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Background

Child H was subject to child protection planning on 2 occasions at age 12 and 16 years. Both occasions related the impact of parental ability to maintain routines and safety in the home. The second Child Protection Plan ceased when Child H became looked after.

Child H had a diagnosis of ADHD and moderate learning difficulties.

Child H lived a sibling who was ten years younger.

The review considered a chronology of sexualised and sexually harmful behaviour as well as sexual abuse and whether earlier opportunities for intervention could have prevented further harm and escalation.

The review explored a concern that Child H was viewed as a perpetrator and not as a victim with complex multi-layered inter-familial abuse.

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Safeguarding Concern and Incident

Child H was exposed to domestic abuse, maternal substance abuse and adult sexual activity.

The children were exposed to different males in the home environment with poor regard for the safety of the children.

Both Child H and sibling displayed sexualised behaviour inappropriate to their age and stage of development. Child H displayed sexually harmful behaviour.

More than one referral was made alleging that mother sexually abused her children.

The Mother's behaviour would frequently become highly aggressive towards professionals.

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Findings

Professionals working with children who are subject to neglect should be consciously alert to the increased potential of co-occurring forms of abuse

The Voice of the Child is achieved through an interpretation of their words and actions. For children experiencing sexual abuse, professionals need to commit to understanding the child's lived experience whilst factoring in the barriers for a child to be able to share they are being abused.

Professionals must raise consciousness that children can be sexually abused by men and by women and mindful of the behavioural biases that prevent identification in relation to females who abuse children.

Interviewing children who may have been sexually abused requires a skilled professional, who has a thorough understanding of the case from multi-agency information and has identified and actioned where additional support is required.

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Findings Cont..

When a child is identified with a risk of harmful sexual behaviour, a written, multi-agency risk management plan should be formulated which addresses the needs of the subject child, and any other potential victim children.

The Partnership needs to ensure a strategy is in place which enables timely access to (AIM) trained assessors across children's social workers and youth justice service.

To support timely outcomes and robust analysis, AIM assessors should be supported by a minimum of three supervisory sessions, and a final multi-agency meeting that acts as a quality assurance process.

Unresolved professional difference can become a dispute which is detrimental to working together. Professional challenge should be respectful and with a genuine intent of listening and reaching agreement.

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Learning for Action

The investigation of sexual abuse under Section 47 Children Act 1989 needs to faithfully follow process outlined by Working Together 2018 and Salford procedural guidance.

Strategy Meetings need to be recorded and convened with all relevant professionals in attendance. Consideration of an Intermediary should be standardised with rationalised and recorded decision making.

Professionals must understand and avoid the pitfall of a disclosure led approach to the determination of sexual abuse. The criminal pathway of beyond reasonable doubt should in no way be considered as the arbiter of the need to safeguard a child.

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Learning for Action

In order to address harmful sexual behaviour, the partnership needs an appropriately skilled and trained pool of assessors with robust management oversight and support

The process for completing an AIM assessment should include a final multi-agency meeting where the partnership provides a function of challenge and scrutiny

Whilst assessments of sexually harmful behaviours are ongoing, a multi-agency risk assessment should be formulated from an immediate desk top review to action identified issues without delay.

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Implementing Change

- Reflect on the features presented in this case, that may have resonance with other current cases
- Use the findings to support your critical thinking and impact assessments
- Understand and avoid the common pitfalls of practice in current casework



Additional Information

Visit: <https://safeguardingchildren.salford.gov.uk/>

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