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Safeguarding Adult Reviews in Rapid Time

Learning from early implementation

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Introduction

Safeguarding is core to social work practice. In terms of adult safeguarding, legislation in England and Wales (the Care Act 2014; the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014) defines safeguarding as 'protecting an adult's right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect'. The Acts set out requirements for local authorities and others to protect adults at risk of abuse or neglect. They also make clear the duty of Safeguarding Adult Boards (SABs) to conduct a Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) if a vulnerable adult dies or suffers serious harm and there is a possibility such death or harm is due to neglect or abuse from which the adult should have been protected. A SAR can also be conducted when the criteria for mandatory action are not met but the learning engendered by a SAR promises to help prevent harm in similar circumstances (LGA, 2020). Furthermore, legislation and guidance asks that the process of each SAR be determined locally in line with the needs of each case. Consultation of SAR reports offered by the National Network for Chairs of Adult Safeguarding Boards (https://nationalnetwork.org.uk/search.html) shows that numerous models of SAR exist and can be drawn upon as needed.

One challenge of conducting SARs is the lengthy time often taken to undertake the process and generate learning. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the need for a SAR capable of producing learning as quickly as possible was recognised by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), which asked SCIE to develop a rapid case review model as part of a wider 'Covid-19 Action Plan for Social Care'. This work was taken forward in SCIE's safeguarding audits and reviews team building on SCIE's work developing the national standards for SARs: the SAR Quality Markers. The model developed is now known as 'SAR in Rapid Time model'). The model provides a methodology to support systems learning and provides a process and related tools for each stage in a SAR from review scoping to reporting findings (Fish, 2022).

After initial testing in a small number of SARs, the SAR in Rapid Time model was then piloted with a small number of SABs across England. SCIE support during this period consisted of a one-day training course, group supervision during the process and coaching sessions as needed. Informal feedback received by SCIE suggested that attending SAB members, independent reviewers, organisational managers and practitioners found the sessions that explained the concept of a systems approach, the SAR in Rapid Time framework and the provision of tools to guide data collection and analysis useful. However, the model was not universally liked as it involved change from more familiar SAR models. The need for an evaluation of how well the new model worked in practice and the existence of such divergent opinions called for an early exploration of the feasibility of the model with the intent of further development or refinement.

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of those who have used the SAR in Rapid Time model with a focus on the following critical elements:

- levels of fidelity to model and associated tools, together with barriers/enablers to use
- whether or the extent to which the reports generated using the model were focused on wider systems findings
- the extent to which systems findings were identified, considered and acted upon.

In sum, the study was concerned with the internal integrity of the model, fidelity in application, the expertise with which the SAR in Rapid Time model has been used, views about the adoption and use of the model and the identification of systems findings and changes actioned after use. The central research questions were:

- What conditions allow the SAR in Rapid Time model to be used with high fidelity and remain true to the principles of a systems approach to learning from practice?
- How effectively have SARs that used the model with fidelity been able to draw out systems learning?
- Where systems findings were identified, did they make a difference?

Methods

Recruitment

The study time span under review ran from the development of the SAR in Rapid Time model in 2020 through to January 2023. During this period 11 SABs took part in pilots. More have used the model since then, with and without SCIE support. These SABs were identified via help from SCIE and key individuals in the field, as well as searches of databases containing SAR reports. All SABs identified were contacted by email and asked to take part in the study. This resulted in nine participant SABs and 12 interview participants (Table 1).

Table 1 SAB Interview participants

Participant(s)	**N**
SAB business managers/coordinators	4
Independent reviewers	1
Business managers and internal reviewers (dual roles)	2
Partnership agencies	2
SAB chairs	2
SAB subgroup chair	1
Total	**12**

Data collection

To gain information about the process of SARs using the SAR in Rapid Time model, interviews were conducted with participants from the nine SABs (Table 1). Participants included partner agencies, SAB business managers/coordinators, SAB chairs and SAB subgroup chairs.

Interviews were supplemented by analysis of the contributions of two SAB chairs to a recorded SCIE webinar.

To explore changes subsequent to and dependent on SARs using the in Rapid Time model, the review reports of each participant SAR were downloaded from the internet and analysed. Where possible (and depending on when the SAR took place), annual SAB reports were also downloaded and inspected.

The study adopted an action research approach to some extent. Such an approach links action development, implementation and outcomes (Lewin, 1946) with the aim of improving interventions or situations. To achieve this, early discussions and an interview were held with a key developer of the model allowing some refection on study findings and their consideration in the light of clarifications and changes made to the model since first use.

Data analysis

Documentary analysis focused on whether/to what extent findings from the SARs using the In Rapid Time model represented systemic factors underlying agency and individual practice, and systems changes made in response to SARiRT findings.

This exercise was supplemented by thematic analysis of the study's qualitative interviews. This analysis explored:

- the process of conducting a SAR using the SAR in Rapid Time model
- conditions that facilitated use with high fidelity to the model
- outcomes and changes associated with the SAR.

The framework for this analysis was drawn from knowledge that contextual or implementation factors are likely to influence intervention implementation (e.g. May et al., 2009; Klaic et al., 2022), and from the Medical Research Framework for Evaluating Complex Interventions, which calls for attention to be given to intervention acceptability, intervention adherence and the capacity of providers to deliver the intervention during the early stage of implementation (Skivington et al., 2021). The purpose of this exploration was to refine the intervention to make it more acceptable and effective.

Findings

The study questions were defined by the hypothesis that high fidelity to the model would deliver a SAR using a systems approach and thereby identify systemic factors that affected events and led to the need for a review. To test and explore this contention, the study was first interested in the conditions which allowed the SARiRT to be implemented as designed (i.e. in line with the principles of a systems approach to learning). Further considerations were whether the SARs conducted with high fidelity gave insight into systemic factors that affected events and outcomes and, if so, whether this led to changes or differences. As the findings of the first research question identified the participant base for the second, the following section first considers alignment with the systems approach.

Implementation of the SARiRT using a systems approach

At this early stage, interest lay in model implementation, intervention acceptability, intervention fidelity and capacity to deliver the intervention.

Initial model acceptability

Key factors affecting initial model acceptability

- A rapid SAR promised quicker learning and changes.
- Holding a SAR close to events should allow clearer recollection and more easily available documentation.
- Existing knowledge of the underpinning systems approach.
- Case being perceived as suitable for a SARiRT.
- SAB capacity under pressure.

Initial attitudes and receptivity to the embedded systems approach were generally positive. This was unsurprising as most participant SABs were part of the pilot phases of the SAR in Rapid Time model use. When asked about motivations to adopt or try out the model a range of factors were identified.

- **The rapid nature of the model**. The SAR in Rapid Time model gave an opportunity for SARs to be conducted quickly:

  'we needed something quick, something comprehensive and something cost effective. Rapid time really felt like it would be a really good vehicle' (SAB 1). 'What we have been waiting for – a slick, efficient effective review model' (SAB 3).

  While some of this need for rapidity was attributed to the Covid pandemic, there was a wider belief that many other existing models took up excessive time and resources:

‘We need to do something different … we need to spend less time doing reviews and more time getting on to making a difference and testing ourselves out’ (SAB 9).

- **The SAR in Rapid Time model was likely to be conducted closer in time to precipitating event(s)**. There was some belief that a rapid SAR would draw on clearer memories of events and better availability of the relevant documentation and individuals involved:

  ‘[before] it often happened that by the time any SAR [was] usually actioned and processing, many of those concerned had left’ (SAB 4).

- **The SAR in Rapid Time model promised an opportunity to achieve quick learning and faster changes**. The SARiRT was developed in response to the Covid pandemic:

  ‘we needed to get the learning out super quickly it because we were facing further lockdowns … we knew that it was likely to reoccur … It served a purpose at the time; quick lessons that could soon be put in place’ (SAB 1).

  However there was a general appetite for a rapid methodology as

  ‘previously most SARs had taken over 12 months’ (SAB 6).

- **Knowledge of a systems approach**. Existing positive attitudes to a systems approach found in some SABs generated initial motivation to use the SAR in Rapid Time approach:

  ‘It would not have been suitable, we would not have had that discussion [if] partners had not understood a systems approach’ (SAB 2).

  Moreover, familiarity with the approach appeared to be growing, as illustrated by accounts of regional trends towards the use of a systems perspective,

  ‘the thought processes were already there in our case review panel, but our methods didn’t previously tie in with this; [the SAR in Rapid Time model] gave a system in which to do it’ (SAB 6).

  Previous use of SCIE’s Learning Together approach (SCIE, n.d.) had already introduced systems thinking within some SABs.

  Elsewhere, partners and/or board members had used or learned of a systems approach in different sector settings or when studying. Despite this, there was no evidence of universal experience or understanding of the concept across any participant SAB.

- **A wish to make deeper systems changes**. This factor revolved around recognition that a case focus directs attention to the ‘minutiae and the drama of the story’ which ‘often sent the SAB ‘down rabbit holes’’ (SAB 5). There was additional comment on how the removal of the emotional focus enabled the identification of systems factors. Further, there was support for the removal of the ‘name and blame’ culture engendered by some SAR models.

- **Case characteristics**. Many SABs assessed the fit between the case and the model. A few

'Went through all possible SAR models and decided that the lack of complexity of the case … and the need and desire to consider the system rather than concentrating on the facts of this case, made the SAR in Rapid Time model the correct choice' (SAB 2).

A tendency to use the SAR in Rapid Time model when the case was perceived as relatively simple was further voiced:

'If the case had been more complex with a lot of agencies involved [we] would have used another model' (SAB 4).

In addition, some SABs used the model to explore a defined time period or discrete part of a system or incident*:*

'can use it in chunks to look at what you want, and the system supports you' (SAB 2).

- **A wish to explore SAB capabilities**. Three SABs talked of selecting the model to test whether they were able to work together to conduct a SAR, achieve the learning, and put findings into action, more quickly than usual.
- **A positive attitude to innovations was voiced by a number of participants**: 'Always interested in innovative ways of working' (SAB 4). One SAB liked the action research nature of the model.
- **A few SABs perceived the SAR in Rapid Time model as similar to Children's Services rapid review model** (Dickens et al., 2021) and hoped for a similar process.
- **SAB capacity**. Many SARs were paused during Covid. Post-pandemic:

'doing normal SARs was difficult as we had so many. So [we] wondered if this would be better' (SAB 4).

Facilitators and challenges to model fidelity

Key facilitators and challenges to model fidelity

Facilitators

- Careful scoping: consideration of the suitability of the case and required learning; collection of most required documentation.
- Knowledge of the model and underlying systems approach.
- Support for and consistent use of a systems perspective.
- Information/reinforcement of a systems approach throughout.
- Use of and adherence to SCIE templates and tools.
- Timely provision of supporting information and documents.
- Brief reports.
- Skilled support for organisers and reviewers.
- Positive SAB and partner agency networks.
- Achieving a 'safe environment' atmosphere in workshops.

Challenges

- Lack of traditional-style recommendations in SARiRT reports.

In terms of the conditions and factors that supported or prevented model fidelity throughout the process, initial attitudes to the model were generally positive with it being viewed as a useful addition to existing SAR methodologies. Moreover, it was largely understood that the approach aimed to facilitate learning at organisational, agency and possibly cultural levels and that such learning had potential to change policy and practice in ways that could impact on wide levels of service operation, delivery and receipt. This section follows and analyses the SAR in Rapid Time model use with a focus on factors that promoted or challenged the model's fidelity.

SAR scoping

A plethora of SAR models exists. As noted, some participants spoke of the need to match the correct SAR model to the current case during the case scope. One participant summarised the importance of this stage.

> 'In this we only wanted to review the process around [the events] with the focus on the system underpinnings that affected the process and a shared understanding of this. With these aims it was easy to see the [SAR in Rapid Time model] functioning. If it had

> been less easy to see the sequence, another model might have been [deemed] better or more appropriate. The discussion about the method is very important as the early discussion shapes outcomes and can prevent learning. So the extended discussion at the start meant everyone understood and agreed on what they were trying to learn and that the [model] was appropriate' (SAB 2).

The information collected for the scope was also important. Collecting extensive information during scoping helped the overall time frame as little additional documentation was needed once the SAR began. SCIE training was also a vital preparation. Not only did this augment or supply knowledge of a systems approach it gave organisers and reviewers insight into the SAR in Rapid Time process and the tools, templates and support offered by SCIE.

SAR set-up

The majority of SABs described the set-up tools, templates and support provided by SCIE as helpful, clear and useful.

> 'They set up meetings in advance, the panel of people involved in the SAB, gave notice [that] people would be asked for information and at which point early on' (SAB 1).

There was a further view that the tools were easily understood, methodological and increased confidence of high levels of fidelity to the model. One SAB found the information helped establish the SAR timeline and made evident the necessity for SAR phases to be finished on time to allow quick implementation of actions. Moreover, there was a feeling that when used to communicate with partners and people involved in the SAR, SCIE terminology made it clear from the outset that a systems approach was being used. An early meeting with SCIE at this stage was seen as helpful as it increased understanding and gave

'that helicopter view of everything' (SAB 8).

However, the set-up phase was not without problems. One SAB lost time as multiple meetings between the reviewer and key SAB members were needed to clarify different partner responsibilities. Another had to chase SCIE and the reviewer to gain materials and information – time loss that impacted on later stages of the review. Elsewhere, one SAB made little use of the SCIE templates and tools, preferring the terms of reference made for the SAR and an understanding of a systems approach gained during earlier use of the SCIE Learning Together systems methodology.

There was further learning in the experiences of one SAB. The SAB business manager (who also conducted the SAR) underwent SAR in Rapid Time training but conducted the SAR without SCIE support. The manager had multiple networks which provided the SCIE tools, mentoring and peer support as needed. This provided a valued safe space in which to ask questions and 'be vulnerable'. In support of this method, the study found that the skilled and knowledgeable peer support provided sufficient guidance for use of the model as intended, as findings classed the resultant SAR as showing high levels of fidelity.

Document access

Four SABs gathered much of the necessary documentation during scoping and experienced no problems accessing any additional information needed. As this is not always their experience, one SAB speculated that use of the term 'rapid time' in communications made partners aware of the urgency.

Most other SABs asked for the information during the SAR in Rapid Time process and again experienced fast responses. Overall, the view was that holding the SAR soon after the relevant events helped, as the individuals and agencies involved were still aware of the case, had good recollection of it and good knowledge of what information would be needed (and where it was). They were also keen to hold a SAR. There was further opinion that positive relationships with partners promoted quick responses:

> 'Having an established network was instrumental in contacting people and obtaining information as quickly as possible' (SAB 3).

Partner agencies reported being used to time pressures and confirmed they would rather provide help soon after an incident had taken place:

> 'we probably grumbled about it at the time … but it is part of our job and whenever there is any incident we would rather do it soon after, quicker, as we can hardly remember what we have done two years ago, there is a crisis every day' (SAB 9).

Challenges were experienced elsewhere. As noted in one SAB, delays were occasioned by early confusion about the information needed to give the reviewer the necessary facts. This was further complicated by debate about whether 'the voice of the person' was being sufficiently alluded to. Elsewhere, a SAB member insisted on anonymising the documents before use, which caused problems for the reviewer and added to the overall time taken.

Early analysis report

The early analysis report provides an initial opportunity for the reviewer(s) to collate data and begin to identify emerging themes or issues, as well as possible gaps in data. It provides a helpful prompt to be used in the workshop.

First use of the SAR in Rapid Time caused comment on how conducting a SAR using this method was very different from usual practice. In line with this, some individuals found the early analysis report difficult to understand and use at the beginning. However, for most, use of the report improved as they became used to it and understood the systems perspective better. Generally, participants liked the brief time sections, as they helped to identify: drivers of events at organisational and wider levels; areas for reflective analysis; influential factors; and changes that could lead to different outcomes.

> 'This is what the tool offered … it lets you concentrate on one bit without being distracted by other elements' (SAB 2);

> '[the early analysis report] template helped the reviewer get to heart of it very quickly' (SAB 8).

There was further comment on how a systems approach focused on higher level factors that negatively affected practice, made the overall SAR process and outcome actions more acceptable, and promoted understanding that solutions are often found in procedural and policy changes. One business manager described the early analysis report as much better than the usual process and attributed much of this to SCIE supervision which had helped reviewers define events and identify the underlying systems issues they wanted to consider.

Overall, opinion was that the early analysis report template produced well structured, useful documents that set discussion areas for the following workshop. However, the report's value

for the workshop was in part dependent on workshop participants reading it before the workshop:

> ‘60% of people won’t have read reports before any meeting so it’s good in theory but hard in practice’ (SAB 2); ‘It structures the workshop discussion well and brings participants up to scale … if they read it’ (SAB 8).

This concern was addressed for some by the length of the report:

> ‘the short length made it readable’ (SAB 4). This belief was reinforced when another participant described the early analysis report they had received as ‘too long, too detailed and too distracting. A bit all over the place’ (SAB 5).

Workshop

The multiagency workshops bring together practitioners and frontline managers with direct involvement and knowledge of the case. The purpose of the sessions is to explore what happened and the factors that influenced practice.

Most workshops went well, the discussion topics already having been set by the early analysis report. Key to workshop success were the organisational skills of those who set up the meetings, and the chairs and reviewers who kept discussions on focus. To aid this it was important that the chair and reviewer had sufficient knowledge of the subject area and the SAR in Rapid Time model. It was also preferable that attendees received the early analysis report with sufficient time to read it, reflect and prepare for the workshop. The workshop agenda template also helped as, where used, it ensured that the workshop discussion included all relevant topics and that they were discussed quickly.

There was some belief that it was also helpful if the same group of people was consistently involved throughout the SAR process:

> ‘It helped that the group had been working on the project since deciding the method. Having the same group is key and [I’m] not sure this can be done without this’ (SAB 2).

This, good reviewer/chair skills and a SAB history of conducting non-threatening empowering workshops tended to create the feeling of a safe space in which to contribute to the workshop, and allowed participants to demonstrate:

> ‘much openness and reflection on the process and systems … [it] exposed vulnerabilities, [they] admitted where practice could have been better’ (SAB 2).

While there was confidence that nearly all workshop participants received the early analysis report, it seemed fairly common practice for reports to be presented at the start of the workshop, sometimes accompanied by a case chronology or an explanation of the SAR in Rapid Time model. As noted by one person,

> ‘the aim was to ensure all attendees had knowledge of the report and ‘understood it was systemic, not a blame process’ (SAB 8).

Emphasising the systems learning approach was helpful and reassuring:

> ‘the fact we were exploring a sequence of events rather that a crisis moment, it was a lot easier’ (SAB 2).

Unfortunately, this understanding did not extend to all. Two occasions when representatives of partner agencies became very defensive during the session were described. In one case this was despite effort made to explain a systems approach to all:

> 'Reviewers had to work hard to get participants away from the more defensive attitude previous SARs generated' (SAB 8).

An attendee at one workshop employed a blame approach and,

> 'annihilated one of the [other agency] staff'

an episode which then dominated the whole meeting. This experience caused the reviewer to advise that when holding workshops and conducting SARs nothing about general levels of knowledge of a systems approach should ever be assumed. There was further opinion that it would be helpful to have easily accessible material that explained the theory of a systems approach which could be sent out as necessary, although other comments suggested that changing attitudes could be a prolonged process:

> 'for some members of the SAB there was little appetite for the systems approach, rather they saw [the events] as the fault of the [key agency] and they wanted to "blame" them …it was evident that not everyone on the SAB or in the field understood the concept; one professional at the end said "it's not about policy, it's about practice"'(SAB 8).

This returns attention to the expertise of those running the workshop. The SAR in Rapid Time is a new model. One reviewer reported that familiarisation with use saw their method of running workshops become less prescriptive and more nuanced, which led to more productive workshops. According to another participant, a lack of familiarity with SARiRT and the terms of the SAR reference set during scoping led to distraction from key issues and debate about non-systemic factors. This complicated the process and saw:

> 'a rapid review became non-rapid, and [it] didn't pick up salient points … The organiser of the workshop needs to be clear and skilled' (SAB 5).

Findings report

The findings report is intended to be brief and contain an enhanced focus on the systems findings and questions posed to the board. It presents each system's findings in three parts: a sentence describing the systems issue; a section considering it more fully (e.g. what a safe practice/set-up is, support needed to work this way, the insight gained into local systems operations); and questions to be discussed and considered by the board as a bridge to the development of an improvement plan by the SAB.

Although the general format was followed there was variation in:

- report length (2–10 pages) (some added chronologies, case descriptions, the family voice, descriptions of key individual(s) lives etc.)
- descriptive sentences, some purely stating the area of interest while others defined areas where systems failed to support best practice
- the length and content of the generic section
- use of the question format.

Two reports did not use a descriptive sentence, rather a paragraph combining the area of interest and the finding. One of these reports replaced questions with recommendations, the other offered 'learning opportunities' which stated the identified need for change.

Overall, the format and nature of the findings reports was well received by SABs and partners. A positive factor was the 'readability' of the reports; they were succinct and answered the scope of the review. There were high levels of support for the identification of systemic factors, and within this the supervisions with SCIE were seen as very important:

> '[It] would be hard without some supervision, whether that be SCIE, other external supervision or peer support of [the] same quality' (SAB 7).

Most criticism of the report layout arose from negative reactions to the enhanced focus on systems findings and less focus on the individuals concerned and case accounts. While appreciation of the value of systems findings existed, it was balanced by high levels of demand that all SARs must, overtly and in sufficient depth, recognise the damage and loss experienced by the focus person(s), family and friends. Many participants asked, or referred to other SAB members who had asked, for reports to include more details of the individual and their experiences or how/where the system failed that person:

> 'In the report the story was missing. This is what the [SAR in Rapid Time model] process and templates produce. Some people found this difficult … they need[ed] something to hang the findings on, especially if they didn't know the story … they needed to put the findings in context, were asking "what happened?" … [the] board etc. were fine with the format of findings but wanted the story; maybe just a brief set of circumstances would help.' (SAB 8)

SABs expressing this opinion tended to produce longer reports with additional sections describing the individuals and events added. Within this, one participant recommended that case details be kept central during a SAR, with the process moving to a systems analysis from that point. In contrast, one participant voiced concern about use of the story in the report, feeling that this distracted attention from the findings or the questions posed:

> 'This is not to say you completely lose the story – the grief of the families left behind is so important, but it's the terminology, albeit you need some context … but does it take the focus off trying to prevent those things happening again?' (SAB 5).

Reaction to the format of using questions posed to the board at the end of the findings was mixed. Most found this format useful to some extent:

> 'This generates discussions when you sit in a room with people and makes parties get involved' (SAB 6).

SABs who had used SCIE's Learning Together previously were used to and supported this method.

However, more participants focused on the lack of recommendations in the report:

> 'this report left us short of this. It's a halfway house: I want to be told what are the must dos and what would be beneficial to consider. And these would be at systems level' (SAB 7).

Additional findings

Key additional findings

- Use of SARiRT tools and templates promotes fidelity.
- Efficient use of the model calls for high skills, knowledge and expertise in SAB business managers, chairs and SAR reviewers.
- Time frames associated with SARiRT can be too demanding.
- High quality support helps SARiRT use and implementation, as well as consistent use of the systems perspective.

While some reference to the importance of the tools and templates has been made, it is helpful to emphasise the importance given by some participants to using the tools to structure the SAR. Of the SABs who used the materials faithfully, one commented:

> 'It's hard to go wrong if you keep to the process' (SAB 2).

Elsewhere, a business manager who had not conducted a SAR before and was therefore reliant on the tools and support provided by SCIE, organised a SAR without problems and completed it within the recommended time frame. Where tool use was more sporadic there was some evidence of this causing barriers to use:

> 'I am looking at X's report, the one we did for [them] and I think this is why we didn't use this after that … [it] is 17 pages long, no one has got the time to read 17 pages' (SAB 6).

The value of knowledge of SARs, a systems approach and using the SAR in Rapid Time model previously has been noted. In addition, there was comment on the importance of the reviewer(s) being knowledgeable about the area(s) of concern. There was further recognition of the need for business managers and chairs with excellent organisational skills and experience, support from the SAB subgroup and an extensive network of partner agencies. These factors were important for a smooth SAR process and keeping to the time frame of the model.

Throughout model use, time was an important factor. When the SAR in Rapid Time model was first introduced the recommendation was that it could be completed within 15 working days; later this was extended to five to six weeks. Some SABs managed the process easily and within time, with the opinion that the type of case selected was an important factor. Others found time an issue:

> 'It was fast paced and [there was] not much time to process ideas that came out of it; it was tight but it was meant to be' (SAB 3); '
>
> The timeline didn't work, it took much longer and was very stressful' (SAB 8).

Or decided the time factor could not be implemented:

> ‘[the model] was very useful but not in the rapid times presented. Altogether, with governance, the time frame was six months. That may not sound rapid, but [other SARs] usually take one to two years’ (SAB 6).

Elsewhere, factors such as parallel inquests and families being called as witnesses impacted on the SAR process (as found in SARs generally).

The training received from SCIE was central in managing the process and understanding a systems approach. During the process, supervisions with SCIE were described as vital:

> ‘would be difficult without external supervision or at least some peer support. The SCIE support helped with phraseology and how to tease findings out of analysis’ (SAB 7).

The instance where the SAB reviewer used established peer networks suggest that developing or extending such networks may provide additional support forums.

Changes since first implementation

Key findings
SARiRT clarifications since first implementation

- Use of a consistent systems approach is required.
- Some other elements can be used more flexibly.
- While the process can produce quick reviews, commissioners can decide on how quick.
- SARs in Rapid Time can include more detail about key individuals and events as long as the focus remains on systems findings.
- Another phase concerned with producing an action plan and change can be added.
- SARiRT model can be used with more complex cases.
- Use of and adherence to a systems approach becomes easier with familiarity.

The study investigated aspects of the feasibility of the model with the intent of refining or developing the model further. The above findings must be viewed alongside knowledge that the model constructs and training have progressed since inception. A discussion with the SAR in Rapid Time model developer at the end of data collection suggested that the model is perceived as more prescriptive than it was intended and it has proved to be and there is room for flexibility and adaptation of the model when used.

Drawing on the developer’s knowledge, this section is concerned with identifying the elements of the model that can be adapted and the core parts which must be adhered to.

- As noted, the model time frame was initially set to be tested at 15 working days. During development this was viewed as a starting point rather than a prescription and was based on statutory requirements for rapid reviews in Children’s Services as well as the time constraints of the pilot phase. Early feedback led to phase two

seeing an extension to five to six weeks. Current training makes it explicit that the SAR in Rapid Time model does not prescribe a rigid time; it does enable quicker SARs but the time taken is for SAB commissioners and boards to decide.

- The wish for more detail about individuals and events in the final report has already been discussed. During the SAR in Rapid Time development, SAR requirements were pared back to reduce necessary time and resources. The developer advised that the model promotes a close analysis of the individual case through the early analysis report and the workshop, however the recommended style for the final report is to include a succinct outline only about the key individual or events of the case in order to allow the focus of the report to be the wider systems learning,

  > 'beyond the case to see causal issues that can be addressed and create better systems that allow better practice to flourish' (SAR in Rapid Time developer).

  The developer advised that if a SAB chooses to include more detail about the specific case and individual(s) in the final report (in addition to systems findings) this does not compromise the model. However, it is essential that the focus on systems findings is not lost within the report, and that the learning has managed to move beyond case-specific issues.

- Opinion about the use of recommendations was considered. A case review is a diagnostic tool. Traditionally a set of recommendations is a standard way that the reviewer will indicate areas for improvement they feel need to be addressed. The SAR in Rapid Time model uses 'questions for the board' in place of recommendations as a vehicle for engaging the board members in considering the areas for improvement necessary. Developing an action plan is a further phase which would need to be led and owned by the board and local partners. It is not usual for case reviewers to lead on the development of an action plan, whatever methodology is used.

- There was evidence that the innovative nature of the SAR in Rapid Time model affected acceptance. The developer recognised that working with a new concept made things harder and those familiar with a systems approach found the model easier to use. Indeed, phase two of the model's pilot phase found that the systems approach challenged the SABs culturally:

  > 'some [SABs] dropped out or the board said this is completely out of [our] comfort zone, we are not interested' (SAR in Rapid Time developer).

- Some participants expressed a belief that a relatively simple SAR is more compatible with use of the SAR in Rapid Time model. This view used to be shared by the developer, but over time use of the model has included complex high profile cases with associated high activity, interagency antagonism and local profiles, and this evidence has changed opinion. The developer recognised that the overall small number of SARs so far limits the generalisability of the point, but that the model has been used successfully in some complex cases which gives confidence about this being a viable option in at least some instances. The developer emphasised the need for strategic commissioning when planning any SAR, including one contemplating using the SAR in Rapid Time model.

SAR in Rapid Time fidelity, systems learning and change

The second area of interest was in the ability to conduct a SAR using the SAR in Rapid Time model to identify influential systems factors. Further attention was given to whether, when this happened, this led to systems-level changes. This section begins by identifying participant SABs with high levels of fidelity to the model during its use before exploring study findings for this group.

Model fidelity

Key findings: model fidelity

- Levels of fidelity ranged from high to low.
- The fidelity of implementation was classed as high for four SABs, moderate for three SABs and low for two SABs.
- There was evidence that one SAB with familiarity with systems approaches decided not to follow the SARiRT model closely, and instead chose to use the particular elements they required.

A decision was made for the study to assess SAB fidelity through analysis of the use of three key elements of the SAR in Rapid Time model:

- use of the tools/templates provided by SCIE
- the 'rapid' turn-around time of the model
- use of a systems approach throughout the process of conducting a SAR using the SAR in rapid time model.

While the results suggested that relative levels of fidelity may be best represented by use of a continuum ranging from high to low, the need to answer the research question, which was interested in links between levels of fidelity and subsequent actions and changes, called for a more defined categorisation. Therefore, SARs adhering to all elements were classed as displaying high fidelity, use of two elements was classed as displaying moderate fidelity and use of one or no elements as displaying low fidelity.

Use of this method saw SABs 1, 2, 7 and 9 classed as demonstrating high levels of fidelity. Of these, three adhered very closely to all elements. SAB 7 articulated strong commitment to the SAR in Rapid Time model, used the tools and maintained a systems approach but saw a very small (one week) time slippage.

Among the rest, three SABs employed moderate levels of fidelity. Evidence indicated that they all found it difficult to keep the review systems-focused throughout. In one SAB this led to calls for additional documents unrelated to a systems perspective which led to extra

meetings and extended the time taken for the SAR. Another SAB did not use all of the SCIE templates; the final SAB disregarded the time framework and took six months to complete the SAR.

The remaining two SABs displayed low fidelity to the model. Participants from both reported that the SAR in Rapid Time model and associated guidance had been consulted but not followed closely:

> ‘we took what fitted in with the way we wanted to run the SAR and left the rest’ (SAB 6).

Neither employed the time framework. Although both seemed familiar with a systems approach, whether this influenced the process of their SAR was not ascertained. However it should be noted that the SAR procedures described by one SAB closely mirrored the SAR in Rapid Time process and this SAB was familiar with a systems approach through previous use of SCIE’s Learning Together approach.

This process did not lead to the conclusion that other SABs, especially those with previous experience of and/or extensive knowledge of a systems approach, did not use the approach. However, they were excluded from further inclusion and data analysis because the evidence gained did not illustrate sufficient fidelity to the use of the SAR in Rapid Time model.

Model and systems findings

The SAR reports of the four SABs included in this section were accessed and read by a member of SCIE staff with extensive experience of involvement in SARs and the SAR in Rapid Time model. This exercise indicated that the use of the model to conduct a SAR led to systems findings, or findings with systemic traits.

While all the findings were systemic, some achieved a deeper analysis than others. Specifically, while SAB 2 findings were focused on systems issues, they did not identify all systemic causes of the event(s). The reviewer for this SAR had attended SCIE training but did not receive SCIE support during the SAR process. While the peer support was described as excellent and had been given by those with experience of using the SAR in Rapid Time model there is a possibility that the knowledge and limited experience of its use affected the outcome. This impression is supported by the experiences of SABs who worked with SCIE throughout

> ‘The SCIE support helped with phraseology and how to tease findings out of analysis’ (SAB 7)

and earlier observations that use of the new model becomes easier with familiarity.

Use and systems changes

Key use and systems changes

- Multiagency staff training.
- Organisational/agency process changes.
- Policy/strategy revision and development.
- Changes in staff support and guidance.
- Improved inter- and/or intra-agency communication.
- Development of new software for cross-sector use.

Finally, the study was interested in whether use of the SAR in Rapid Time model could be associated with subsequent system-level changes. To explore this, where possible the study considered annual SAB reports as these contained descriptions of how the learning from the SARs had resulted in changes and improvements to local systems. When considering findings, it is important to be aware that some SARs explored more complex issues than others. Further, as the time interval since the SARs varied, some SABs had longer to consider, plan and make changes than others. There is no claim that the changes identified are exhaustive.

- **Training**. All SARs led to additional training or plans for it. The focus of training varied and included: legislation; intra-/interorganisational communication; the work of other agencies; assessment; safeguarding; mental health; risk. Some training participants came from multiple organisations and sectors. Other training was targeted at professionals/practitioners in particular sectors.
- **Process changes**. Changes to organisational processes were made in three SAB areas. These included: cross sector assessments (three SABs); introduction of audit assessment (one SAB); changes in information collection (one SAB); plans to consider new referral mechanisms (one SAB).
- **Policy and strategy development/revision**. This took place in three SABs and affected multiple stakeholder agencies in all of them. In two instances new policies affected multiagency practice procedures and developed or changed the nature of interorganisational group membership. In one SAB the policy created a new practitioner role. Elsewhere a new policy was developed to increase community resources.
- **Staff support and guidance**. Three SABs improved staff guidance or made plans to do so. In one SAB work appears to have been done in one sector; elsewhere the work or plans for work affected professionals and practitioners in multiple sectors.
- **Better agency interaction/collaboration**. One SAB has raised intra-agency collaboration through increased interagency meetings and development of new consortia to bring relevant agencies together.

- **New databases**. In one SAB a new database was created to help service placement and support work to meet and monitor service user need.

Discussion and conclusion

The study was concerned with early implementation of the SAR in Rapid Time model. At this relatively early stage of use, the study was interested in the feasibility of the model and in identifying barriers and facilitators for use. Further attention was given to whether use of the SAR in Rapid Time model led to systems changes in the agencies and organisations involved. The research questions focused specifically on conditions that allowed the model to be used with high fidelity, and to remain true to the tenets of a systems approach to learning from practice. The questions also considered whether SARs that used the SAR in Rapid Time model with fidelity were able to identify systems learning and whether responses to such learning made a difference.

When investigating conditions that allowed the model to be used with fidelity, its acceptability and implementation were key. The study found a very positive attitude towards the new model, with wide agreement that many existing models shaped long-term SAR processes. The recognised negative impact of the Covid pandemic on social care staff and service delivery (Owens et al., 2022) extended to SABs, whose workload grew and diverted attention from SARs. This caused a build-up that was later complicated by an influx of post-Covid cases.

The exploration of study implementation identified conditions that helped the SAR in Rapid Time model be used as intended. Practical factors included attending the SCIE training, using the tools and templates provided and accessing the support offered by SCIE during the SAR. Another important factor was the environment surrounding use of the SAR in Rapid Time model. The existence of supportive SABs and affiliated organisations, practitioners and professionals helped the process to be conducted quickly.

Cognitively, existing knowledge of a systems approach was a positive factor. For agencies and individuals who understood the concept well, the approach made sense and they already appreciated the value of its use. More widely, knowledge of the systems approach had a positive effect as it reduced tendencies to blame individuals and agencies. The barriers to implementation consisted of two main issues. First, some resistance to review findings being posed as questions for the board and partners to consider. This led to a strong call for the final report to include explicit recommendations. However, this opinion may change as the SAR in Rapid Time model becomes better understood. SABs already used to the question format liked this way of encouraging board members to engage with the findings. There was further concern about a perceived lack of focus on the individuals involved in the case reviewed. The SAR in Rapid Time model developer advised that extending the work and report to include additional information does not compromise the model as long as a systems approach is central and the purpose of conducting a rapid review is recognised and met.

The study also explored whether use of the SAR in Rapid Time model with high fidelity led to systems findings as, if so, whether this led to changes. In all instances where the model constructs and processes were followed, the report findings were systemic in nature. There was a suggestion that while the SAR in Rapid Time model is a new approach, having support from systems approach experts helped full analysis of information during the process. Regardless of this, all SABs who displayed high levels of fidelity to the model were able successfully to use SAR systems findings to make or plan changes to create more conducive contexts for good practice to be achieved.

In conclusion, the study found the SAR in Rapid Time model to be acceptable and usable by most SABs taking part. Key to successful use was a good understanding of and consistent use of a systems approach during the process. When considering whether or not to use the model, it may be helpful for SABs to know that not all of the other elements of the model have to be completely adhered to. However, any such considerations should be balanced against the purpose of the SAR in Rapid Time model which is to generate a fast review that facilitates quick learning and positive changes.

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