

How can we get the story right?

CONNECTING THE DOTS TO
ENHANCE SAFETY

Irene de Haan & Julie Sach

The recording process is complex...how practitioners construct the problem determines what happens next....



How information is stored and presented is part of a process where *an overall account of a case is constructed*



Record-writers make both *intentional* and *unintentional* selections of what to **filter out** or **include** in the records



Recorders' linguistic and content choices shape interviewees' trajectories
(Huuskonen & Vakkari, 2015)

Information shared information understood

Potential to prevent further family violence by information sharing is reliant on:



Integrity of information *sought*



Quality of information *shared*



What is *understood* by the practitioners



What action is taken



Quality of recording....

Notes are for the reader – not
the writer!

Accurate language is a prerequisite for safety

OLD SPEAK

- Conceals violence
- Blames victim
- Obscures responsibility
- Conceals responses and resistance

SAFE SPEAK

- Exposes violence
- Aligns with victim
- Clarifies responsibility
- Honours responses and resistance

Knowing what the words mean...

Family violence history together	Pattern of escalating violence, by whom to whom
Child witnessing abuse	Child experiencing abuse
Separation	Continued/exacerbated risk of violence
Perpetrator	Predominant aggressor
Victim	Primary victim
Safety Plan	Safety conversation

Pitfalls and how to avoid them



Misunderstanding/misconstruing the story



- ❑ *details are omitted*
- ❑ too much miscellaneous detail is included, with *no analysis* of what it means
- ❑ *no coherent overview* – information is not all in one place
- ❑ Record-writers stick to ‘facts’ – *practice wisdom or ‘intuition’ is left out*
- ❑ the *interviewee’s voice is silenced*
- ❑ *too focused on current situation* – no chronological perspective

Leading to terrible outcomes.....

‘records did not provide an overview of a case because core information often drowned in miscellaneous details in narrative text and was spread over various documents’

The Victoria Climbié case demonstrated the other extreme:

‘disturbing observations and other relevant details were totally absent from the records and consequently the seriousness of the issues was not conveyed to readers’

Huuskonen, S. & Vakkari, P. (2015). Selective Clients' Trajectories in Case Files: Filtering Out Information in the Recording Process in Child Protection. *British Journal of Social Work*, 45, 792-808. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bct160

Record-keeping expectations



To convey a coherent and comprehensive history of someone's situation

BUT a **PITFALL** is that:

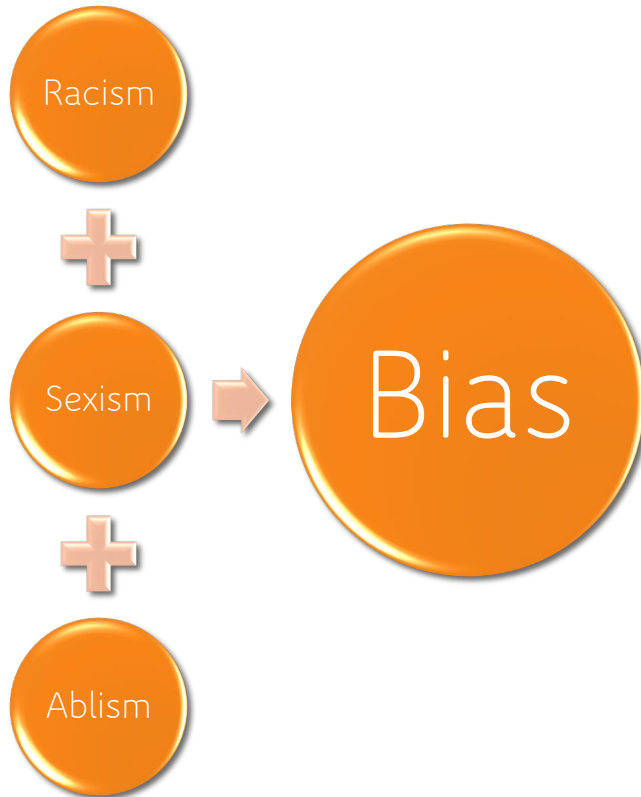
.....client information systems (forms, templates etc)

f / r / a / g / m / e / n / t / h / o / l / i / s / t / i / c / i / n / f / o / r / m / a / t /
i / o / n / i / n / t / o / p / i / e / c / e / s

and thus lose the narrative.....

	Event	Interpretation	Casenote	Action
Worker 1	I call the victim three times and get no answer.	She doesn't want/need our help	She has disengaged with our service. She is safe with whanau. She will contact us if she needs us.	Close the file
Alternative account	I call the victim three times and get no answer.	I don't know what is happening. Who else can I talk to?	This is very unsafe and I am very concerned.	Call Police and discuss concerns and decide to call cousin to see if I can find Melissa.

Filters



Dominant gendered stereotypes

- ❑ constructing mothers who parent in the context of domestic violence as failing to protect their children
- ❑ Rendering invisible men who use violence by collecting limited evidence about their perpetration patterns and fathering practices
- ❑ decontextualising survivors' mental distress and/or problematic substance misuse.

More accurate accounts

Only part of the story.....	A fuller account.....
Mother returned to FV relationship.	Mother reports she left her partner 6 months ago. She says his continuing threats to take the children away forced her to return to live with him.
Father not included in referral.	Made consistent attempts to engage father over 12 months. He would not answer worker calls although his partner reports he has a working phone.
Children witnessed DV incident.	The children have been exposed to DV perpetrated by their mother's current partner over the past 3 years. Because of his violence they have been homeless, had to change schools, and been isolated from their peers.
Mother has history of non-compliance with medication.	Patient has disclosed ongoing DV perpetrated by her partner. She reports he often steals and sells her prescribed meds, meaning she goes for days without it. She says her anxiety gets worse when she can't access her meds.

Group exercise

The danger of group think

Agency referral to Police

Does not want Police or Refuge involved.

- being assaulted on a daily basis, punches to the head and stomach, pulling hair, strangulation
 - thrown down stairs, pinned against wall and head smashed against wall, hard out hitting
 - Tom threatened to stab her with a knife
- Approaches by Police or Refuge may cause more violence

Police Follow Up

- FV NGO – she is an alcoholic, did not show for services, warned that he may check her texts. Advised to call.
- OT – children removed
- Family say she is an alcoholic, has own accommodation, has been offered lots of help.

Police call – at home with Tom, found somewhere to talk – refused help from Refuge, Police or any other agency. Advised of Police details (urgent and non-urgent.)

Victim not engaging.