

Caseworkers, Computers, and Risk Assessment

continued from page 11

- Reinoehl, R. (1990) Partners in thinking and learning *Computers in Human Services*, 7, 167-175.
- Ricoeur, P. (1976) *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning* Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian University
- Sheets, D. (1992). Implications of research for the design and implementation of the Texas risk assessment model. In Tataru, T. (Ed.) *Fifth National Roundtable on CPS Risk Assessment Summary of Highlights* (pp. 169-186) Washington DC: American Public Welfare Association
- Starr, R. (1993) Cognitive factors underlying worker decision bias. In Tataru, T. (Ed.) *Sixth National Roundtable on CPS Risk Assessment: Summary of Highlights* (pp. 195-210) Washington DC: American Public Welfare Association

- Wald, M., & Woolverton, M. (1990) Risk assessment: the emperor's new clothes? In Tataru, T. (Ed.) *Third National Roundtable on CPS Risk Assessment: Summary of Highlights* (pp. 223-283) Washington DC: American Public Welfare Association
- Wells, S., Anderson, I. (1992). Workers' estimation of risk as a predictor of case substantiation. In Tataru, T. (Ed.) *Fifth National Roundtable on CPS Risk Assessment: Summary of Highlights* (pp. 91-101) Washington, DC: American Public Welfare Association

David Sheets, LMSW-AP, works at the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, Austin, Texas.

MEASUREMENT AND ASSESSMENT TOOLS

New Section— Introduction

Editor's Note: To help increase communication among professionals regarding the assessment of abused children and their families, the APSAC Advisor will begin a new section devoted to the use of assessment and measurement tools in child abuse practice. Each quarter in this column, a specific assessment procedure or instrument will be featured. The measure will be clearly described, including explanations of the constructs it measures, psychometric properties (e.g., reliability and validity), normative and comparison information available, appropriate populations for its use, administration considerations, cost, and how to obtain it. In addition, the procedure or instrument will be critically reviewed and its strengths and weaknesses discussed. Our goal is to provide readers with information that will both facilitate the task of choosing reliable, valid, assessment devices and help readers employ those measures in a responsible manner. Perhaps this new section will also stimulate research on new methodology.

Elizabeth Letourneau will serve as editor of the Measurement and Assessment section. Suggestions should be directed to her at the address indicated on the masthead. This first article introduces an important new database of standardized measures: CANDIS

Introduction to CANDIS: A Database of Standardized Measures

—Elizabeth J.
Letourneau and
Benjamin E. Saunders

As the field of child abuse and neglect matures and its scientific knowledge base grows, the use of standardized measures as part of a comprehensive approach to assessment is evolving as a standard component of practice. Child abuse professionals view the assessment of abused children as a multidimensional process; the use of standardized measures is an important part of that process. The increasing national scrutiny of the assessment and intervention procedures used by child abuse professionals has also encouraged greater use of standardized approaches. Standardized measures can be used to enhance the full assessment process by helping professionals assess risk and traumatic history as well as determine the current functioning of children, family members, marriages, and family relationships. The use of standardized measures can be of great help in customary tasks such as developing intervention plans, constructing treatment goals, tracking treatment progress, and making decisions about visitation and family reunification. Results from standardized measures can thus be helpful to child abuse professionals in many disciplines, including mental health, child protection, medicine, and law.

Standardized assessment procedures involve the use of norm-referenced measures,

interviews, observations, and interview assessments (Sattler, 1988). The primary strength of standardized measures is their consistency and generalizability over time, client, and examiner. The results of properly administered and interpreted standardized measures can be compared across various populations, and consistent conclusions about their meaning drawn. Standardized measures are less susceptible to outside influences than nonstandard approaches and offer more reliable and valid results.

Obviously, many standardized measures developed for use with general populations are being used in cases of child abuse and neglect. Most of these are instruments originally developed for use in mental health settings that are now being applied to child abuse victims and their families. In addition, several measures have been developed specifically for use in child abuse and neglect cases: the Children's Impact of Events Scale-Revised (CITES; Wolfe, Gentile, Michienzi, Sas, & Wolfe, 1991), developed to assess problems with sexual abuse victims; the Child Sex Behavior Inventory (CSBI; Friedrich, Grambasch, Damon, Hewitt, Koverola, Lang, Wolfe, & Broughton, 1992), developed to assess sexual behaviors of children and widely

continued on next page

Standardized Measures

continued from page 12

used in sexual abuse cases; and the Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children (TSC-C; Briere & Runtz, 1989), developed to assess mental health sequelae such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, and other problems associated with childhood traumatic events. These and other measures developed specifically for use with victimized populations represent significant advances in the child abuse field.

The use of standardized assessment measures in cases of child abuse and neglect is likely to continue to increase. Indeed, in the near future, not using such measures may be considered negligent practice. Therefore it is important for child abuse professionals in many disciplines—not just those in mental health—to develop an understanding of the assessment technology available, particularly measures specifically developed for use in child abuse and neglect cases. Unfortunately, obtaining information about the instruments available can be daunting because such a large number of instruments and procedures have been developed, and information about them is scattered in the scientific literature. Also, instruments and assessment procedures designed to measure specific constructs associated with child abuse and neglect are relatively new and may not be well known. Directions about how existing measures can be applied to child abuse cases often are difficult to find. Communication between professionals is not always optimal, making it difficult to learn about the many instruments that have been used previously or developed recently. Further, child abuse professionals come from a variety of disciplines and may not be familiar with the methods of other disciplines or understand the need to measure constructs not commonly used by their own disciplines.

In an effort to meet this need for access to information about standardized assessment measures by child abuse professionals, the National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center at the Medical University of South Carolina, with funding from the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, recently completed a project designed to make measurement information more easily available. While the full project was multifaceted, its primary purpose was to develop the Child Abuse and Neglect Database Instrument Sys-

tem, or CANDIS. CANDIS consists of two parts, a personal computer (PC)-based searchable database containing information about a large number of standardized instruments that have been used in child abuse and neglect research, and a text-based comprehensive reference guide detailing critical information about each measure. An up-to-date child abuse and neglect measurement system like CANDIS serves to increase communication among professionals, improve the overall quality of assessment in the field, and enable professionals to build on previous work rather than continually "reinventing the wheel." In addition, collaboration across different disciplines permits the sharing of expertise and increases the likelihood that important issues (e.g., developmental perspectives, systemic issues) are addressed in assessment. A comprehensive measurement resource guide such as CANDIS, which not only catalogues psychometric properties and other characteristics of the instruments, but also reviews them and their use, will help professionals find and use the best tools available.

The CANDIS program works in such a way that virtually any person interested in accessing its data would be able to do so. One does not have to be a computer whiz to operate CANDIS, though familiarity with basic PC operations does help. Minimum system requirements to run CANDIS include a 386SX processor; a VGA monitor, DOS 5.0 or higher; a 4 MB RAM hard drive; and a 3.5-inch disk drive. The program is easily installed and may be run out of Windows as well as DOS, and with or without a mouse. CANDIS cannot be used on Macintosh computers.

When CANDIS is in use, three main screens perform different tasks. Within each screen the commands are controlled by activating the appropriate "field" using either keys or a mouse. The Title screen has several commands, including System, File, Query, and Backup. Within the File field are numerous options; for example, a Browse Instruments option simply lists all of the instruments, alphabetized by title. The View Instruments feature allows a user to view instruments and will produce the instrument

continued on next page

Standardized Measures

continued from page 13

title; the author; the type (e.g., multidimensional, unidimensional); the unit of study (e.g., individual, family, siblings); the primary method of administration (e.g., interview, self-report); the number of items; and the role of the respondent (e.g., parent, child, other). Within the View Instruments feature is an option for "constructs," "key words," and "check boxes." These features allow a user to find out whether information on the reliability, validity, normative data, and other data is available for this instrument. If such data are available, they may be reviewed in the comprehensive reference guide.

With the Query feature, the most useful feature of CANDIS, a user can construct a search with selected parameters to choose instruments with the desired characteristics. This command allows a user to search the instrument database using a single criterion or a combination of several criteria. A user may search the database by author, construct, key word, type of instrument, method of administration, age, reliability data available, validity data available, norms available, unit of study, role of respondent, cost, and other languages available—or any combination of these criteria. For example, a user can search for instruments that measure the construct "depression" in adolescents, have fewer than 50 items, and can be obtained for no cost. Once a user has conducted a search, it is easy to begin a second search.

CANDIS will print out the results of a search in one of three modes that the user chooses: the Custom Report mode includes all information available on an instrument in an easy-to-read formation; the All Fields mode fits more instruments per page, but is less easy to read; and the Names Only mode (i.e., the default mode) prints out the names of the instruments identified by the user's search. When finished, searches may be saved by using the Save Query function.

Once a search has been conducted and

relevant instruments have been located, these can be looked up in the *Comprehensive Reference Guide* (CRG). The CRG is a manual that comes with CANDIS and includes a clear description of each measure, a review of its psychometric properties and performance, guidelines for its use, and a reference list of studies in which particular measures were employed. The CRG is text based and comes as both a computer file and a paper copy.

CANDIS and the CRG are available to researchers, clinicians, and other child abuse professionals via several methods of distribution. They will be provided to NCCAN and to several child abuse clearinghouse organizations such as the National Resource Center on Child Sexual Abuse, the National Resource Center on Child Abuse, and the National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse. Plans are now being made for CANDIS and the CRG to be placed into the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect at the Family Life Development Center at Cornell University. Here users will be able to download CANDIS and the CRG directly; thus professionals will be able to easily obtain CANDIS for use in their work.

An up-to-date child abuse and neglect measurement system like CANDIS serves to increase communication among professionals, improve the overall quality of assessment in the field, and enable professionals to build on previous work.

Standardized assessment will continue to play an increasingly important role in professional practice in the child abuse field. As noted previously, in many areas of practice, not to use standardized measures may be viewed by some as negligent. Therefore, child abuse professionals should be knowledgeable about the standardized measures that are available, and learn to be skilled in their use. It is hoped that tools such as CANDIS will help professionals readily obtain the information they need.

References

- Briere, J., & Runtz, M. (1989). The Trauma Symptom Checklist (TSC-33): Early data on a new scale. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 4, 151-163.
- Friedrich, W., Grambasch, P., Damon, L., Hewitt, S.K., Koverola, C., Lang, R.A., Wolfe, V., & Broughton, D. (1992). Child Sexual Behavior Inventory: Normative and clinical comparisons. *Psychological Assessment*, 4, 303-311.

continued on next page

Standardized Measures

continued from page 14

Sattler, J.M. (1988). *Assessment of children* (3d ed.) (pp 3-11). San Diego: Jerome M Sattler Publisher

Wolfe, V., Gentile, C., Michienzi, I., Sas, L., & Wolfe, D. (1991). The Children's Impact of Traumatic Events Scale: A measure of post-sexual-abuse PTSD symptoms. *Behavioral Assessment*, 13, 358-383

Elizabeth J. Letourneau, PhD, is with the National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center at the Medical

University of South Carolina, Charleston; phone: 803-792-2945; fax: 803-792-3388

Benjamin Saunders, PhD, is Associate Professor, National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center at the Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, and serves on the Editorial Board of the APSAC Advisor.

TECHNOLOGY Getting Connected: Child Abuse Resources on the Internet

—by Randell Alexander, Krista Holtzmann, and Beverly Saboe

Editor's Note: This is the first of a series of items to be published about on-line resources for professionals in the field of child abuse and neglect.

Cruising the information superhighway? Still waiting to see if it turns out to be a fad? This article will tell you how to gain access to some of the information about child maltreatment already available to users of the Internet. You do not have to be proficient with computers to learn about some of the interesting sites on child abuse you can access with fairly simple equipment and a little patience. Your investment in time now can pay big dividends later. Inevitably, communications and education will increasingly involve the Internet and the World Wide Web.

What is the Internet? The World Wide Web?

The Internet is the term for the vast interconnection of computers worldwide that are linked through many different types of data transmission lines, from satellites and fiber optics to simple telephone lines. Through the Internet, you can e-mail colleagues in the next office or across the world, electronically transfer entire book manuscripts, and search the card catalog in the Library of Congress. One of the most versatile and exciting applications in the Internet is the Web. Through the Web, users can use "hypertext" to access information. Hypertext consists of text in which some of the terms are highlighted. When selected, these highlighted terms, or links, will automatically link or transfer information related to that term. A user will not only have access to text through these links, but in many cases also have access to multimedia-formatted information such as pictures, sound, and brief videos. Hypertext allows all of the child abuse resources on the Internet to be connected, as explained next.

How do I access the Internet and the Web?

Virtually any personal computer (PC)

can tap into this communication network with the proper software and hook-ups. However, the type of physical connection between the computer to the outside and the software on your PC makes a significant difference in exactly what can be accessed. (For a full discussion of how to choose modems and software, ask your local bookseller for the best books on the topic.) Briefly, you need a personal computer, a modem or a direct connection to the Internet, and communications software. If you do not have a direct connection to the Internet, which is available at many universities and some businesses, you can use a modem, which uses telephone lines to send and receive signals. The Internet may be accessed more quickly and efficiently depending upon your computer's memory capacity and processing speed as well as the speed of your modem. If your computer transmits sound and video, you will be able to take full advantage of the Internet and the Web. Cable TV and other options might be developed in the near future that will provide better connections than phone lines, allowing even more users to benefit from all of the features of the Web.

Your computer and modem will need software to enable your system to dial out and make the Internet connection. Most computers that come with modems also have pre-installed software for an Internet subscription service such as America Online, CompuServe, or Prodigy. Newer services include Apple's eWorld, the Microsoft Network, and AT&T's Interchange. Subscription services generally provide instructions that are easy to follow. Software for "browsing" the Web, such as NetscapeTM, is also desirable, allowing a user to view graphic information as well as text. Browser software can also be provided by subscription services.

continued on next page