. The incident has left the service user feeling distressed emotionally	F	F	T	T/F	T

Dealing with challenges- Job role

- Similar process were adopted with ‘job role’ fields
- Information was not consistently recorded and several variations of the same job role existed:
 - For example ‘support worker’ (care home); ‘Support worker’ (home care)
- Using simple computer programming and the process of randomly selecting and checking we identified and correctly coded job role into the following categories:
 - Frontline staff; team leaders/supervisors; nurses; managers/deputy managers; and staff without care responsibilities

Dealing with the full records

challenges- sample records

- The sample records offered a great opportunity to
 - Fill many gaps in the full records for the purpose of the analysis
 - Recode type of abuse with more information which allowed the team to identify a further type of abuse 'Neglect'
- However,
 - Very time consuming
 - Can limit the sample to a maximum number depending on available time; in this case 300 referrals

What we could not deal with

- Perform any analysis in relation to ethnicity
 - Was not recorded in full records
 - Available only in very few detailed records (sample)
- Identify and investigate ‘discriminatory abuse’
 - Lack of specific information on misconduct; staff characteristics, service users characteristics
- Were only able to infer service users’ characteristics from the registration categories of employers

Some of the findings of the analysis

- Only 10% of all referrals were eventually placed on the list (barred)
- The most common form of alleged abuse was physical abuse (33%)
- The least common was sexual abuse (6%)
- Financial abuse was significantly more common in domiciliary settings
- Physical abuse was significantly more common in care home settings
- Men are over represented in referrals

Some of the findings of the analysis (cont.)

- Younger staff (<25) were significantly more likely to be accused of financial abuse
- Allegations of sexual abuse were predominantly made against men
- Older staff (35 or older) were significantly more likely to be accused of sexual abuse
- Police was significantly more likely to be involved in referrals with elements of financial or sexual abuse
- Referrals from residential care are significantly more likely to be confirmed on the list

Messages about using government data

- Government data records offer:
 - A unique source of data
 - Usually a census of a topic
 - Thus can report findings with confidence
- However,
 - Are kept for a different purpose
 - Recording does not usually follow a pre agreed categorization
- By using a variety of skills & techniques one can maximize benefits
- Requires elaboration and dedicated time for data processing

References to the research

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