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Article in Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology · July 2016

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# Examining forensic interviewers' perceptions of practice-focused supervision

Missy Wolfman, Deirdre Brown  
and Paul Jose

School of Psychology, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

## Abstract

Regular supervision influences interviewing quality with child witnesses. It is unclear, however, whether interviewers recognize the importance of supervision, and how often they access it. The present study surveyed 39 New Zealand Specialist Child Witness Interviewers (otherwise known as forensic interviewers), and examined: (a) their access to, and, perceptions of supervision, and (b) factors that may influence their access to, and, perceptions of supervision. We identified 26 interviewers who received some form of practice-focused supervision. Within this group, there was considerable variability in terms of how often they accessed supervision, and, their ratings of how satisfied they were with their access to, and, the content of, supervision. Furthermore, some of those who did participate in supervision felt they did not actually receive specific input about their interviewing. Thus, an important area for investment in promoting good interviewing practice is developing effective approaches to facilitate interviewers engaging in regular *practice-focused* supervision, perhaps, at least in part, by addressing some of systemic barriers identified (e.g. limited financial support, time constraints, lack of experienced supervisors, lack of understanding/support from managerial staff and geographical isolation).

## Keywords

best-practice interviewing, child witnesses, forensic interviewing, investigative interviewing, specialist child witness interviewing, supervision

Date received: 18 November 2015; accepted: 16 May 2016

Interviewing children about allegations of maltreatment is a crucial first step in the process of ascertaining whether the child has been abused or is at imminent risk of abuse (Brown & Lamb, 2015). Whilst there are a variety of factors that influence how well children can recount their experiences, there is widespread recognition that interviewing techniques play a significant role (Lamb, La Rooy, Malloy, & Katz, 2011). The quality of interviewing is improved when interviewers engage in regular supervision

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## Corresponding author:

Missy Wolfman, School of Psychology, Victoria University of Wellington, Kelburn Parade, P.O. Box 600, Wellington 6012, New Zealand.

Email: [missy.wolfman@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:missy.wolfman@vuw.ac.nz)

and feedback (Cyr, Dion, McDuff, & Trotier-Sylvain, 2012; Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Esplin, & Mitchell, 2002; Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Horowitz, & Esplin, 2002). Despite this, little is known about forensic interviewers' perceptions of supervision, their evaluation of the quality and contribution of supervision to their practice, and their general beliefs about the importance of supervision for maintaining evidence-based practice. The two aims of this study, therefore, were to (a) establish forensic interviewers' access to and perceptions of supervision, and (b) identify factors that may influence their access and satisfaction with their supervision.

## **The role of practice-focused supervision in forensic interviewing**

Supervision can be defined in many ways and for many purposes, but two broad themes are identified in the literature – supervision for self-care or well-being, and supervision for quality control (Turner & Hill, 2011). Although supervision plays an important role in the well-being of forensic interviewers (Perron & Hiltz, 2006), this study is interested in the second role of supervision, namely *interview practice* (i.e. quality control).

Forensic interviewing requires highly specialized skills and knowledge, and it is a cognitively challenging task (Powell, Wright, & Clark, 2010). Training may increase knowledge without necessarily improving interviewing skills (Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Hershkowitz, et al., 2002). Given the poor adherence of interviewers to recommended guidelines, researchers have developed interviewing protocols such as the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) investigative interviewing protocol (Orbach et al., 2000). Training in following the NICHD protocol (Cyr & Lamb, 2009) or just the general principles underlying it (without implementing the structured protocol, e.g. the PEACE model, Clarke & Milne, 2001) improves interviewing practice by increasing open-ended prompts and reducing closed-ended and suggestive prompts (Cederborg, Alm, Lima da Silva Nises, & Lamb, 2013). Research suggests, however, that the gains from training in a particular interview protocol are only maintained when regular individualized supervision and feedback is provided (Cyr et al., 2012; Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Esplin, et al., 2002; Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Hershkowitz, et al., 2002). For example, in Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Esplin et al.'s (2002) study, eight trained forensic interviewers who received direct and specific feedback about their interviewing practice were more likely to ask open-ended questions when receiving regular supervision and timely feedback compared to when they did not receive supervision. In other words, when supervision and feedback were withdrawn, interviewers used fewer invitations (e.g. "Tell me everything that happened"), but more Option-posing (e.g. "Did he touch you under or over your clothes?") and Suggestive prompts ("He forced you to do that, didn't he?") with alleged child victims of sexual abuse.

In another study, Cyr et al. (2012) trained two groups of forensic interviewers to use the NICHD protocol. After training, one group received written feedback on interviews they conducted with child sexual abuse complainants while another group did not receive written feedback. Although both groups conducted better interviews after they had been trained, the group that received written feedback on interviews were more likely to adhere to the NICHD protocol compared with the group that did not receive any feedback. Specifically, interviewers who received feedback were more likely to ask broad open-ended prompts than those who did not receive feedback (37% vs. 24% of the questions were

broad open-ended prompts). Thus, while training interviewers in NICHD protocol did improve interview quality, more benefits were evident when regular supervision and feedback was given to interviewers. Overall, the extant evidence suggests that *ongoing* feedback and supervision is necessary for maintaining best-practice interviewing.

According to the Feedback Intervention Theory (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), effective feedback brings the locus of attention to how current behaviour is congruent or incongruent with goals or standards. Only when there is a perceived discrepancy between current behaviour and goals will there likely be behavioural change. As such, providing direct feedback on interviewing practice may assist interviewers in recognizing how their interviewing practice compares to (and perhaps falls short of) best-practice guidelines. Specific feedback may subsequently stimulate behavioural change that leads to better adherence to best-practice recommendations.

Given the importance of regular and direct feedback on interviewing quality, it is important to establish forensic interviewers' access to, and perceptions of supervision. Reflection upon supervision needs may assist interviewers in accessing additional supervision and/or support. Identifying perceived barriers to accessing supervision will also contribute to the development of future studies (e.g. strategies to support interviewers in maintaining best-practice standards of interviewing). To the best of our knowledge, only one study has examined child forensic interviewers' access to practice-focused supervision. La Rooy, Lamb and Memon (2011) surveyed 91 Scottish police interviewers and found that only 39.6% of the respondents received any feedback about their interviews. When interviewers did receive some form of feedback, this typically constituted a discussion of the case rather than specific interviewing techniques. Furthermore, Powell and Barnett (2014) identified a lack of experienced supervisors as one of the factors hindering forensic interviewers from regularly receiving feedback on their interview practice in Australia. In a Canadian study surveying 171 forensic interviewers working with adults, Snook, House, MacDonald, and Eastwood (2012) found that only 23% of respondents indicated that they received feedback on their interviews. The frequency of this feedback, however, was not assessed nor was interviewers' satisfaction with their access to, and the content of supervision. Taken together, these findings suggest that access to supervision and skill development opportunities expressly targeted at both child and adult interviewing practice may be limited, and one potential barrier in accessing supervision may be the lack of supervisors with specific expertise in interviewing. As such, benchmarking supervision practice will highlight areas of good practice as well as common challenges that can be addressed at a systemic level.

Despite evidence that supervision contributes to good interviewing practice, we do not know whether interviewers themselves recognise this situation, and what their beliefs and expectations of the role of supervision are. Such beliefs may play an important role in whether interviewers engage in supervision activities, when they are available. Examining individual perceptions of the role of supervision may highlight whether interviewers would benefit from education or support to increase their engagement in supervision opportunities.

### *Child witness interviewing in New Zealand*

Under the Child Protection Protocol (New Zealand Police and Child Youth and Family, 2010), allegations of child abuse are typically evaluated in a forensic interview conducted

by specially trained interviewers who are either police officers or social workers from Child, Youth and Family (Westera, Zajac, & Brown, 2016). Interviewers are trained to follow the Specialist Child Witness Interviewing (SCWI) model, which is adapted from the PEACE framework (UK framework to guide police in interviewing practice; Clarke & Milne, 2001), and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Investigative Interview protocol (an internationally validated interviewing protocol; La Rooy et al., 2015).

Training is comprised of a series of online training modules covering relevant theory and research relating to child development, offending against children, and developmentally supported interviewing practice. Once participants have successfully completed the online training and associated practical tasks, they attend a four and a half day residential training programme focused on practising interviewing techniques, and submit a mock forensic interview for evaluation.

## **The current study**

The present study had two goals. First, we explored forensic interviewers' access to and perceptions of their supervision activity. We conducted a survey assessing: (a) forensic interviewers' access to supervision activities, (b) their satisfaction with supervision access and content, (c) their perceptions of the need for supervision and (d) perceived barriers in accessing supervision.

Second, we examined factors that were associated with access to and perceptions of practice-focused supervision. We examined whether professional affiliation, interviewing experience, interviewing load (full time vs. part time interviewing and average number of interviews conducted per week) and location influenced perceptions of supervision. We examined professional affiliation given that forensic interviewers in New Zealand are drawn from two distinct organizations with different foundational training pathways and goals: namely, police focused on criminal investigation and social workers focused on care and protection (Westera et al., 2016). Given the different institutional goals and culture, interviewers from these two groups may have different perceptions of supervision. We also examined interviewing experience, load and location to assist in identifying whether certain groups of interviewers were more likely to face challenges in accessing supervision. In a survey of mental health professionals, for example, Kavanagh et al. (2003) found that senior and more experienced mental health professionals were least likely to receive supervision, possibly because it can be more difficult to find an appropriate supervisor for this group. Geographical isolation has been identified as a barrier in supervision access for mental health professionals who work in rural communities in Australia (Kavanagh et al., 2003). Therefore, it may be possible that more experienced or geographically isolated interviewers may find it more challenging to access supervision.

## **Methods**

### *Participants*

All forensic interviewers in New Zealand ( $n=81$ ) were invited to complete an online survey between June and July 2013. Thirty-nine interviewers (all female) completed the

online survey (48% response rate). Seventeen of the interviewers were social workers (44%) and 22 were police officers (56%). Twenty-six of the interviewers (67%) worked part-time as forensic interviewers ( $n = 13$  were full-time). Interviewers averaged 6.3 years of experience interviewing children ( $SD = 6$  years,  $Minimum = 1$  year,  $Maximum = 23$  years) and conducted an average of three interviews per week ( $SD = 1.5$  interviews,  $Minimum = 1$  interview,  $Maximum = 6$  interviews).

### **Materials and procedure**

Interviewers gave consent and completed the survey via a web-link that directed them to the consent form and survey. They were given the option to complete the survey anonymously by not completing the section on demographic information (e.g. professional affiliation, whether interviewers work part-time or full time, years of experience, etc.). The survey contained 11 questions assessing supervision practice and needs. Three of the 11 questions asked interviewers to rate statements on a Likert scale with 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Neither Agree nor Disagree*, 4 = *Agree* and 5 = *Strongly Agree* (e.g. “I am satisfied with the current access to supervision”; “I am satisfied with the current content of supervision”; “I think supervision is important for my role as a specialist child interviewer”). Interviewers were also given options to comment on these statements. The remainder of the questions were open-ended (e.g. “What would you like for supervision?”; Please see Appendix 1 for the online survey).

### **Coding of survey**

Two types of data were collected in the survey: numerical ratings and open-ended responses. An example of a question where numerical response was required was, “How frequently do you engage in supervision?”

Open-ended responses to questions such as “What is the purpose of supervision for you?” were coded using thematic analysis. This method identifies, analyses and reports recurrent patterns or themes that emerge within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first author and a trained research assistant independently coded all of the qualitative responses and discussed consistencies and inconsistencies on the themes identified. This approach ensured that identified themes adequately captured the information contained in the surveys. After established themes were agreed upon, 20% of the surveys ( $n = 8$  surveys) were randomly selected to be double-coded. One hundred percent agreement was achieved between the first author and the reliability coder.

## **Results**

### ***Aim 1: To explore forensic interviewers’ access to and perceptions of supervision***

First, we examined all surveys to assess whether respondents received some form of supervision focused on their interviewing practice. Two-thirds of the respondents indicated that they received practice-focused supervision ( $n = 26$ ; 66.67%). Those who indicated that they received supervision for well-being ( $n = 9$ ; 23.1%) and never received supervision ( $n = 4$ ; 10.3%) were excluded from subsequent analyses. Therefore,

all subsequent analyses focused on the data from the remaining 26 surveys from respondents who received practice-focused supervision.

One respondent (3.8%) indicated that she received supervision once a year through attending the National Peer Review, which is compulsory for all forensic interviewers in New Zealand. Two respondents (7.7%) indicated that they received supervision twice a year and six respondents (23.1%) indicated that they received supervision 5 times a year. Over a third of respondents ( $n=9$ ; 34.6%) indicated that they accessed supervision monthly. Five respondents (19.2%) accessed supervision fortnightly, and only two respondents (7.7%) accessed supervision weekly. One respondent did not answer this question.

We next divided the number of interviews that interviewers conducted in a year with the number of supervision sessions they had participated in, to calculate the ratio of interviews to supervision contact. On average, interviewers conducted 22.72 interviews per supervision session (*Minimum* = 2, *Maximum* = 52, *SD* = 16).

Respondents engaged with a number of different professionals for supervision: other forensic interviewers (40.9%), psychologists/psychiatrists (13.6%), work supervisor/manager (4.5%) or multiple professionals (e.g. psychologists for external supervision and other forensic interviewers for peer review; 40.9%).

#### Satisfaction with supervision access and content ( $n=26$ )

Approximately half of the respondents (53.9%;  $n=14$ ) agreed or strongly agreed with the following statement, "I am satisfied with my current access to supervision". However, under a quarter of the respondents (23.1%;  $n=6$ ) indicated dissatisfaction, and 15.4% ( $n=4$ ) of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Two respondents did not answer this question. Thematic analyses indicated that one of the main reasons why respondents were not satisfied with supervision opportunities was the lack of access to supervisors who had expertise in forensic interviewing. In contrast, those respondents who were more satisfied often commented on having access to a supervisor with expertise in forensic interviewing. Interestingly, we did not find a significant relationship between the frequency of supervision and satisfaction with access to supervision,  $r(22) = -.26, p = .221$ .

Just over half of the respondents (57.7%;  $n=15$ ) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I am satisfied with the current content of my supervision". However, 23.1% ( $n=6$ ) of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the content of their supervision and 15.4% ( $n=4$ ) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. One respondent did not answer this question. One of the most commonly cited reasons for dissatisfaction was the lack of feedback or critique they received about their interview practice. Thus, even though these interviewers identified that the purpose of their supervision was to review interview practice, some of them felt that this goal was not achieved.

I don't believe my supervisor is skilled enough in the interviewing field to give me satisfactory supervision. My supervisor doesn't work in my geographic area and doesn't know (and understand) the issues we are facing. We don't watch or discuss interviews.

My formal supervision is not about my practice in interviewing children – it would be much more useful if I was able to discuss issues from interviews with a practitioner skilled in this area.

Respondents who were satisfied with the content of their supervision often commented that their supervision was directly related to their interviewing practice and they were being supervised by someone who had a background or expertise in forensic interviewing.

My current supervision is very much related to interviewing as my supervisor is a practicing interviewer.

I always have access to a supervisor or colleague who has knowledge about specialist child witness interviewing in my unit.

### Interviewers' perceptions of the need for supervision ( $n = 26$ )

The majority of respondents (80.7%;  $n = 21$ ) agreed or strongly agreed with the following statement: "I think supervision is important for my role as a specialist child interviewer".

When respondents were asked what they would like for supervision, the most common theme identified through thematic analysis was more constructive feedback on their interviews (43.6%), specifically, feedback on question types, adherence to the New Zealand interview model and updates on research, policies and developments in child interviewing.

My supervisor is also a forensic interviewer, therefore has an understanding of the work and impact on the interviewer. When working at a previous site, my supervisor was only familiar with care and protection work and acknowledged that (s)he had no expertise in forensic interviewing. This lack of knowledge impacted greatly on my sense of self-worth in undertaking the forensic work when the only interest from the supervisor was for care and protection matters.

(I would like) one-on-one watching of DVD and honest critique (at the moment, often I do supervision in local group and I do not always feel like I get honest critique).

I would like an experienced interviewer with the knowledge not only around interviewing but also around case law, trends and developments nationally as well as internationally. Ideally someone that has time to look at an interview occasionally and give me direct feedback about my performance.

I would like to regularly review work I have completed and know that the supervisor is current with best practice and the training coming out of National College.

We compared interviewers' actual frequency of supervision compared with their ideal frequency of supervision, and determined whether they would like their access to supervision to increase, decrease or remain the same. Half of the respondents wanted their current access to supervision to stay the same. However, more than a third (40.9%) of respondents wanted to increase their access to supervision, whilst 9.1% wished to reduce it. Respondents most frequently indicated a preference for monthly supervision (44%).



### Perceived barriers in accessing supervision (n = 26)

Thematic analyses showed that interviewers most commonly cited financial constraints within their organizations (26.6%) as a barrier to accessing supervision. Time constraint was also frequently cited (23.3%) as well as the limited number of supervisors available with a background in forensic interviewing (16.6%). For some interviewers in rural interviewing sites, geographical isolation was a barrier to accessing adequate supervision (16.6%), as were accessibility issues such as lack of transport or financial support for travel. Some respondents also raised the lack of understanding by managerial staff of the role of interviewers and the importance of regular peer review or supervision in maintaining the quality of their practice (13.3%).

#### *Financial barrier*

The existence of supervision in this area of work within the department. The reluctance of the department to support external supervision let alone pay for it

#### *Time*

Sometimes can't attend things as we are busy with our core role

Pressures to focus time on interviewing

#### *Lack of experienced supervisors*

There is no one available in our area that would be qualified enough to give quality supervision

#### *Lack of understanding/support from the managerial staff*

Amongst the police culture there appears to be a lack of understanding around how difficult it can be to interview children. This can result in the feeling that you are unsupported by management staff

It would be great to see an importance placed on interviewers as a specialist area of work that does require additional resourcing to enable us to deliver the best possible service to the children and families we work with

There aren't many opportunities provided. Peer review can be difficult for part time staff to access given managers have limited resources to pay for this. I think that Child Youth and Family managers have a limited understanding of Evidential interviewing and therefore do not appreciate that all interviewers need to attend Peer Review

#### *Geographical isolation*

Because I am isolated (I am the only interviewer in a rural location) I am not peer reviewed on a regular basis. When I am it has to come from me – i.e. I have to arrange

to go and do an interview in a larger centre and have another interviewer monitor/review it for me

### *Aim 2: To examine factors that may influence access to and perception of supervision (n = 26)*

We conducted a series of analyses to examine whether interviewer characteristics predicted interviewers' frequency of supervision sessions per year, and interviewers' perceptions of their satisfaction with access to supervision, and satisfaction with content of supervision. We did not analyse the beliefs about the importance of supervision for their roles as interviewers as most respondents rated "Agree" or "Strongly agree". We conducted three t-tests with the following as independent variables: (a) professional affiliation, (b) interviewing load and (c) location, and the following dependent variables entered into each t-test: frequency of supervision per year, satisfaction with access to supervision and satisfaction with content of supervision. We also conducted two correlational analyses examining associations between the following variables: (a) the average number of interviews conducted per week and (b) years of interviewing experience, influenced frequency of supervision per year, satisfaction with access to supervision and satisfaction with content of supervision.

We found that no interviewer characteristics were significantly associated with any of the responses. This set of findings suggests that variations in supervision access and satisfaction may not be related specifically to either professional affiliation, interviewing experience, load and location. Instead, the variation in supervision access and beliefs may be due to other factors such as themes identified in perceived barriers of accessing supervision (Aim 1 above). However, given the small sample of respondents, future work with larger samples should re-examine these factors before we can conclude that they are irrelevant in influencing interviewers' access to and perceptions of supervision.

## **Discussion**

The first goal of this study was to examine the extent to which forensic interviewers engage in supervision, their perceptions about the value and quality of opportunities they have for such activities, and perceived barriers they encounter. The results, consistent with our hypotheses, suggest that supervision is not readily accessed by many forensic interviewers, and is often primarily constituted of group-based feedback rather than an individually tailored process. Studies suggest that what makes supervision particularly effective is direct and specific feedback on interviewing practice, and this goal may be achieved best by receiving individualized feedback. For example, Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Hershkowitz, et al. (2002) compared two groups of interviewers who both attended monthly group supervision discussing problematic cases with other experienced forensic interviewers. One group, however, also received individual oral and written feedback about their interviews. Although the two groups performed better than those who did not receive group supervision or individual feedback, they found that the interview quality was highest for those who received detailed individual feedback. In our study, the need for more specific evaluation and feedback of their interviewing

techniques was strongly communicated by the participants. Considerable variability was also noted in how often interviewers engaged in supervision activities, and how satisfying they found it. Taken together, the findings highlight that lack of individualised supervision is an issue that warrants further organizational review given that many interviewers were not readily accessing opportunities to have their work individually reviewed. Problems in accessing such opportunities may reflect both systemic (e.g. resources and managerial policies) and individual (e.g. motivation, workload) factors.

The second goal of this study was to examine whether interviewers' access to and perceptions about supervision differed across various characteristics. We did not find any systematic differences in the interviewers' characteristics we assessed (e.g. professional affiliation, interviewing experience, load and location). Of particular interest, there were no relationships between interviewing experience and the frequency of supervision or the satisfaction of their access to supervision. We acknowledge, however, that given the small sample size, our analyses lacked statistical power, and our results should be treated as preliminary. We cannot conclude that these interviewer characteristics have no influence on perceptions of supervision. Future studies with larger sample sizes should be conducted to examine the relationship between interviewers' perceptions of supervision and their characteristics.

Qualitative responses by interviewers suggested that variables such as support from managers and whether their supervisors possessed expertise in child interviewing may be important in predicting interviewers' satisfaction. Indeed, five major themes in the barriers to accessing supervision were identified: (a) limited financial support, (b) time constraints, (c) lack of experienced supervisors, (d) lack of understanding/support from managerial staff and (e) geographical isolation. Research suggests that these barriers are not restricted to New Zealand. For example, Powell and Barnett (2014) have identified the lack of experienced supervisors as one of the factors hindering interviewers from regularly receiving feedback on their interview practice in Australia. Many supervisors may have trained in child forensic interviewing some time ago and may even provide feedback to interviewers that is inconsistent with contemporary best-practice recommendations (Powell & Barnett, 2014). Similarly, some of our participants identified a preference for their supervisors to be experienced forensic interviewers themselves and also trained in the current interviewing model to ensure that appropriate feedback on their interview is given.

We know little about what is important for effective supervision. For example, there are no guidelines identifying what constitutes "sufficient" expertise in forensic interviewing for providing effective practice-focussed feedback. Even when supervisors have sufficient expertise in forensic interviewing, they may not have the skills necessary for providing effective feedback. Köpsén and Nyström (2015) argued that forensic interviewers who are also supervisors require specific skills to ensure optimal learning for trainees. Yet supervisors typically receive little or no training on how to supervise (e.g. clinical psychology supervisors: Milne, 2010). Therefore, considerable attention should be directed towards the interviewing and training status of supervisors themselves and future research should focus on this issue. In another study, Powell et al. (2010) identified a number of daily work challenges that Australian child forensic interviewers face. Although the focus of this study was to identify work challenges, and not specifically assess engagement in supervision, the themes that emerged echoed many of the same

findings in our study. One of the major daily work challenges identified was a heavy caseload which inevitably limits time available for further training and supervision (Powell et al., 2010). Further, participants in Powell et al.'s study felt that the role was under-valued in the police department, and that they were disadvantaged in terms of resource allocations. Consequently, Powell et al. (2010) discussed how forensic interviewing needs to be recognised as a specialized profession to increase the provision for ongoing training and supervision. Although forensic interviewers in New Zealand are considered as specialists with a specific training pathway and accreditation programme (Westera et al., 2016), a few respondents noted that this status did not necessarily translate to receiving support from managerial staff for regular access to supervision.

Since the time of data collection of the present dataset, a number of initiatives have been introduced in New Zealand, including the appointment of a national coordinator for forensic interviewers, a national accreditation programme (this scheme includes detailed written evaluation and feedback of at least two interviews per annum for every interviewer), regular communication with the interviewing community through a newsletter and a move to a small group format for the compulsory peer review meetings.

Although some of these initiatives may improve interviewers' satisfaction with their access to supervision and feedback, the lack of national policy in supervision requirement may still be a barrier. A lack of managerial policy specifying frequency and content of supervision was identified as one of the barriers in accessing supervision for allied mental health professionals in Australia (Kavanagh et al., 2003). Similarly, the lack of a national policy about frequency and content of supervision as well as who qualifies to be supervisors for New Zealand forensic interviewers may contribute to some of the barriers interviewers encounter (e.g. limited financial support and lack of understanding/support from the managerial staff).

## **Future research**

Currently, there is a paucity of research regarding the practice and theory of supervision in the context of forensic interviewing. Just as research has developed "best-practice" models on how to interview children (e.g. La Rooy et al., 2015), and how to train forensic interviewers (e.g. Benson & Powell, 2015), a "best-practice" model of supervision for forensic interviewers needs to be developed. Although still in its infancy, best-practice recommendations for supervision have emerged for mental health professionals (e.g. Fleming & Steen, 2013), which may serve as a useful framework for supervision of forensic interviewers.

Given the scope for improvement in engagement with practice-focused supervision, and the importance of frequently engaging in such practice, we believe that this issue warrants further attention. To achieve regular and satisfactory supervision, solutions should be explored at both the organizational level (e.g. addressing resourcing constraints and developing a national policy for minimum supervision requirement), and the individual level (e.g. emphasizing and supporting interviewers' responsibility to seek out and engage in supervision activities wherever possible). Interviewers in this study universally acknowledged the importance of supervision, yet there were clear barriers that decreased engagement in supervision. We emphasise that an important area for future research and investment is developing effective approaches to overcoming

identified barriers. Although identified as an obstacle by some, financial constraints and geographical isolation need not prevent engagement with the interviewing community if innovative and effective solutions are developed. For example, future research should focus on how to provide supervision activities that are both cost-effective and evidence-based such as web-based supervision activities (Powell et al., 2010) or self-evaluation (Cederborg et al., 2013) that may supplement the traditional face-to-face supervision. An evaluation of an e-learning training programme for Australian forensic interviewers of children suggests that online initiatives may improve interviewing practice and can be cost-effective compared with a face-to-face training programme (Benson & Powell, 2015). This suggests that online peer supervision or peer-reviewing sessions may be useful avenues to consider. Finally, some interviewers identified activities they have developed in an informal manner (e.g. local peer review meetings), and as such, promoting the responsibility of interviewers to engage in activities to improve their practice is also a part of this process.

### Limitations of the study

Gathering survey data from forensic interviewers is challenging given the small population of interviewers across two distinct organizations and the amount of work pressures they faced every day. Although this study provides important insight into forensic interviewers' perceptions of supervision, we acknowledge several limitations of the study. First, our sample is not entirely representative of all New Zealand forensic interviewers. Interviewers volunteered to participate in this study and so our sample may have been biased through self-selection. It is possible that interviewers who did not participate in the study may have been different in some important way (e.g. perhaps by engaging in fewer supervision sessions compared with the average or not engaging in supervision at all and therefore not recognising any relevance in the study). Second, it is important to acknowledge that the survey assesses interviewers' *memory and perceptions* of their supervision practice. For example, the reported frequency of practice-focused supervision may be subjected to individual memory error. Interviewers' reported perceptions about the importance of supervision may also be subjected to social desirability bias, which is a common challenge in any survey study irrespective of its data collection method (e.g. paper vs. online survey; Dodou & De Winter, 2014). Furthermore, although two-thirds of the respondents stated that they engaged in practice-focused supervision such as reviewing DVDs, it remains unclear just what the amount and specificity of the feedback they received on their interviewing practice is. Studies have often found discrepancies between self-reported and actual behaviour (Armitage & Conner, 2001); therefore, a direct measure of supervision practice should also be used in future research.

### Conclusion

Only two-thirds of our sample (26 interviewers) indicated that they received some form of practice-focused supervision. Amongst these interviewers, there was considerable variability in how satisfied they were with their access to, and the content of, supervision. Moreover, in our preliminary results, we found that frequency of supervision,

satisfaction ratings about access to and content of supervision did not vary by interviewers' characteristics we assessed. Qualitative responses by interviewers suggested that other variables such as organizational support and availability of experienced supervisors may be more important in predicting interviewers' satisfaction. Given the importance of forensic interviewing techniques for the proper investigation of child abuse cases, developing cost-effective and evidence-based approaches to overcome systemic barriers to regular supervision is an important next step.

### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge New Zealand Police, Child, Youth and Family, and all forensic interviewers in this study. They also thank Detective Inspector Ross Grantham, Andrea Woods, Michele Timms, Detective Inspector Annie Ryan and Lizzie Waring for their support and guidance. Special thanks to Yee Wei Ooi for reliability coding and Lizzie Waring (Specialist Child Witness Interviewing National Coordinator and Trainer) and Detective Inspector Annie Ryan for feedback on this manuscript.

### Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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**Appendix I**

**The supervision survey**

Demographic information

Unique Identifier Number (on your information sheet):.....

Gender:  Male  Female

Which ethnic group do you belong to? (e.g. New Zealand European).....

Professional affiliation:  Child Youth and Family  Police

Which interviewing site do you work in? (e.g. Koru House in Wellington):.....

Full time or part time in child interviewing?  Full time  Part time

If part-time please indicate full time equivalence or the number of hours per week interviewing children .....

Please indicate on average how many interviews with children you conduct per week (e.g. three per week):.....

Years of experience conducting specialist child interviewing:.....

Current supervision access and needs

- How frequently do you engage in supervision?
- What does supervision consist of?
- What is the purpose of your supervision?
- Please rate your satisfaction with your current access to supervision and comment on the box below

I am satisfied with the current access to supervision

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1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Agree

---

Please comment on your rating (e.g. if you chose 'agree' above, please comment why you are satisfied with your current access to supervision):

- Please rate your satisfaction with the current content of your supervision and comment on the box below

I am satisfied with the current content of supervision

---

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Agree

---

Please comment on your rating (e.g. if you chose 'disagree' above, please comment why you are not satisfied with the content of your supervision):



- How important do you think supervision is for your role as a specialist child interviewer?

I think supervision is important for my role as a specialist child interviewer

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Agree

- What would you like for supervision?
- How frequent would you ideally like to have supervision? (e.g. monthly supervision)
- What would supervision consist of?
- What other resources would you like to support your current role as a specialist child interviewer?
- What are the difficulties you face in accessing supervision? Please list as many as you can identify. These may reflect organizational issues and/or personal difficulties

Additional comment: