The Nature and Effects of Violence against Child-Protection Social Workers: Providing Effective Support

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Summary

This article examines the experiences and views of child-protection social workers and managers in relation to the management of violence against child-protection social workers in a large county council's Social Services Department. These findings demonstrate the importance of the role of managers and agency support systems in dealing with such matters. Questions are raised concerning the effects of interventions by child-protection professionals with resistant and threatening parent service-users, and challenges some of the assumptions underlying the current paradigm in child-protection work which demands an uncritical view that working in partnership with parents is always in the interests of children, and is always possible. The findings suggest that in certain types of situations, workers' effectiveness can be compromised when carrying out their roles in both supporting families and protecting children. They also illustrate the types of agency responses which professionals and managers find helpful and unhelpful in response to parental threats and aggression. In particular, the importance of supervision and support from managers is addressed, as are the implications of the findings for practice and agency support strategies for workers. The relevance of the findings are also set out within the context of the requirements placed upon individual practitioners and agencies which employ social workers by the General Social Care Council Codes of Conduct and Practice for Social Care Workers and their Employers.

Keywords: violence, staff support, child protection

Introduction

Violence from service-users can significantly affect social workers' capacity to carry out their work effectively, and their commitment to that work (Norris, 1990; Littlechild, 2000; Brockmann, 2002). Concerns relating to how such violence can negatively affect assessments by child-protection social workers, and agency decision-making processes, have been raised by a number of authors (Reder *et al.*, 1993; Farmer and Owen, 1995, 1998; O'Hagan and Dillenburger, 1995; Stanley and Goddard, 2002). Child-abuse death-inquiry reports in England have highlighted how assessments and interventions in child-protection work can be influenced by workers' anxieties about aggression directed at them (Department of Health, 1991). Two recent such reports in England provide further evidence of this. Leanne Labonte was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, and Dennis Henry sentenced to twelve years', for the manslaughter of their two-year-old daughter, Ainlee Walker. There were many incidents of domestic violence, and the parents were aggressive and violent towards child-protection staff (Newham Area Child Protection Committee, 2002). The social workers and health visitors involved became 'paralysed by fear' (*The Guardian*, 2002). As time passed, incidents became more threatening and confrontational, and, one by one, agencies withdrew. The children were living in an environment that adult professionals were unprepared to visit, and the impact of the violence of the parents on Ainlee was not evaluated by the agencies involved. Lord Laming, in his report on the death of Victoria Climbie, says

> I recognise that those who take on the work of protecting children at risk of deliberate harm face a tough and challenging task. Staff doing this work need a combination of professional skills and personal qualities, not least of which are persistence and courage. Adults who deliberately exploit the vulnerability of children can behave in devious and menacing ways (Lord Laming, 2003, p. 3).

Whilst violence and threats have been shown to be key features affecting child-protection workers' and agencies' ability to protect children in a small but critical number of situations, including child-abuse deaths, there has been little research into the experiences of practising social workers or managers in this area. This article examines the stresses placed on staff by aggressive and violent behaviour from those in the parental role, and the effects on workers' interventions. It also considers the knowledge and approaches that agencies and managers can employ to make their protective functions more effective, and how the new regulatory framework for social work and social care in England affects these. It draws on research carried out in a large social services department in England that examined the experiences, views and responsibilities of statutory agency child-protection workers and managers. These findings highlighted a number of matters concerning the effects of involuntary interventions with parent service-users, and challenges some of the assumptions underlying the current emphasis in child-protection work found in various central-government

publications (e.g. Department of Health, 1995*a*, 1995*b*), which appear to demand an uncritical view that 'partnership' working with parents is always in the interests of children, and is always possible. Such an approach can mean that issues of aggression and violence from parents that affect the protection of children are frequently ignored or minimized, when they may be key features in the abuse suffered by children (Humphreys, 1999, 2000; Littlechild, 1998, 2002*b*).

The relevance of these matters is discussed within the context of the requirements placed upon individual practitioners and agencies which employ social workers by the General Social Care Council Codes of Conduct and Practice for Social Care Workers and their employers.

Methodology

The first phase of the research contributing to the findings presented in this article consisted of a questionnaire survey of child-protection social workers' experiences of aggression and violence from parent service-users in a large social services department which covered both urban and rural areas. It utilized open-ended questions that explored workers' experiences of violence and its effects upon them, their experiences of support from managers, and any other issues that they wished to raise in relation to this area. The survey also included closed questions that produced data concerning the number of incidents experienced, length of time in post and gender issues. Questionnaires were sent to all of the child-protection workers in the authority. One-hundred-and-ninety-two questionnaires were distributed, of which forty-eight were returned (25 per cent), with twenty-one reporting having been victims of violence. Seven in-depth follow-up interviews were undertaken with workers who had reported being victims (Littlechild, 2000).

A number of areas highlighted in the findings from the first phase of the research were then explored further in the second phase, by way of interviews with twenty managers—thirteen female, seven male—in the same agency. The purpose of this was to explore the issues that arose for them at their level within the organization in relation to violence and aggression against their staff (Littlechild, 2002*a*).

The findings presented within this article relate mainly to this second phase of research with managers, as informed and framed by the findings from the first phase. Detailed data from the first phase are presented where they are particularly relevant. In the following discussion, 'phase 1' refers to the findings from the first phase of the research with workers, and 'phase 2' refers to the findings from the second phase with managers.

Semi-structured questionnaire schedules were utilized in both phases in order to facilitate interviewees' presentation of their own views and experiences. The resulting transcriptions of the taped interviews were then examined by way of a thematic analysis, and also to highlight any particularly unusual incidents and individual experiences. One of the criticisms that can be levelled at the use of such interview data is that respondents may distort social reality (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995), and keep hidden what the interviewer

really wishes to find out, or be untruthful (Denzin, 1970). Whilst it is possible that workers and managers may have behaved in this way, e.g. by managers' stating that they supported workers in ways which, in reality, they did not, this was not borne out by the congruence of what workers stated concerning managers' support, and what managers said, reported later in this article. Furthermore, it is possible that workers and managers may have been embellishing or diminishing the number of incidents that they have suffered and/or the effects of them. There was, however, no evidence that this was the case, and there was consistency of findings between experiences of workers in the first phase of the research, and between the workers' reports and those of managers in the second phase.

A further issue concerns whether the staff themselves had indicated accurately their own feelings, or if they had been able to recognize their feelings, as there can be problems for workers in recognizing their accommodation of the aggressor—a matter discussed more fully later in this article.

Commenting on these dilemmas, Brown and Sime (1981) state that:

> An account is neither naive nor an apology for behaviour, but must be taken as an informed statement by the person whose experiences are under investigation (p. 160).

Garfinkel (1967) argues that accounts are part of the world that they describe, and so are valid in that way. Silverman (1985) argues that interview data should be treated as nothing more and nothing less than displays of reality.

Given the way in which the research was presented to the respondents, and their agreement to participate, there were no apparent reasons for respondents to either over- or understate their experiences in the areas being explored. Confidentiality and the ethics of the research had been clearly set out, including how dissemination of the results would take place. Respondents were informed that confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and that the research was conducted independently from the employing agency. They could therefore feel confident that there were no 'hidden agendas' for carrying out the research, or that there might be distortion of data due to commissioners of the research's influencing intentionally or unintentionally the formulation of the research questions, the methodology or the presentation of findings.

The importance of definitions

The importance of definitions of violence as utilized by workers, managers and agencies is emphasized by the National Institute for Social Work (1999), and Brockmann and McLean (2000). The Government's *National Task Force on Violence Against Social Care Staff* report (Department of Health, 2000) considered that research into the management of violence and abuse against social-care

staff has been impeded by problems of inconsistent definition, and suggested the use of the definition as set out by the European Commission, DG-V (3):

> Incidents where persons are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work, involving an explicit or implicit challenge to their safety, well-being or health.

The term 'violence' is used throughout this article to denote not only physical violence, but also situations of perceived threat and aggression, in accordance with the Task Force's findings and recommendations. This is because in child-protection work, as will be demonstrated, it is frequently the types of aggression and violence that are non-physical that have the most serious effects on workers and the protection of children.

Requirements on agencies and workers in relation to violence against staff

There are various acts of the UK Parliament relating to staff safety at work, including the 1974 Health and Safety Work Act, and various European regulations concerning the reporting of incidents and agency staff safety procedures. In addition, as from 2003, the General Social Care Council (GSCC) (2002) Codes of Conduct and Practice for Social Care Workers and Employers of Social Care Workers, which social workers who registered with this body from 2005 will be required to comply with, state that social workers must follow practice and procedures designed to keep them and other people safe from violent and abusive behaviour. Other requirements in these Codes which have relevance to work with violent service-users include taking steps to prevent service-users from doing actual or potential harm to themselves or other people (including the worker); challenging dangerous, abusive, discriminatory or exploitative behaviour; and using established processes and procedures to report it. They also require workers to inform their employer or the appropriate authority about any physical, mental or emotional difficulties that might affect their ability to do their job competently and safely; and to seek necessary supervision and training. Social workers are required not to put themselves or other people at unnecessary risk.

In addition, the GSCC codes for agencies that employ social workers state that such employers must regularly supervise and effectively manage staff to support good practice and professional development. They also have a duty to address any deficiencies in workers' performance, and to make it clear to service-users and carers that violence, threats or abuse to staff are not acceptable. Agencies are also advised to have clear policies and procedures for preventing violence and managing violent incidents.

All of the above-mentioned issues are known to be problematic areas for social workers and employing agencies, and will require attention from workers, managers and agencies in order to address them. These matters are highlighted in the following discussion of the findings from the research.

Findings from the Research

The findings from the first phase of the research (Littlechild, 2000, 2002a) illustrated the nature of the risks faced by child-protection workers, the effects upon staff of different forms of aggression and violence, and the types of agency responses which professionals found helpful and unhelpful in responding to their difficulties when victimized. The findings also provided data concerning workers', managers' and agency responses to perpetrators. The findings began to raise questions concerning the roles that child-protection workers are expected to carry out, and the changing nature of political, policy and organizational cultures that affect such work.

The findings highlighted that physical violence is comparatively rare ($n=6$), but other forms of 'indirect violence', as one respondent referred to it, were common and were reported by all respondents ($n=21$). These situations contained elements that, at times, affected workers' practice and their well-being to a considerable extent. Threats from service-users had the greatest effects, especially when this appeared to both workers and managers to be focused individually against workers, and sometimes onto their families, rather than on their role as an agency representative.

The situations in which violence was most likely to occur were when decisions were being made about removing children from parents, such as just before, during or after child-protection conferences or court hearings, or when parents were told of recommendations for care orders in court reports.

Eight respondents raised issues concerning the importance of needing to keep the protection and the welfare of the child as the primary goal in situations where threat was present, particularly when subtle or not-so-subtle threats of violence were being used to keep the worker and agency from effectively investigating the question of abuse.

In situations of physical violence, nearly all respondents ($n=19$) found managers to be largely understanding and responsive to an acceptable degree in attempting to ensure proper back-up, but found procedures and support for the less obvious (to others than just the worker) types of violence and threats were less clear and accessible, and these were much less likely to be reported.

The reactions of managers and colleagues, and their expressions of concern, were clearly a major feature in respondents' judgements on how well they felt supported and protected. Affirmation of understanding of the increasingly difficult role of child-protection work from immediate managers, senior managers and councillors was also seen as being very important, but was often lacking, particularly from the latter two groups.

There were differences between the types of violence displayed by service-users, depending upon gender. In child-protection conferences, when they were told of a recommendation for a care order, or at the court hearing, it was usually mothers (five out of six incidents) who reacted in ways that were physically or near physically violent. In less obvious but very threatening situations, such as continuing and sustained verbal abuse and threats against themselves and/or

their family, and following workers in the street or in cars, it was males who were the perpetrators. Effective responses to, and work with, violent male service-users on their part in the aggression was not the norm. Ten managers specifically mentioned that there needed to be more systematic and structured responses to service-users who are aggressive and violent, within an agency culture that discourages violence. None of the workers in the first phase of the research experienced agency responses to such perpetrators as effective.

One of the key areas highlighted by staff in the first phase of the research, concerning the importance to workers of agency managers' planning, attitudes and responses to potential and actual violence, constitutes the remaining area of discussion within this article. The findings from the second phase of research with managers built on the issues raised by workers in the first phase of the research. These included the most common forms of violence; how best to support staff; emotional and professional reactions workers may experience; and the effects on their practice. Other areas explored are gendered issues, the most effective ways of dealing with violence and conflict, how some service-users use aggression and violence to try to deflect workers from focusing on any abuse, and the extent to which issues of aggression and violence from service-users towards staff are included in assessments and child-protection plans.

Examples of aggression and violence, and the emotional and professional reactions that workers may experience

All of the managers described situations that had produced emotional and professional effects for workers. These included 'a serious threat to kill us from someone who had been seriously violent (against child-protection social workers) in the past and killed a child'. Whilst an injunction was in place to keep the person away from the office, the worker was concerned about being followed, and subjected to interference and threats in her personal and family life. Another incident consisted of threats to shoot a worker from someone whom the staff knew, from past history, was capable of such behaviour. In another, where a worker's life was threatened, the worker had subsequently taken long-term sick leave, and then resigned.

Other examples given included one in which a service-user threatened workers, damaged cars, threatened to harm the children, the foster-carers and the foster-carers' children. One manager, on a home visit to a family in which the children were on the child-protection register, was physically attacked and suffered significant injuries, requiring hospital treatment and operations over a period of time. She only managed to escape from the situation when one of the older children in the family intervened physically. The mother was subsequently sentenced to prison.

Both phases of the research identified that personalized threats against the worker and her/his personal networks, in addition to professional effects, had produced some of the most severe repercussions for workers, and were the

most difficult for workers and managers to deal with. Emotional/professional violence was a frequent experience for workers; this concerned feelings of being threatened and undermined, often in conjunction with a series of complaints made against them.

Factors relating to risk

All of the managers stated that violence and aggression were constant features of the work, and referred to the tension involved in balancing the safety of the worker against the protection of the child in such situations. The findings provide evidence of a number of risk factors arising from such behaviour from service-users. The perception of ten of the twenty managers interviewed for the research was that there was a much higher level of threats and violence than a decade previously.

The most common forms of violence reported by the managers were verbal abuse and threats, but these were rarely reported or recorded unless clear threats were attached to them. Intimidation, harassment and threats were the next most common forms of aggression and violence. Drug or alcohol abuse was often associated with this behaviour ($n=8$), and was seen to be associated with violence from parents to a much greater extent than parents' mental-health problems—another area associated with greater perceived risk. Racist abuse was identified as a regular occurrence where there were workers from minority ethnic groups in a team ($n=5$).

One manager's view, which was representative of the views of nearly all respondents ($n=17$), was that the impact on workers of different types of aggression and violence on assessment and practice 'could be massive. I think a worker who is intimidated or lacking confidence is not going to come to the correct conclusions'. This accords with the findings of Reder *et al.* (1993) and Stanley and Goddard (1997, 2002), who found that such processes could be negatively affected by such violence from parents.

Fear, anxiety and stress were common features of workers' reactions to the different types of violence that they reported in the first phase of the research. Balloch *et al.* (1998) found that violence from service-users was a particular cause of stress for social workers. Smith and Nursten (1998, 2003) found that violence from service-users was the main cause of fear in social workers. Such effects can be particularly pervasive and disempowering in situations where there are developing and threatening violent scenarios, where there is a build-up of pressures, threats and abuse against the worker over a period of time (see also Stanley and Goddard, 1997, 2002).

Other agencies were seen to frequently avoid problems arising from parents' aggressive and abusive behaviour. One of the most problematic areas for managers in this regard was where threatening males had not been challenged about their behaviour by those other agencies. When such violent and intimidating service-users then finally have these issues confronted by child-protection social workers, this produces greater risk to those workers. Several managers ($n=5$) stated that

education staff are particular 'offenders' in this regard, seemingly not wanting to negatively affect their relationships with the parents. This could also occur with health staff.

The majority of managers (*n*=12) believed that a small number of service-users employ aggression and violence as tactics or strategies to deflect from the issues of abuse and protection. One said:

> They want us to withdraw, and that is why they are threatening us—it is to get us out.

Six of the seven workers interviewed in the first phase and thirteen of the twenty managers in the second phase believed that improved responses to aggressive and violent service-users were necessary. Eight managers believed that violence towards staff was often linked to abuse of children but that risk assessments do not usually consider this possible link. Child-protection interventions can impinge upon the power and control dynamics within the family situation that are often a feature of child abuse (Reder *et al.*, 1993; O'Hagan and Dillenburger, 1995; Littlechild, 2002*a*; Stanley and Goddard, 2002). Examples of threats against individual workers resulting from challenging such power/control dynamics within families were given by managers in this research.

There were indications from some managers that workers may experience similar disempowering factors in relation to abusive and violent family systems, as do abused children. The similarities between abused children's experiences of their parents' behaviour and experiences of social workers abused by such parents are also apparent in a review of associated research (see, e.g. Stanley and Goddard, 1997, 2002; Mudaly and Goddard, 2001). These concerns for workers were set within more general concerns about workers' non-reporting of threats to them, and workers' accommodation of the aggression. It has been suggested that there may be links between the different forms of violence against children, mothers and workers in certain individual cases, and that there may be particular elements of the situation to assess and confront when the parent service-users are using such control strategies (Stanley and Goddard, 1997; Department of Health, 1991; O'Hagan, 1997; Humphreys, 1999, 2000; Littlechild, 2002*b*).

Most managers' (*n*=17) experiences confirmed findings from the first phase of the research that women are more physically violent than men. However, men were seen to be more threatening but in less obvious ways (*n*=13). These types were also much less likely to be reported—an issue which agencies need to address in order to provide effective safety procedures for the staff and the children whom they have responsibility for, as well as fulfilling their responsibilities set out in the GSCC Codes.

Role conflict and ambiguity

All of the managers stated that parents saw child-protection social workers in their role as initially controlling and critical, and that workers required considerable

skill to overcome this in their explanations of the reasons for the interventions and the possible outcomes. They also needed to gain the parents' trust and, in the majority of situations, reasonable working relationships were achieved. However, one example of how service-users might feel in such situations, expressed to one of the managers by a parent, was that her anger at social workers was due to her worker seeing her as no more than 'a set of problems'.

Pahl (1999) notes the importance of the 'very real power (in the child protection social work role) which can provoke service users and their relatives to abuse, but which also protects them from more serious physical attack' (p. 91)—findings confirmed in both phases of the research reported in this article. Howe states that the 'welter of procedures and guidelines' has led to the social worker becoming an 'investigator, reporter and "gatherer" of evidence' (Howe, 1992, p. 502).

This role ambiguity would appear to be one of the reasons for aggression towards workers from parents when trying to enact this dual role which contains supportive and investigative functions—an element of the work which official guidance tends to ignore (Littlechild, 2002*b*). Such conflicts have significant effects upon how social workers and parent service-users view each other, and the effectiveness of engagement, assessment and interventions. They can also affect the well-being of workers, as well as their professional practice.

Supporting staff

Several of the managers (*n*=5) emphasized that it is important for a worker's manager to be sensitive and open in acknowledging workers' fears where they are caught up in situations of violence and threat. A key element in this is for the worker to be able to say that s/he does not feel able to challenge the service-user or to carry out a piece of work—an issue which relates to workers' and agencies' duties under the GSCC Codes. Dale *et al.* (1986) and Reder *et al.* (1993) note the potential dangerousness of severely stressed and unsupported workers—a matter also covered under employers' duties in the GSCC Codes. A minority of the managers saw two groups of workers as particularly vulnerable to accommodating aggression in this way. The first was those who were inexperienced, and the second were those who did not feel they have the right and/or the confidence to carry out the control elements that have to be utilized in protection work.

Supervision and monitoring of such potentially 'dangerous' workers was seen by ten managers to be important, as the worker may not themselves have recognized the risk, or may be too fearful to report it in supervision or else-where. This accords with the work of Stanley and Goddard (1997, 2002), who identified how some workers accommodated the aggression of service users as a defence mechanism, meaning they could not challenge the abusive parents and their behaviours, causing problems for the child, other workers, and the agency. Managers' reports of the responses that workers could sometimes exhibit in response to severe intimidation and threat from parents are similar

to those displayed by hostage victims, which supports the findings of Stanley and Goddard (1997, 2002). One manager reported a situation where a social worker had not been able to articulate her fear of one family for over a year. One manager said:

> 'One of the complaints I pick up from social workers.... is there is far less time spent (than in the past) in supervision on . . . 'are you keeping yourself together, and keeping on top of the job?' The focus is on task issues; there is less of a supportive relationship built into the supervision.'

Lord Laming in his report on the death of Victoria Climbie (Lord Laming, 2003) states

> 'Supervision is the cornerstone of good social work practice and should be seen to operate effectively at all levels of the organisation. In Haringey, the provision of supervision may have looked good on paper, but in practice it was woefully inadequate for many front-line staff. This must change.' (p.14).

In Bell's (1999) research, reasons given by one third of respondents for not being able to undertake a thorough child-protection investigation in relation to the case they related to the researcher were not lack of time, but due to characteristics of the family that the social workers experienced as lack of co-operation. She found that the workers' supervision did not focus on this, but consisted of dealing with particular problems concerning tasks to be completed.

In summary, supervision skills are important to support the worker, to assess over time if role conflict, ambiguity and aggression are affecting the protection work, and to ensure that the worker is not becoming potentially dangerous by putting themselves and/or the child (ren) at risk by avoiding- consciously or unconsciously—the effects of threat in their work with a family.

Lessons from the research findings

Analysis of the findings from the empirical research and the wider literature reported in this article indicates a number of areas for further consideration in agencies' policies, workers' practice and managers' duties. Foremost amongst these is a greater recognition at all levels within agencies of how actions and decisions of child-protection workers can be negatively affected where they experience intimidation and the threat of violence.

Such recognition within agencies needs to be accompanied by increased awareness of how role conflict and ambiguity, evident in child-protection work, impact upon the power and control issues which are crucial determinants for the actions of some parent service-users. Brown *et al.* (1986) found that issues of power, authority and control appear to be key factors in violence against social workers, whilst Reder *et al.* (1993) found that in thirty-five British child-abuse death inquiries, issues of control for the abuser were central. These findings suggest that such knowledge needs to be considered more systematically in assessments and intervention plans. At present, the dominant paradigm for

child-protection work, it can be argued, places blinkers on workers and agencies, as the emphasis in Government guidance and publications is firmly placed on workers and agencies 'working in partnership' with parents (Department of Health, 1995*a*, 1995*b*; Department of Health *et al*., 2000). Whilst this self evidently should always be the goal for social work in such situations, the lack of any recognition within this paradigm of the nature, extent and effects of what are frequently the most serious and dangerous situations of abuse for children, where deceit and threats from parents do not allow such partnership in its full sense, can lead to the child being placed further at risk. Inquiries into the deaths of children known to child-protection agencies demonstrate that aggression and violence against staff have been important elements in a number of these (Department of Health, 1991). Whilst the Government's Assessment Framework (Department of Health *et al*., 2000) continues to develop the important theme of working in partnership with parents, and the necessity of providing effective family-support services, policies and practices need also to take into account the confounding effects of the small, but significantly dangerous, number of instances in which clients use violence and threats to try to ward off or silence those who are attempting to prevent further abuse.

One particular area requiring greater attention and planning in relation to risk assessment and risk management relates to the disempowering effects of developing violent scenarios, which are often unreported and can affect the well-being of workers and their assessments and interventions to a considerable extent. These situations are almost always generated by males, presented in ways that can have the most severe effects on workers, and which workers may not report to their managers. Uncertainty about reporting intimidating situations that develop over time can present a significant problem for risk assessment and risk management. Agency policies and managers' practice have to encourage workers' reporting of threats as an important element in protecting not only the workers themselves, but also the child. Workers' expectations of how managers and employing agencies will respond to such reporting, and their strategies to deal with perpetrators' threats and violence, are other key elements in an effective approach. In order to improve reporting, the agency needs to collate the workers' reports on all types of violence and provide feedback to staff on what supportive actions have been taken to reduce risk as a result of such scrutiny (Norris, 1990).

One goal for agencies would be for them to change some workers' attitudes that some forms of violence are not considered serious enough to report or are somehow to be seen as 'part of the job' (Norris, 1990; MacDonald and Sirotich, 2000). They also need to support workers in recognizing when they are being drawn into family's disempowering power/control dynamics. Effective strategies need to be in place to support threatened workers, and also, importantly, to appropriately confront violent service-users. There is little evidence from the research that agencies work to set limits and boundaries with service-users where they have presented violence or intimidatory and threatening behaviour.

Managers often did not feel that they were well supported in dealing with aggressive and violent clients by their higher managers. Managers' own training and support, and their supervision practices in responding to threats and violence, require development (Littlechild, 2002*b*).

Conclusion

This article has examined the problems for workers that can negatively affect themselves and the protection of children. It has also begun to examine how the new GSSC Codes of Conduct and Practice might affect their work, and agencies' responsibilities to staff.

There are a number of measures that could be taken to help to remedy these problems. These include the application of knowledge concerning the risk factors in relation to violence exhibited by parent service-users in child-protection work which can affect the safety and well-being of workers and of children, and understanding and dealing with workers' individualized, disempowering experiences of threats. In addition, managers require a better understanding of the tactics that can be used by a minority of threatening and violent parent service-users. The development of strategies to deal with the effects on workers and children of the power/control dynamics utilized by some parents, and responses to these types of behaviour from parents, can then be based upon such awareness.

Agencies need to give greater consideration to how they support workers and managers in achieving such safety for workers and children whom they have responsibility for, particularly in areas of supervision, and risk-assessment and risk-management procedures. Employers' approaches for dealing with the different factors that may affect the safety and well-being of staff and children could profitably take into account the duties set out for them by the GSCC.

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