



INTRODUCTION

This scoping review reveals that the literature available provides many insights into the need for comprehensive pre-employment screening practices, which include criminal background checks as well as other pre-employment screening approaches, such as those that aim to identify soft information. Furthermore, there is a need for clear legislation permitting employment prohibitions based on the outcomes of pre-employment screening practices. However, many legitimate concerns were raised in relation to such pre-employment screening practices, such as, the costs and time delays associated with criminal background checks, or the risk that an applicant will take measures to conceal their identity and history. Additionally, consideration must be given to potential infringements on an individual's right to privacy, rehabilitation and employment, both before implementation and during the subsequent monitoring, evaluation and revision of such practices (2015, p.50).

KEY LEARNINGS

The review team compiled the findings, suggestions and recommendations of evaluation authors in each of the included studies in an effort to present a more nuanced understanding of the studies. Twenty-five papers were included in the scoping review consisting of retrospective case studies and surveys as well as qualitative analyses of submissions and hearings.

The scoping review identifies and provides a discussion of the key findings identified, in particular those relating to two major areas including 'the effectiveness and feasibility of criminal background checks' and 'other pre-employment screening practices' which are discussed further below.

The effectiveness and feasibility of criminal background checks

The review identifies that many of the authors of the included evaluations emphasised that criminal background checks appear to be "universally considered as an important component of pre-employment screening practices" (p.6). However, the review reveals that the effectiveness of this practice to safeguard children from sexual abuse by staff is reported to be limited by several factors including:

- Time delays in recruitment processes due to time needed to complete a criminal background check and/or the resulting decision to employ a person before the check is complete.
- Costs associated with conducting criminal background checks.
- The risk that an applicant may have changed their name, or give a pseudonym or nickname.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

TITLE

'Scoping Review: Evaluations for pre-employment screening practices for child-related work that aim to prevent child sexual abuse'

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KEY FOCUS

To provide an overview of the nature and extent of the international literature available on evaluations of pre-employment screening practices for child-related work that aim to prevent child abuse.

KEY OBJECTIVES

The paper identifies and provides a discussion on the key findings identified in the scoping review.

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- The need to check for criminal offences in other jurisdictions (such as international or interstate jurisdictions)
- The risks posed by those exempt from mandatory criminal background checks (for example, parent volunteers whose child is present, and other adults that share the home with the caregiver and child).
- A lack of reporting, confirmation and, therefore, criminal background checks of other adults that may be living in institutions (for example, foster or childcare homes).
- Issues related to conflicting child protection and child welfare legislation regarding the need for, and actions to be taken based on, criminal background checks.
- Ethical concerns regarding infringing on a person's right to exoneration, privacy and/or rehabilitation due to sharing information about served, pardoned and quashed criminal convictions (pp.40-41).

Other pre-employment screening practices as known as 'soft information'

The evaluation authors also identified other pre-employment screen practices as necessary components of a comprehensive pre-employment screening procedure which included:

- Thorough reference checks (including direct contact with previous employers and direct questions to referees about any concerns they may have regarding an applicant's suitability to work with children).
- Structured employment interviews with a focus on determining the applicant's suitability to work with children (such as value-based interviewing).
- Checks against other sources of information on suspected or substantiated child abuse, for example, child-abuse registries, children's court decisions, disciplinary body proceedings and teacher registries.
- The use of structured written applications based on pro-forma documents that include direct questions requesting criminal background and other relevant information that may shed light upon the applicant's suitability to work with children. This is to be followed by a critical examination of the answers and follow up information requested where relevant (either from law enforcement agencies, previous employers or applicants themselves).
- Critically examining an applicant's employment history and/or written application.
- Verifying the applicant's identity using methods such as photo-based documents or fingerprinting.
- Verifying the applicant's education or qualifications (p. 7).

Employment prohibitions based on the outcomes of pre-employment screening practices

In addition to the various steps that are identified as being important when screening potential employees, the paper highlights the need to disqualify people from working with children when the results of such pre-employment screening practices raise questions as to a person's suitability to work with children.

Interpretation and implications of the scoping review findings

Authors of the scoping review provide a detailed discussion on the gaps in the literature in the areas of the effectiveness of pre-employment screening as well as the inherent difficulties of exploring the effects of specific pre-employment screening practices on rates of child sexual abuse.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The review concludes with "Until sufficient data on rates of child sexual abuse and pre-employment screening practices employed to prevent its occurrence are available to quantitatively test the effectiveness of pre-employment screening practice (which may not eventuate), this topic is arguably best explored as it has been to date: namely by conducting in-depth case studies and inquiries into cases where child sexual abuse has occurred in organisations, with the aim of identifying the factors that may have contributed to these factors." (p.46)