

PM Psychology psycho-legal assessments during the current COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

This information sheet has been prepared to answer several questions that we are being asked about the psychological assessments during the current COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. In this information leaflet we attempt to answer questions about the current situation and also anticipate future methods of continuing to be able to provide a service in the event of further restrictions.

Current Situation

We continue to follow current Government social distancing and travel guidance and therefore all assessments are conducted via video call. Our preferred platform for this is Skype but we can also facetime on apple devices and WhatsApp.

Clients who have been asked to self-isolate but are well can be assessed, but please note no one should be assessed if they are actually unwell.

Assessments by Video Call

There is now a reliable evidence base dating back over twenty years that assessments can be undertaken by video-link. These assessment methods have been used in remote locations such as the Scottish Highlands and Islands and Australia very successfully and there is a good evidence base for this approach. In our view these methods would be a reliable method of carrying out a psychological assessment in most circumstances. The personality measures we use, and our assessment of attachment are integrated into the clinical interview and could be carried out without difficulty during a video call. We would also be able to use verbal and non-verbal measures to screen for cognitive difficulties.

It would be important that the client allowed at least two hours to undertake the call and they would need to be alone in private for the assessment to continue. We believe that the resultant report would be a valid and reliable psychological assessment although we would recommend that if there is any question of cognitive difficulties then a full psychometric assessment of cognitive functioning should be undertaken as soon as possible after conditions allow this. If our screening suggests there may be cognitive difficulties, we may recommend that a further face to face interview takes place when conditions allow.

Unfortunately, we do not believe that a full assessment can be conducted by audio telephone call alone as there is not a good evidence base for this approach in court proceedings although it is increasingly used by the NHS and other services. We may suggest an audio telephone call for a short addendum assessment, but our preference would still be a video call if possible.

Capacity/cognitive assessments

These can generally be undertaken via video call as we have been able to source measures that we can administer remotely. We may recommend a further face to face assessment when conditions allow.

Conclusion

Although there will inevitably be disruption during the current pandemic we will endeavour to offer as normal a service as possible and we believe the alternative methods we have outlined above will enable us to do this.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries or we can assist in any way.

Dr Shaun Parsons

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Parsons', written in a cursive style.

Mr Alex Marshall

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. Marshall', written in a cursive style.