

Developing, Implementing, and Evaluating a Screening Assessment for Maryland Social Services Administration



A joint initiative of Maryland Department of
Human Resources, Social Services Administration;
Casey Family Programs; and the
Children's Research Center (CRC)

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Agenda

- Impetus for development
- Assessment development
- Pilot implementation
- Statewide implementation and evaluation
 - » Methods
 - » Findings
- Supporting implementation
- Answering your questions

Impetus for Development

- County managers raised concerns with state administrators
- Anecdotal evidence that there was inconsistency in screening decisions between jurisdictions
- Large disparity in screening rates
- Screening decision relied on local interpretation of state policy

Incorporating Research Into Practice

- Maryland SSA administrators recognized need for improvement, not just change
- Pilot implementation and evaluation were needed prior to statewide implementation
- Substantial evaluation activities were always part of implementation plan

Screening Assessment Development

- Based on Maryland law, policy, and regulation
- CRC staff facilitated several meetings with local agency and state office staff
- Great deal of time needed to refine and clarify policy; local policy interpretation evident
- Developed structure and definitions for screening and response time tool

Screening and Response Time Assessment Pilot

- Assessment development: Spring 2008
- Assessment pilot: July 2008
 - » Baltimore City, Montgomery County, and Anne Arundel County
 - » Training focused on screening tool structure and definitions
 - » Screening tool completed outside of SACWIS
- Evaluation of pilot: October 2008
 - » Pre- and post-implementation case file review
 - » Initial reliability test

Statewide Implementation

- Pilot evaluation identified areas for improvement
 - » Clarified several definitions
 - » Expanded training to include narrative documentation
- Statewide training: January 2009
 - » Explicitly stated goal of increased consistency
 - » Included description of post-implementation evaluation activities
- Statewide implementation: February 2009
(still documented outside of SACWIS)

Is the screening and response time assessment improving decision making?

Research Question	Evaluation Method
Does the assessment help workers make more consistent screening decisions?	Inter-rater reliability testing
Has it influenced screening practices? Are workers writing more precise narrative?	Qualitative case review
Are workers completing the assessment as intended? Are they completing it prior to making the decision?	Survey of workers

Testing the Assessment's Reliability: Inter-rater Agreement on Case Vignettes

Description

- Forty-six workers from 22 jurisdictions
- Thirty-six referral vignettes were drawn from actual records in CHESSIE
- Each worker completed the screening assessment on 12 vignettes

Measures

- Rate of agreement for screening decision and items
- Kappa statistic

Testing the Assessment's Reliability: Inter-rater Percent Agreement Findings

Item Examined	Average Rate of Agreement	Minimum Rate of Agreement	Maximum Rate of Agreement
Initial decision	87.9%	53.8%	100.0%
Final decision after overrides	87.6%	50.0%	100.0%
Inter-rater agreement across individual items	89.5 – 99.8%	50.0 – 94.4%	100.0%

Testing the Assessment's Reliability: Fleiss' Kappa Findings

Item Examined	Average Fleiss' Kappa Across 36 Cases (Confidence Interval)
Reliability for the 28 items and decision across intake workers	.64 (.61–.68)
Reliability for maltreatment classifications and decision across intake workers	.76 (.68–.84)

Assessment Reliability Findings: Summary

- High rates of agreement among workers who voluntarily participated in testing
 - » Percent agreement for screening decision was 75% or better for 32 of 36 vignettes
 - » Agreement rate was 90% or higher for each of the 28 assessment items
- **Fleiss' kappa similar to those of other screening assessments**
- Findings suggest the screening and response time assessment and its associated item definitions can help workers make more consistent screening decisions.

Case File Review: Description of Method

Pre-implementation case review:

- Provided a baseline measure of documentation quality
- 196 randomly selected reports
 - » Non-pilot agencies
 - » September 2008

Post-implementation case review:

- Focused on accuracy of completed screening assessments relative to narrative and other case file documentation
- Quality of documentation
- 244 randomly selected reports
 - » Pilot and non-pilot agencies
 - » April 2009

Case File Review: Pre- and Post-implementation Comparison

Item Examined	Pre-implementation Case Reading	Post-implementation Case Reading
Number of Reports Reviewed	164	244
Screening decision supported by narrative	93.3%	95.9%
Allegation types		
a. All supported by narrative*	65.8%	73.8%
b. Some supported by narrative	11.0%	9.0%
c. None supported by narrative	23.2%	17.2%
Allegation not marked that should have been*	23.8%	7.3%
Response time supported by narrative*	74.4%	84.2%

*Indicates significant difference in rates (z score, $p < .05$, two-tailed test).

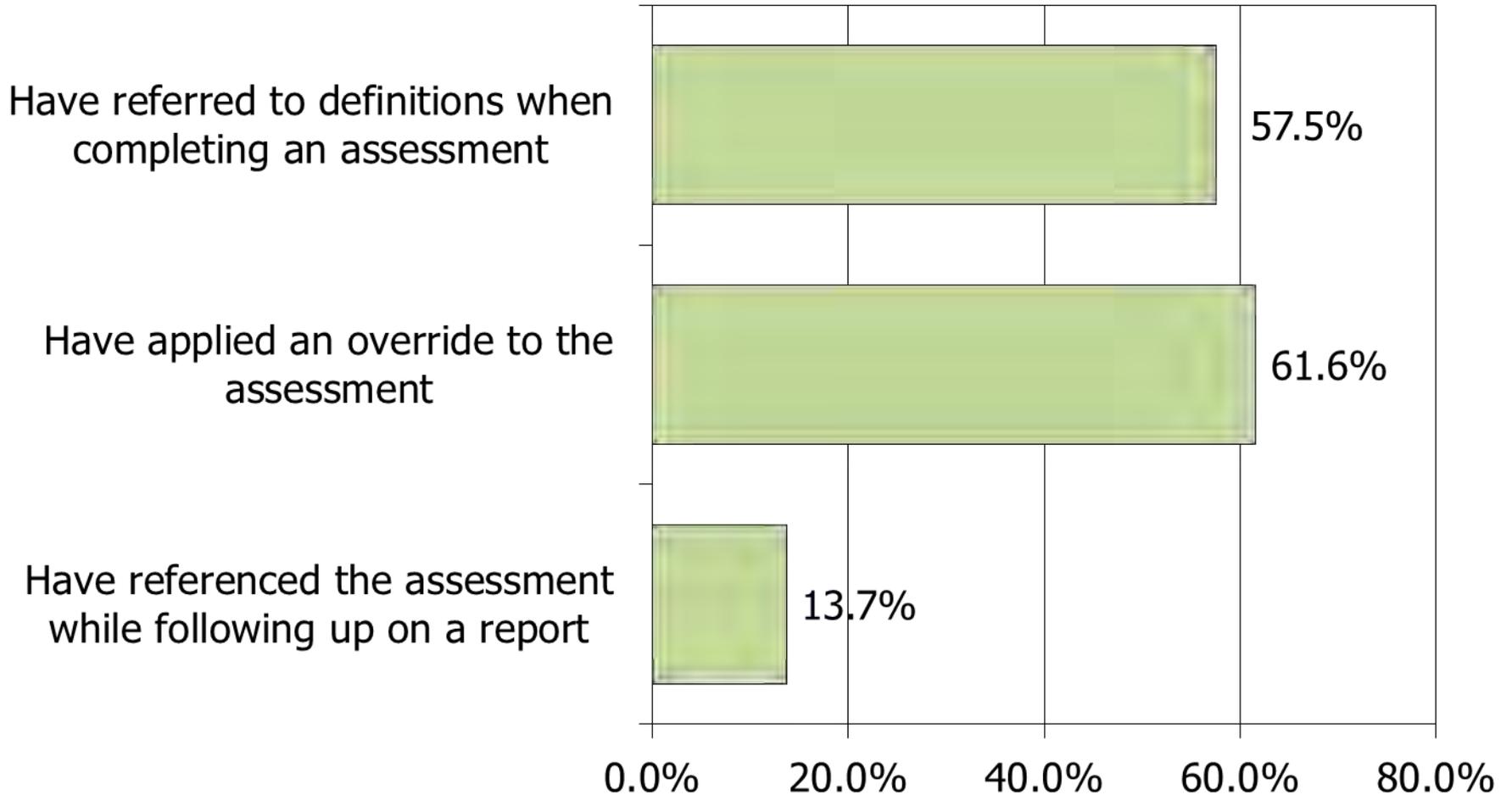
Case File Review: Summary of Findings

- Post-implementation, significantly more reports had:
 - » Narratives that fully documented all the maltreatment allegations indicated in the report
 - » Narratives that matched allegations recorded in CHESSIE
 - » Narratives that justified the response time assigned
- Inconsistent interpretation of some neglect allegation definitions
- Implementation fidelity varied by office
- Overall, the screening assessment and narrative training efforts improved **workers' case narratives.**

Worker Survey: Description of Method

- Web-based survey of intake staff in June 2009
- 39.7% response rate (73 of 184)
- Data collected:
 - » Structured questions (yes/no and Likert scale)
 - » Open-ended questions
 - » Basic demographics: age, experience, and degree
- Content:
 - » Ease of completion
 - » Perceived usefulness
 - » Effect on screening decisions and practices

Worker Survey: Self-reported Use of Assessment



(N = 73 workers, June 2009)

Worker Survey: Self-reported Frequency of Assessment Completion

Self-reported Frequency of Activity	Average	Range
Definitions were referenced during completion	25%	1–100%
Applied overrides to screening assessment	9%	1–50%
Discussed an override with supervisor	8%	1–100%

Note: Unit = Percentage of reports for which activity occurs, on average.

Worker Survey: Summary of Findings

- Most workers (75–80%) knew the screening assessment was intended to inform the screening decision and reflect agency policy.
- Two thirds (57–61%) of workers referenced assessment definitions during completion.
- Approximately 60% of respondents found the assessment helpful.
- Practice appears to vary by worker and sometimes by office.

Summary of Evaluation Findings

Question	Method	Answer
Do the screening and response time assessment and definitions help workers obtain consistent screening decisions?	Inter-rater reliability testing	Yes
Has using the screening and response time assessment positively influenced other aspects of screening?	Qualitative case review	Yes
Are workers completing the screening and response time assessment as intended and prior to making the decision?	Survey of workers	Sometimes

Implications of the Research

- **SSA's project used research to inform practice in the following two ways:**
 1. Assessment development
 2. Evaluation of implementation fidelity
- The project demonstrates to other agencies:
 - » How structured assessments can help improve decision making
 - » How research can support assessment development and implementation

Makes Managing the Screening Process Possible

State office can produce reports on screened-in/-out rates and the frequency of **“overrides.”** This type of monitoring:

- Allows for targeted investigation and training when numbers show wider than acceptable variance between local department screening activity
- Points to areas where more work is needed to refine policy and definitions
- Provides information so local departments can evaluate their screening rates against their sister departments

Supporting Implementation

- Incorporated the assessment into SACWIS
- Supporting implementation
 - » Monitoring and reporting on assessment implementation
 - » Incorporating assessment findings into case file reviews to increase implementation fidelity

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