

Abuse and harassment survey

2019

Method

- Online survey promoted to People employees via e-newsletters and Team Brief.
- Targeted at social workers but not exclusive
- Questions covered:
 - Types of abuse experienced
 - Reporting
 - Management response
 - What could be improved
 - Future risks
- 78 people responded

Types abuse

- Verbal abuse
- Threats of physical violence
- Physical abuse
- Damage to personal property
- Legal threats
- Malicious allegations and complaints
- Abuse via social media
- Stalking/prolonged harassment

Reporting and management response

- Almost a quarter did not report the abuse
- Those that did received a variety of responses of varying effectiveness
- No consistency

How response could have been improved

- Follow up and being shown evidence of change/action taken
- Greater support/empathy/understanding, especially of emotional impact and strain
- Direct action/challenge with parents/service users to warn them about their behaviour
- Clear CCC policy for dealing with abusive service users
- Stronger lone working policy/provisions
- Consistent response between different staff experiencing similar abuse (but receiving different management response)
- Onus should not be on the individual to resolve situation themselves
- Non-disclosure of contact details, especially in mental health cases

Future risks

- Pervasive nature of digital technologies and social media, far reaching impact on people's lives blurring professional and personal boundaries. Expectation that online abuse will only grow. Lack of clarity about if/how abuse can be stopped/deleted/removed.
- Lack of resources meaning clients are not always getting the service they want, which causes frustration and abuse – impact of austerity.
- Normalisation/acceptance of abuse and lack of challenge
- Lone working – increasing expectation, boundaries of safe working being pushed.
- Courts deciding that increasingly challenging/risky people should be cared for in the community
- Other agencies retracting from service due to resource limitations, leaving social workers exposed.

Most important future action

- Take this issue seriously, organisationally and at an individual manager level.
- Better understanding/empathy and opportunities for debriefing/aftercare following incidents
- Clear policy and guidelines, consistently followed
- Quick action following reporting
- Log and monitor abuse
- Zero tolerance – clear CCC statement that it considers the abuse/harassment of its staff to be unacceptable
- Training for individuals and managers
- Support to pursue legal action