

Recognition of child maltreatment in emergency departments in Europe: should we do better?

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Child maltreatment is a worldwide threat to a child's individual physical and psychological health and has a huge impact on socio-economic level. Emergency departments (EDs) are the main entrance to acute health care and systematic screening at the ED has shown to increase the detection rate of child maltreatment.

On EM-day we proudly present to you the results of our survey performed in 2018 & 2019 to evaluate screening of child maltreatment in EDs in Europe to define areas of improvement. The survey was kindly distributed through EUSEM, REPEM and EuSEN key members. Hospitals were scored based on the NICE guideline on child abuse & neglect.

The results of this study, representing 148 hospitals from 29 countries, show that only 26% (34/133) of the EDs in Europe conform to most of the NICE guideline recommendations. Overall, there is a lack of the use of available screening tools on child abuse, guidelines on parental risk factors (parents admitted due to domestic violence, substance abuse or severe mental health problems), training and a clear hospital policy regarding child maltreatment in the ED. Strikingly, 72% of the respondents reported a need for (more) training.

From this study we can conclude that in Europe:

- Only a quarter of the EDs conform to most of the NICE guideline recommendations.
- There is a high variability in policies for detection of child maltreatment.
- There is an absolute need for screening tools, training of ED staff and implementation of local hospital policies in order to improve recognition of child maltreatment in the ED.

Are you interested to read the article we published in PLOS ONE? Click on the following link:
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0246361>

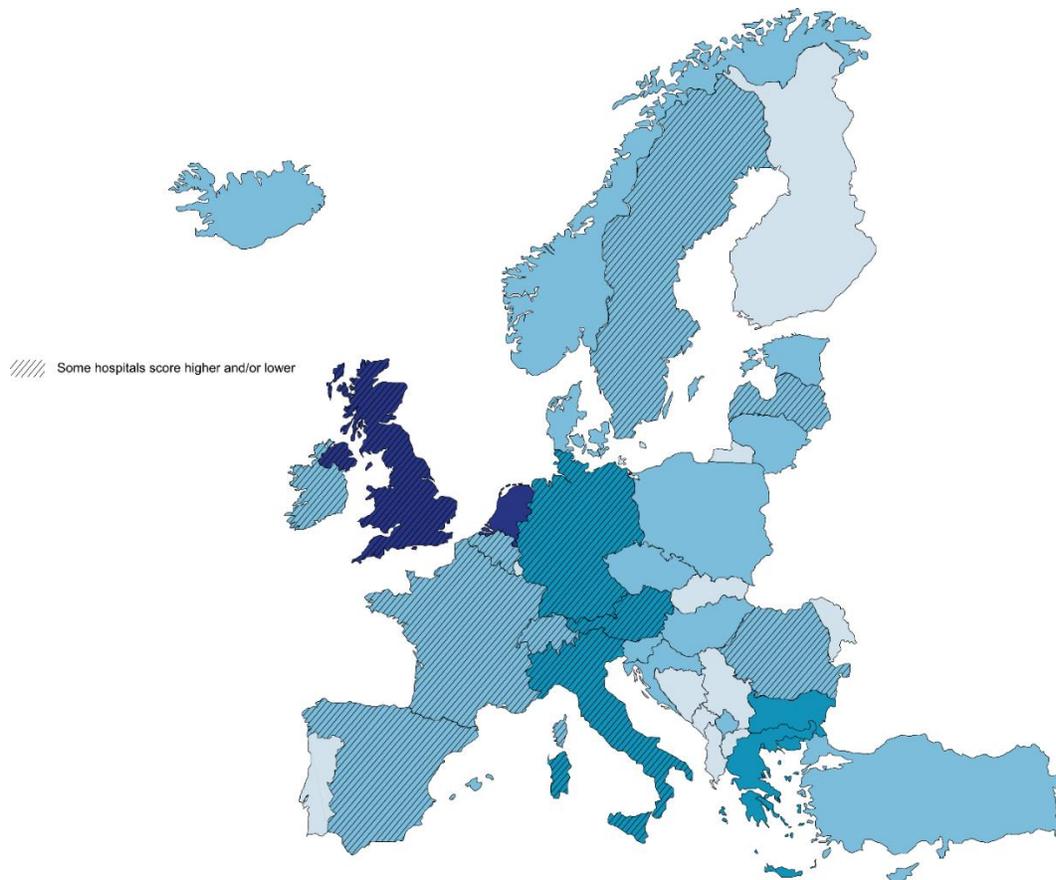


Figure 1: Map of recognition of child maltreatment in EDs in Europe, showing countries where hospitals scored best (dark blue), moderate (medium blue) or low (light blue) according to the NICE guideline recommendations for child abuse & neglect. © Mapswire

Improving recognition of child maltreatment

Implementation of a toolkit for child maltreatment containing the use of a validated screening checklist, a training program and a written hospital policy could be a first step for hospitals to improve screening for child maltreatment in their EDs. Therefore, we first need to study barriers and facilitators of such a toolkit using a follow up survey that is developed by the Erasmus MC Sophia Children's Hospital and the Augeo foundation. This survey will soon be ready for distribution.

Can we do better? Do you want to help in the battle against child maltreatment and are you interested our new survey? Send your email to childmaltreatment.toolkit@erasmusmc.nl to receive a survey link!

Acknowledgements

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