

Psychological Testing in Custody Cases

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Components of a Child Custody Evaluation

- Interviews
 - Parents
 - Child(ren)
 - Other caregivers
- Observations
- Collateral Information
 - Record Review
 - Collateral contacts
- Psychological Testing
 - Parents
 - Children

Concerns with testing in CC evaluations

- Questionable validity and reliability
 - Highly litigious parties are very motivated to present themselves as favorably as possible
- Types of test measures being administered
 - Are they measuring the relevant issues?
- Time and cost associated with comprehensive testing
- Concerns about the impact on the children

What types of measures are most commonly used?

- In adults
 - MMPI-2
 - Rorschach Inkblot Test
 - Measure of Intellectual Functioning
- In children
 - Measure of Intellectual Functioning
 - Projective measures

Other factors relevant to custody determinations?

- Trauma
- Psychopathology / Symptomology
- Parent-Child relationships
- Parenting Stress

What can testing NOT tell you?

- If someone is a perpetrator of abuse
- If someone is a victim of abuse
- We can look at patterns/profiles that are consistent
- We must take context into account

Adult Assessment Battery

- *Measures of personality*
 - MMPI-2
 - Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI)
- *Measures of trauma*
 - Trauma Symptom Inventory-2 (TSI-2)
 - Detailed Assessment of Posttraumatic Stress (DAPS)
- *Measures related to parenting*
 - Parent Child Relationship Inventory (PCRI)
 - Parent Stress Index, 4th Edition (PSI-4)

Common Response Patterns

- Response Styles/Validity Concerns
 - *Minimization/Defensiveness*
 - On MMPI-2: Elevated K (defensiveness); Elevated L (Lie scale); minimal elevations on clinical scales
 - On PAI: Elevations on PIM (Positive Impression Management)
 - *High endorsement/Over-endorsement*
 - On MMPI-2: Elevated F scales (high endorsement of symptomology)
 - Exaggeration
 - "Cry for Help"
 - High level of distress commonly associated with trauma
 - On PAI: Elevated NIM (Negative Impression Management)

Common Response Patterns/Profiles

- **Trauma/Abuse Victim**
 - Elevations on clinical scales related to paranoia, affective instability, borderline tendencies, hysteria, anxiety, disordered thought processes
 - Often used to diagnose an Axis I or Axis II disorder
 - Context NOT taken into account
 - Alternative hypothesis is that the psychological presentation is a "reactive state," not a characterological trait

Common Response Patterns/Profiles

- **Trauma/Abuse Victim**
 - Often elevations on trauma-related scales both on personality measures and specific measures of trauma
 - Low scores on measures of Dominance, Self-Esteem, and Ego Strength
 - Often internalized anger and frustration toward self
 - Fear, anxiety, and worry over continued abuse patterns in the context of divorce and custody

Common Response Patterns/Profiles

- **Perpetrator of violence/abuse**
 - No definitive profile
 - Often very few elevations or indicators of psychopathology
 - Things to look out for include over-controlled hostility, dominance patterns

Child Assessment Battery

- *Measures of symptomology*
 - Children's Depression Inventory-2; Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale
 - Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale-2
 - Piers Harris Self Concept Scale-2
 - Children's Inventory of Anger / Aggression Questionnaire
- *Measures of trauma*
 - Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children
- *Projective measures*
 - Kinetic Family Drawing
 - Roberts Apperception Test for Children
 - Sentence Completion

Common Response Patterns/Profiles

- Often children will show signs of trauma-related symptomology including intrusive experiences, avoidance behaviors, and dissociation
- Also common are signs of depression, anxiety, and low self-concept
- Anger and aggression often seen in children with low distress tolerance and/or modeling of learned behavior patterns
- For those children who repress or deny any problematic thoughts/feelings, projective measures can be very helpful in identifying areas of concern

In summary

- Families are too complex for any single form of measure to result in definitive evidence.
- Multiple measures and methods (e.g., testing, interviews, observations, collateral reports) are required before arriving at any conclusion regarding an issue affecting a party or the family.
- The evaluator relies on the data from all parts of the evaluation process to provide this rich understanding and to put together the complex jigsaw puzzle that exists in highly litigious cases.
- When focusing on testing, an evaluator must remember to always account for context in any interpretation of the measures