

CASE STUDY 1

A teacher at an MK school in sub-Saharan Africa passed on concerns about two children aged 9 and 8 from one family who were receiving excessive parental corporal punishment. The teacher had niggling concerns for some time based on the subdued and sometimes fearful behaviour of the children combined with a lack of willingness to talk about home. The real alert came when one of the children (the 9 year old boy) had bruising about the shoulders & upper arms not hidden by his T-shirt. The child was initially evasive about the bruising, trying to blame it on a rough game two days previously. The teacher asked the school nurse to check the bruises. On closer inspection it was evident to the nurse that the bruising was more extensive being present on the upper legs and buttocks as well. The boy reluctantly acknowledged after careful questioning that his mother would often slap him if he behaved badly. He also conceded that occasionally his father would hit him as well, but only when he deserved it.

The school nurse reported this to the school head who followed up by meeting with 2 other people in the school responsible for child protection concerns. This small committee then sought outside advice and subsequently re-interviewed the boy himself, and then his younger sister. They did this with the knowledge and agreement of the mission field leaders. The story from the boy was the same, but more details were clarified in that he stated the following

- His mother would normally slap him several times per week, anything between 5 and 10 times. She normally slapped him across the upper legs or shoulders and the number of slaps was usually at least 5 or 6.
- His father had hit him several times in the past two weeks. The hitting was harder and a wooden spoon across the buttocks was the norm. He said that he had made his parents very angry sometimes because of bad behaviour and that was why his father had hit him. Sometimes, on approximately one in four occasions, his father would just hit him hard with his hands in the heat of the moment.
- The frequency of the punishment had increased in the last few months, although he has always known slapping and the use of the wooden spoon. His view is that he has been more badly behaved to bring this on himself.
- His mother would often slap his younger sister, but he doesn't remember any occasions when his father hit her.

The 8 year old girl was very reluctant to talk at first, but finally conceded that her mother slapped her sometimes when she was naughty. When asked how often sometimes was and what the slapping was like she stated

- Her mother would slap her normally 2 or 3 times a week. Her brother was slapped more often as he had begun to answer his mother back and argue whereas she would get out of the way if she thought her mother was angry. She normally slapped her several times across the upper legs or shoulders.
- The frequency of punishment had increased over the last few months.
- She was afraid of her mother's bad temper and avoided doing anything that would antagonise her or make her angrier. She would choose to play quietly in her own room or read books.
- Her father had never hit her, although he did hit her brother.

The child protection team then interviewed the parents.

The mother acknowledged that she slapped the children, but was vague on details and frequency instead stressing that she only did this to discipline the children when they deserved it. She referred to "spare the rod" and "folly is bound up in the heart of child" scriptures to justify this discipline. Asked about the increasing frequency of slapping, she couldn't give details but backed up her actions by pointing out that both children had been more badly behaved recently. She couldn't think why this would be the case, except maybe

they were playing up because she was so tired and stressed living in such a tiring and unresponsive country, or maybe the constant stream of demanding visitors (people in need of money, peddlers, con-artists etc) to the house unsettles them. Further questions from the team simply brought evasive and defiant answers, with the clear message that they were interfering and it was none of the team's business how they disciplined their children.

The father was similarly vague on details, although acknowledged that maybe once or twice he had been too heavy handed with discipline in anger on his son, adding the question as to who hadn't done this. He also pointed to the stress of living in a difficult country and maybe that was unsettling the children and making them more badly behaved. Generally though he was defiant and pointed out that it was the parents' duty to discipline children, not that of a school team. The team pointed out their duty of care for the children to him and their concerns about the scale and severity of the bruising that the school nurse had identified, but did not specify what they would do next.

1. What problems do you see in the mission's training and recruitment process?
2. Are there any other possible flaws in mission or school procedure?
3. What improvements could be made to mission training policies to help avoid a repeat of this situation?
4. Did the team act correctly in their early questioning and investigation?
5. What action should come next?
6. Is there anyone else who could give relevant information?
7. Who should know about these disclosures and the team's investigations?

CASE STUDY 2

A 25-year old female youth worker arrived a year ago to fill a much needed gap in the church's ministry with its own young people and for outreach work. As this worker already knew the national language and was a relative of someone on the mission committee the application and orientation process was reduced to a minimum with just informal interviews and a day of seminars at the mission centre in Britain. There was a one-day orientation to the field focusing on some of the practical aspects of living there. The field mostly relies on informal fellowship and advice rather than any organised mentoring, training or accountability. Reacting to excessive control of new workers in the past, they give them plenty of personal freedom and room for manoeuvre in their ministries without committee interference.

Four weeks ago a colleague of this youth worker expressed concern to mission leaders about an exclusive friendship that had developed with a national girl aged 14 who regularly goes to the house for piano tuition and practice. The concern was initially discussed privately with the youth worker, but the concerns were minimised as the worker stressed the advantages of the friendship and personal mentoring she could give in addition to music tuition. This colleague then went to the parents of the girl, but the parents seemed untroubled by the friendship and were happy that their daughter wanted to spend time with someone they trusted and was improving her piano playing in the process. Still troubled by the intensity and the lack of action the concerns were taken to the mission leadership who hastily formed a CPP team to investigate what was happening. On the advice of another mission leader they initially talked to friends of the national girl and other colleagues of the youth worker.

The truth began to emerge – a number of colleagues were very uneasy about the friendship, were aware of a lot of text messaging and Facebook activity between the two, but hadn't expressed their concerns to anyone officially. National friends were less inhibited and several thought the friendship was far too exclusive, a few thought it was possibly sexual in nature and two volunteered that they "knew" of sexual activity having seen text messages. On advice, the youth worker was suspended from duty and asked to remain in a mission centre across the city without internet access or a mobile phone and only supervised landline contact. The national police were not informed, partly because someone had said that the local age of consent was 14, but mainly because they have no child protection unit and ignore all "domestic" issues short of murder or extreme violence.

The national girl was interviewed by a male member of the mission's hastily-formed child protection team and a national female church deacon who had some CPP training when she worked with another mission. The parents were informed shortly beforehand that there were reasons for concern about the exclusivity of the friendship and that the interview was needed as a result. Initially the girl denied all wrongdoing and was full of the virtues of her friend. The strong bond and feelings were very obvious to the interviewers. When asked if she would be willing to show text and Facebook messages the girl was very reluctant and defensive, but with the parents' permission her PC was accessed and the Facebook account opened. In there it was clear that there had been sexual contact which the girl couldn't deny. Finally she opened up and stated

- She was very drawn to the youth worker who had taken a strong interest in her and had really helped her through recent piano exams. This had led to a friendship that continued to develop with the exchange of encouraging text messages and Facebook messaging.
- They had quickly begun to find more time for piano tuition and practice in order to be together as friends.

- Within 2 months the youth worker opened up about how lonely she had been before this friendship. Likewise she (the girl) was a bit of loner and felt similar. It was clear as they talked that they were attracted to each other and that a strong bond was forming.
- Just two weeks after that conversation they were alone together for well over two hours. After piano tuition and practice the tutor had rubbed the girl's aching shoulders before progressing lower to stroke the breasts. The girl said she readily responded to this and this led on to further sexual activity including fondling each other's breasts and genitals.
- After this first event there had been regular sexual contact after piano tuition by mutual consent. She stressed that she knew what she was doing, was old enough in law to consent to sex, and was in love with the tutor. She hadn't told her parents as she knew they wouldn't understand, and would then get upset and angry.

After this interview the parents were informed and interviewed about any behaviour changes they had seen or other warning signs. Naturally they were horrified, but on reflection recognised that their daughter had become much less communicative with them. They had put that down to teenage changes and had never suspected anything even when they had heard the concerns of the worker's colleague.

The youth worker initially denied any wrongdoing and tried to play the part of an innocent accused of a crime. When faced with the evidence the team had gathered though she confessed and her story tallied with that of the girl. She also claimed that the girl's consent combined with the fact that she is at the age of consent, and their obvious love for each other made the behaviour more acceptable - "wrong, but not that wrong" summarised her thinking and efforts to justify herself.

1. What problems were there in the mission's recruitment and training process?
2. What improvements need to be made to help avoid such situations in the future?
3. How can the structure of the mission sending office and this field be improved for the future?
4. Did the team do anything wrong or miss out any procedures?
5. Can anyone else give relevant information? Is anything else needed? Who else should be involved?
6. What should happen now? (protection of the girl, legal duties, counselling, what next for the youth worker and the mission agency)