Is research safe for children?  
A scoping review of safeguarding children in the research process.

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Safeguarding children in the research process

- Increasing recognition of children and young people as social actors in research (Christensen & James 2008)
- Participatory research (QUAL) power relationships between children and researchers (Randall 2012)
- Post Savile? Safeguarding/child protection
- Reputational risk to nursing research
Literature review methodology/method: from scoping to integrative

- **Inclusion**
  - 2000-2012
  - Relevant to research practices which may have implications for the safeguarding of children (including research with adults responsible for children)
  - Peer reviewed empirical research

- **Exclusion**
  - Pre 2000
  - Research on children’s abuse issues, safeguarding and family violence - clinical practice/ health and social care practice rather than research practice
  - Commentaries on legal and ethical issues
Search strategy cont...

- **Search terms (MeSH)**
  - **Keywords** - Child abuse OR Child welfare OR safeguarding AND ethics AND research
  - **Title word** - Child AND abuse OR welfare OR safeguarding OR protection AND research ethics OR research OR research protocols OR research practice

- **Databases used/limits**
  - Embase 1996 to 2012 Week 30
  - Ovid MEDLINE(R) 2008 to July Week 3 2012
  - PsycINFO 2002 to July Week 4 2012
Records identified through electronic database search = 448 + 170

Additional records (from reference lists) = 2

Records after duplicates removed = 394 + 124 + 2

Records screened = 520

Records excluded = 466

Full text papers assessed for eligibility = 54

Full text papers excluded = 39

• Not relevant to research question
• Adult accounts of child abuse

Studies included = 15

Adapted from Moher et al 2009
Critical appraisal of the field from the reviewed papers

- Wide variety of research teams, methodologies and methods including
  - Large scale population surveys
  - Interviews
  - Case studies
  - Review of ethical committee letters
  - Observation studies

- In some papers safeguarding given little attention i.e. not main focus of the paper

- Confidentiality and risk of “fantasists”

- Moral dilemmas of collusion in abuse
Themes emerging from the literature

Social Justice and research

- **Transparency**
  - Researchers informing participants about reporting, including research documentation consent process informing participants of the limitations of confidentiality (related to participant rights vs public health/safety but more about how, or if participants are informed of reporting procedures/practices)

- **Participant rights vs public health/safety**
  - Debate, often legal between research participants rights and the public duty in safeguarding children and other vulnerable people.
  - Rights of family members who may, or may not be identified as research participants

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1 Also relates to safer research
Themes emerging from the literature

Social Justice and research

- Research methods, practices and abuse
  - How research methods or practices could be construed as abusive, or where they mimic or resemble abusive behaviours (e.g. oppressive questioning)

- Practitioner vs researcher
  - Issues concerning researchers as clinicians or social care practitioners and blurring of roles of researcher and clinician/practitioner

- Avoidance
  - Designing the research in order explicitly to avoid detecting and/or reporting child abuse or other illegal/abusive behaviour

- Ethical concerns for the “vulnerable child”
  - Ethical opinions, frameworks and practices which view children as “vulnerable” in research in need of adult protection, which may result in some children being excluded
Themes emerging from the literature

Safer research

- **Training needs of researchers**
  - Training of researchers in abuse issues described or training needs identified
  - Including experiential learning gained as a practitioner

- **Safety protocols**
  - Code of conduct/protocols described or need for such identified
  - Researcher safety

- **Ethic of care and supervision**
  - The negotiation of ethical conduct in practice where abuse contexts are seen as complex and expert supervision is required/desirable to help researchers make referrals when required, but not to make referrals which cause distress and result in no action
  - That ethical frameworks and protocols are insufficient to deal with practice and judgement is required assisted by reflection
Themes emerging from the literature

Safer research

- Collaboration participants
  - Researchers working with participants to safeguard children

- Collaboration services/professionals
  - Researchers working with service providers and or professionals “experts” etc to safeguard children

- Cultural safety
  - Safeguarding children and abuse issues in a cultural context
  - Indian study family being “responsible” for the child, high levels of abuse particularly sexual (Veena & Chandra 2007)
Suggestions for research practice

- Clear safety protocols which identify
  - Training
  - Reporting
  - Research practices - keeping people safe e.g. How, when to ask about abuse
  - Supervisory oversight and support

- Transparent participant information
  - How will abuse issues be dealt with, by whom
  - What are the limits of confidentiality
  - Who will be considered a research participant
  - How to raise concerns, contact details

Further debates

- Is clinical safeguarding training applicable to research contexts?
- Do nurse researchers respond appropriately to abuse issues?
Summary

- There is a risk of reputational damage if researchers do not handle abuse issues well.
- Required by NMC to safeguard children and other vulnerable people.
- Can be tensions between the researcher role and that of clinician/practitioner.
- Ethical and methodological issues need further debate.
- Further work on supporting clinical nurse researchers and nurses involved in research with children and adults who care for children.
- GNC bid and review of standard operating procedures.
Any Questions?

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References


References


