Abstract

Background: Psychological maltreatment (PM) is probably the most difficult child maltreatment form to detect and evaluate. The objective of this research was to determine the effect of an instrument developed to improve accuracy in the assessment of PM severity in Child Protection Services (CPS). Method: Case vignettes representing different severity levels of PM situations were used. 146 CPS psychologists participated in the study. A first group was made up of 115 psychologists who had been trained in the use of the instrument for 4 hours. The second group was made up of 31 psychologists who had been using the instrument for more than 12 months at the time of the study. Psychologists from the first group rated the severity of the vignettes in two ways: applying their own daily work criteria and applying the instrument after the training. Results: Accurate ratings clearly improved when psychologists used the instrument criteria. However, only psychologists who had used the instrument for more than 12 months at the time of the study obtained more than 80% of accurate ratings. Conclusions: Results support the importance for CPS psychologists to use psychological maltreatment severity assessment instruments and show the conditions under which they could be effective.

Keywords

Child psychological maltreatment, child emotional abuse, severity assessment.