

# CHILD NEGLECT IN 2011 (UK): AN ANNUAL REVIEW BY ACTION FOR CHILDREN IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

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## INTRODUCTION

Whilst the neglect of children is recognised as the most pervasive form of abuse, this is so often unreported or not investigated in its' early

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stages, despite the very damaging short term and long term effects. 'Child neglect in 2011' (An annual review by Action for Children in partnership with the University of Stirling) aims to establish a baseline for the current situation cross the UK.

## INFORMATION

During the study, in which over 4,000 people (2,062 adults from the general public and 2,174 professionals) and a significant number of Local Authorities took part, it became clear that there wasn't a consistent definition of neglect across the UK.

Concerns have been raised about a number of factors that hinder the need to be more effective in combating the detrimental impact of this form of abuse.

## DATA

One area of concern is the disparity of how data is collected by the various organisations – "It should be noted that different local authorities may classify child protection referrals differently. For example, some local authorities start the process at a different point and some local authorities do not include unborn children. As a result of these differences, comparisons across years and across local authorities should be made with caution (Scottish Government 2010)".

Clearly this is an area that needs to be addressed to ensure more effective commissioning of services.

## RECOGNITION AND RESPONSE

The public are often uncertain of what to do if they suspect neglect of children in their communities. Only 62% of those who had been worried about a child had told someone about their concerns. Those people that had raised concerns, had tended to do this with partners

and family members. Only 26% went to social services and only 19% to police.

It appears that most members of the general public didn't report issues due to concerns about the lack of evidence or uncertainty about whether neglect was actually occurring. Over a third (37%) would like more information about who to contact when they were concerned.

81% of professionals in universal services (primary school teachers, pre-school and nursery staff and health professionals) have come across children that they suspect have been neglected. The reasons given for this have been worsening parenting skills, problems passed from one generation to another, more family breakdown, greater deprivation in the community and reduced family finance.

Most practitioners appear to be aware that it is important to identify neglected children at both an early stage and at an early stage of difficulties. Focus group respondents in the study said that these professionals were key to the identification of neglect.

Although there are a plethora of multi-agency groups aimed at providing support to children and families, outside of the child protection system, it is not clear how many children receive direct help as a result. Professionals in universal roles reported that the most helpful improvement would be to report less serious suspicions before they got worse. This echoes the findings of Munro (2011b).

Many children are still slipping through the net. "...Social workers need to be able to spend more time actually with families to see what is going on in the home". There has also been concern about increased referrals to social services agencies and the impact that this has on concerns of neglect resulting from higher caseloads, meaning less time spent with families.

## POSITIVE SIGNS?

Communication is seen as improving in many areas, aided by the development of multi-agency groups. However, data sharing between

agencies is still a problem due to the lack of clarity regarding data protection regulations.

Other positive developments include access to Sure Start children's centres (in England) and Flying Start (in Wales) for pre-school aged children. Some primary school children (and some of their families) have access to school-based nurture groups. There are also Family Intervention Projects (FIPs) for families where there is a concern about anti-social behaviour and where tenancies are at risk. Also, extra support for parents is provided where they are known to Adult services.

### The future

- What can help?
- A reduction in overly bureaucratic systems
- Governmental responsibility for recognition and action to reduce all factors that lead to neglect e.g. poverty, deprivation, parental mental health, substance misuse, domestic abuse, etc.
- Commitment by governments to long-term effective early interventions measured by outcomes not outputs e.g. access to personal support services in the long-term, intensive support services for those in greatest need now and a transformation of high cost – low volume services (which are only aimed at those in acute need) to low cost – high volume early intervention services.
- More consistency and co-operation around data collection
- More information to help the general public respond to concerns.
- The need for commitment to funding of early intervention services – for children of all ages.
- Ensure that funding cuts do not derail good initiatives.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Childhood neglect is a major feature in the UK. It remains at high levels and ruins the lives and potential of children. However, it is within our power to do something about it.
- There have been positive changes to public awareness and some pockets of good local practice. However, there is much to do before there is a significant improvement for neglected children.
- There needs to be changes made to the ways in which data is collected in order to provide the strategic and comprehensive responses required – and knowing that local practice is making a difference.
- There needs to be more clarity for the public on what constitutes neglect – both to help parenting and to inform those who are concerned. This needs to be supported by a UK wide campaign.
- Local child protection and safeguarding systems have been shown to stand in the way of appropriate assessments for neglected children and can act as a barrier to prevent early help. There needs to be a re-balancing of services to support early intervention as well as support those in crisis.

Child neglect in 2011. This report sets out the findings of the first annual review undertaken by Action for Children and the University of Stirling with the aim of establishing a baseline of the current situation for neglected children across the UK. Child neglect in 2011. Details. Published: 2012. Copyright: Copyright © Action for Children. Child neglect is a form of abuse, an egregious behavior of caregivers (e.g., parents) that results in a deprivation of child of their basic needs, including the failure to provide adequate supervision, health care, clothing, or housing, as well as other physical, emotional, social, educational, and safety needs. All societies have established that there are necessary behaviors a caregiver must provide in order for a child to develop physically, socially, and emotionally. Causes of neglect may result... Child-on-child harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) at school is highlighted in the literature, although very little is known about how teachers experience it. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to address this knowledge gap. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine teachers from two special schools and one mainstream school. An annual review by Action for Children in partnership with the University of Stirling. C. Burgess, B. Daniel, J. Scott, Hannah Dobbin, Kate Mulley, E. Whitfield. Engineering, Medicine. Neglect can lead to significantly poor outcomes for children in the short and long term. Definitions of neglect and research reflect underlying theoretical assumptions about gender roles. Research Expand.