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Our research (2007 - 2011)

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2007 - 2011

OUR RESEARCH A BRIEF SYNOPSIS

The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Child Protection Research Centre* was set up in 2007. Our research is designed to generate a more integrated and deeper understanding of child protection in the UK and internationally, in order to strengthen policy and practice.

Since our founding we have looked at the direction of reform, trends in policy and the impact of devolution on child protection policy. In addition, the Centre undertakes specific studies in areas of identified priority and gaps in child protection research.

This document provides a brief outline of some of the research we have conducted between 2007 and 2011.

The challenges for those working within the field of child protection are immense. Yet organisations and professionals working across the UK can and do make a difference to children. To be effective requires constant vigilance and joint working and so, at the Child Protection Research Centre, we join with those working to keep children safe, by bringing our research, knowledge and insights to support this important work.

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Our research centre

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

We contribute knowledge and insights to ensure child protection systems are able to respond effectively to children in need of protection wherever they live.

Ultimately we want all children in the UK to be safe from all forms of abuse and maltreatment so we provide independent, internationally relevant research and we work to foster dialogue to improve child protection systems.

The Centre, established in 2007, is part funded by the NSPCC and is based within the University of Edinburgh, situated within the Moray House School of Education. This unique collaboration ensures that our work has academic rigour and independence, as well as strong links to practice and policy development.

With representation from all four nations, our Advisory Committee is pivotal in ensuring the relevance and applicability of our work. Our research is conducted with funding from the NSPCC and from grants secured for specific projects.

RESOURCING POLICY AND PRACTICE

Our work encompasses all aspects of protecting children. We want to ensure that children and young people are kept safe from all forms of emotional, physical and sexual abuse, and neglect.

Child protection is constantly evolving. In addition to exploring established areas of policy and practice our research continues to be responsive to the political environment and emerging child protection developments. Our core work streams are established in dialogue with key stakeholders including the NSPCC, the University of Edinburgh and the Centre's Advisory Committee, and draw on the extensive knowledge of others involved in child protection across the UK and internationally.

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

We are committed to sharing insights and recommendations so that child protection systems throughout the UK can be enhanced. The NSPCC, University of Edinburgh and the Centre are all committed to pursuing a programme of knowledge exchange that leads to positive impact – promoting dialogue and exchange between policy makers, practitioners and academics. To do this we seek to connect with key audiences online, through printed resources and at events.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

These pages provide a flavour of our research findings highlighted in our books, reports and briefings. Sections 1 and 2 of this paper focus on our UK comparative work brought together in our book: *Child Protection Systems in the United Kingdom: A Comparative Analysis* (Stafford A., Parton N., Vincent S. and Smith C. (2011) London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers). Our other work includes research on child deaths, harm and abuse in sport, the support needs of children and young people who have had to leave home because of domestic abuse, and reporting child protection in the media. These are outlined in the remaining sections.

For a full list of our books, reports and briefings, please see the longer version of this document *Our Research: An Overview (2007 - 2011)*, or visit our website.

STAY CONNECTED

If you would like to receive ongoing updates and invitations to future events, please join our mailing list at: www.childprotection.ed.ac.uk

Comparative studies

1. UNDERSTANDING CHILD PROTECTION DEVELOPMENTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

COMPARATIVERESEARCH: ONGOING

From a situation in 2007 where there was relatively little detailed comparative research available on the similarities and differences between child protection systems in different parts of the UK, a new body of work has been built as a result of the Centre's research¹. In our research over the past three years we set out to understand child protection systems across the UK by providing both a broad and a deep perspective. On the one hand unravelling the complex and interrelated factors driving change and reform in child protection in the UK; then looking further afield to gauge how our systems in the UK compare with other systems across the world; and we have highlighted the usefulness of comparing one system against the other to provide new knowledge and understanding.

Within the UK, the three devolved nations (Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland) have different constitutional arrangements and distinct relationships with the UK Government. For our research across the UK, we have used a qualitative case study approach for our UK comparative work, where the researcher is immersed in each case.

Broadly, all parts of the UK have been travelling in a direction away from being narrowly focused on child protection (with an emphasis on investigation and prosecution) towards a system where children's protection needs are met in the context of their wider support needs. This emphasis on the needs of all children will only be possible if services are available and effective. Current spending cuts pose some feasibility questions for the current policy direction.

Following devolution, policy divergence has not yet happened to the extent expected; and England has tended to be the context setter.

The period since May 2010 is the first time the four administrations of the UK have been so different in political make-up, perhaps giving further scope for divergence in policy and for the emergence of different relationships between the four parts of the UK. It is unclear how strongly English developments (including the Government's response to the *Munro Review of Child Protection: A Child-Centred System*, 2011) will continue to provide the context for developments in the other nations.

2. SYSTEMS, STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES: UK COMPARISON

COMPARATIVERESEARCH: ONGOING

In this section we provide headline information about our detailed work comparing and contrasting broad legislative and policy frameworks underpinning child protection systems in the UK including guidance, regulation and procedures. In terms of policy evolution, it is not a static picture and continual monitoring and analysis can provide further information to inform policy development.

2.1 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

All parts of the UK approach child protection policies and procedures in broadly similar ways. To date, the devolved parts of the UK have looked to and borrowed heavily from England in developing their overarching framework documents and local guidance.

2.2 MANAGING INDIVIDUAL CASES

Across the UK there are similar arrangements in place to protect individual children who may be at risk of abuse and neglect. All follow similar stages, including referral, investigation, case conference, management and review. While the overall processes are similar, definitions and the ways in which statistical data is gathered and published varies between the different parts of the UK. This makes it difficult to compare referral rates, make UK-wide comparison or draw UK-wide conclusions.

2.3 ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORKS

While each part of the UK has tools or frameworks for assessing the needs of all children, including those who may be in need of protection, they are at different stages in development and implementation. While there are some differences between the assessment frameworks in use across the UK, all have their origins in the model developed in England.

2.4 CHILD DEATH REVIEW PROCESSES²

All parts of the UK now have processes in place for inquiring into or reviewing cases where a child has died as a result of child abuse or neglect. These multi-agency reviews all have as a primary purpose the aim of establishing whether lessons can be learned from a case, they aim to improve inter-agency working and better protect children. While there are similarities between these processes, there are also differences in the detail. There are differences in structure, including the timetable for review, guidance for family involvement in the process, and in the criteria for conducting a review. The fact that serious case reviews (SCRs) continue to identify the same problems in front line practice and continue to make similar recommendations has triggered questions about their effectiveness as a learning tool for improving practice.

2.5 OFFENDER MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Since the late 1990's there has been rapid development in mechanisms designed to protect children and young people from individuals who may pose a risk to them in the community (i.e. vetting, barring and multi-agency public protection³ systems). Currently, across the UK all of these systems use an individual's previous behaviour as one of the indicators of potential future risk. Additionally they all necessitate the exchange of information between agencies mirroring developments in other aspects of child protection policy where there has been an increasing emphasis on information sharing between agencies. While this policy agenda is (in part) a response to ensuring children are protected from abuse, it has also been subject to the criticism that it is overly focused on known offenders and on risk to children from strangers.

IN SUMMARY

There are currently many similarities in the approaches taken to child protection in the four parts of the UK. While there are differences in terminology and in the way data is collected, legislation, guidance and child protection processes show a high degree of overlap. Current developments may result in greater divergence in future.

Footnotes:

1. Political landscapes and child protection policy, systems and guidance are constantly evolving; every effort has been made to ensure information is current as at November 2011.
2. In England and Wales these are Serious Case Reviews (SCR); in Northern Ireland: Case Management Reviews (CMR); and in Scotland: Significant Case Reviews (SCR).
3. Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) in England, Scotland and Wales; Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI).

For more detailed descriptions and full references refer to our book: *Child Protection Systems in the United Kingdom: A Comparative Analysis*. (Stafford A., Parton N., Vincent S. and Smith C. (2011) London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers).

Themes in child protection

3. THE EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN ORGANISED SPORT⁴ IN THE UK

PRIMARY RESEARCH (2007 – 2010, PUBLISHED 2011)

A major three-year study was commissioned by the NSPCC to provide information about the nature and range of negative experiences and harm faced by children participating in a variety of sports and at all levels of participation. In the study students (aged 18-22) shared their experience and retrospective views of participating in organised sport as children (up to 16yrs).

The study highlighted that overall, participating in organised sport was a positive experience for most children and young people. However, sitting alongside this, a negative sporting culture was widely reported and largely accepted as 'the norm' and is perpetuated by peers, coaches and other adults. Young people in the study reported widespread emotionally harmful treatment and unacceptable levels of sexual harassment. Peers were the most common perpetrators of all forms of harm reported, with coaches sometimes condoning this or failing to challenge it effectively. Coaches were the second most common perpetrators of harm with their role in harm increasing as young athletes advanced through the competitive ranks.

Sport has achieved a great deal over the past 10 years and made significant progress towards ensuring that children and young people are able to participate in sport safely and enjoyably. However work remains to be done. The research has highlighted a number of recommendations for coaches, coach systems builders and adults involved in delivering youth sport.

Footnote:

4. Organised sport was defined in the study as sport that is voluntary, takes place outside school hours and includes an element of training or instruction by an adult. It did not include PE and informally arranged sport such as 'kick-about's' with friends. It did include extra-curricular sport at school, for example playing in the school team or being part of a club, based at school but taking place outside ordinary PE lessons.

For more detailed descriptions and full references refer to our book and research reports:

Stafford A., Alexander K. (2010) *Children and Organised Sport*. Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press)

Alexander K., Stafford A. and Lewis R. (2011) *The Experiences of Children Participating in Organised Sport in the UK*. London: NSPCC. Also available as a summary report and headline findings: www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/findings/experiences_children_sport_wda85008.html

4. LEARNING FROM CHILD DEATHS AND SERIOUS ABUSE

PRIMARY RESEARCH (2007-2010)

The Centre identified a research gap around child deaths and serious abuse in Scotland in comparison with the rest of the UK. This research is concerned with what we can learn from reviewing cases where children have died or suffered serious abuse or neglect. The programme of work included a number of elements:

- A review of high profile child death and significant child abuse cases in Scotland over three decades;
- A book outlining the findings from primary research conducted by the Centre in Scotland and secondary research in the UK and elsewhere; and
- An analysis of 24 serious case review overview reports for one LSCB in England.

Evidence from Scotland and other parts of the UK suggests that the families of children who die experience multiple difficulties; and that it is the co-existence of several risk factors, and the way in which these various factors interact, which is important in predicting death and abuse. Additionally, evidence from inquiries and reviews has shown that many of the children at most serious risk may be those on the margins of the child protection system who have minimal involvement with agencies.

For several decades now, inquiries and reviews have tended to make similar recommendations. The extent to which they are a useful vehicle for generating lessons to be learned has been questioned. Child deaths as a result of neglect or abuse are comparatively rare, yet they have arguably had an inordinate and inappropriate level of influence on child protection policy.

In addition to processes for reviewing deaths from child abuse and neglect, some parts of the UK have introduced processes for wider review of child deaths. This is an

attempt to expand child death review beyond the focus of child abuse and neglect. There is evidence to suggest this might be a more effective way of learning. The overall purpose of these processes is to understand why children die, and to put in place interventions to protect other children, and to prevent future deaths.

There is much we can learn in terms of prevention from child death review. However it is only one source of evidence. There is also much to learn from good practice and cases where things have gone well; as well as from 'near misses' and cases where things have gone wrong.

Refer to our books and briefing papers for more detailed descriptions and full references:

BOOKS

Vincent S. (2010) *Learning from Child Deaths and Serious Abuse*. Edinburgh: Dunedin University Press

Eds. Stafford A., Parton N., Vincent S. (2010) *Child Protection Reform Across the UK*. Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press

Stafford A., Vincent S. (2008) *Safeguarding and Protecting Children and Young People*. Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press

Stafford A., Parton N., Vincent S and Smith C. (2011) *Child Protection Systems in the United Kingdom: A Comparative Analysis*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

REPORTS, SUMMARY PAPERS AND BRIEFINGS:

Vincent S., Smith C., Stafford A. (2007) *A Review of Child Deaths and Significant Abuse Cases in Scotland*. Commissioned Report

Vincent S. (2009) *Child Death and Significant Case Review Processes: A UK Comparison, Briefing No. 5, February 2009*. Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Centre for UK-wide Learning in Child Protection

5. THE IMPACT ON POLICY OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF CHILD DEATHS IN THE UK

SHORT TERM STUDY (2010)

Following the significant media coverage of the death of Peter Connelly (Baby P, Baby Peter) in August 2007, this study explored the relationship between the media, public pressure and policy making. It used newspaper reporting of the death of Baby Peter as a case study to explore the extent to which UK media coverage has influenced policy on child death cases due to abuse and neglect.

Following a long tradition of particular child death cases attracting significant media interest, this case became synonymous with child abuse, debates around child protection and public discontent on the role of the state in protecting children. When the Baby Peter case became public, the UK Government immediately commissioned Lord Laming to report on progress in safeguarding children in England. How far media reporting influenced the UK Government's announcements on the local and national reviews of child protection is difficult to ascertain, but it can be assumed that the intensive media coverage of this case encouraged Government action in the period following the conviction of those responsible for killing Baby Peter.

In addition some newspapers called on the public to petition for the resignation of the Director of Children's Services in Haringey and portrayed social workers involved in this case negatively. Laming highlighted that this kind of reporting has a negative impact on social workers and has serious implications for the effectiveness, status and morale of the children's workforce as a whole.

The media coverage of Baby Peter exposes the very public nature of safeguarding and protecting children. It suggests that a more productive alliance is required between professionals, the media and public in the area of child protection in order to ensure that there is more measured debate in the reporting on child deaths.

For more detail and full references refer to our briefing *Media Coverage of Child Deaths in the UK: The Impact of Baby P: A Case for Influence, Briefing No. 8, June 2010*, (Elsley S., 2010). Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Centre for UK-wide Learning in Child Protection

6. THE SUPPORT NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE TO LEAVE HOME BECAUSE OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

PRIMARY RESEARCH (2008)

This research explored the views, experiences and support needs of children and young people who have to move home as a result of domestic abuse. It was funded by the (then) Scottish Executive and commissioned by Women's Aid.

Most of the young people interviewed had experienced multiple house moves. The 'first move' evoked the strongest feelings and was usually triggered by an incident requiring them to leave home suddenly and in difficult circumstances. While most understood domestic abuse as the reason for having to leave home, information about this move was generally incomplete, with adults making decisions quickly and not sharing wholly accurate information, leaving young people confused and resentful. Moving (or returning to) school after having to move house because of domestic abuse was a major source of anxiety, mainly due to the impact on relationships and education attainment.

In terms of support needs, the young people highlighted the importance of talking and the difficulties of finding someone (trustworthy) to talk to. The refuge, family and friends were identified as key sources of support, although old friendships were often difficult to maintain. While young people lacked confidence in support from their school, practical support from other organisations (e.g. police or housing agencies) was generally viewed as positive, and they very much valued the support of dedicated children's workers.

The research identified a range of recommendations to help improve existing services aimed at supporting children and young people who have to leave violent homes, and inform the process of building new services, including:

- Recognise young people as active decision makers with high awareness of the situation and holding strong views on solutions; they appreciate honesty.
- Provide support for maintaining friendship networks and/or building new ones.
- Provide more opportunities to access counselling and therapeutic services.
- Schools can help by being more aware of difficulties faced by young people in this situation; and by addressing concerns they have about peer relationships when returning to or moving school.
- Most young people experiencing domestic abuse will be living at home, with no contact with relevant services. Ways of reaching and supporting young people in this situation should be carefully considered.

For more detail and full references refer to our report: Stafford, A., Stead, J., Grimes, M.(2008) *The Support Needs of Children and Young People Who Have to Move Home Because of Domestic Abuse*.

To conclude

In the past four years we have built a considerable body of work contributing knowledge and understanding to the reform process of child protection across the UK. We have produced five books along with numerous reports and briefing papers. Additionally we have hosted seminars and events to advance discussion on these important themes. The full list of books is outlined below. For other research material please visit our website.

We remain committed to conducting research and knowledge exchange that is responsive to developments and evolving political landscapes to improve child protection systems.

PUBLICATIONS BOOKS

Stafford A., Parton N., Vincent S. and Smith C. (2011) *Child Protection Systems in the United Kingdom: A Comparative Analysis*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Stafford A., Alexander K.(2010) *Children and Organised Sport*. Edinburgh:Dunedin Academic Press

Eds. Stafford A., Parton N., Vincent S. (2010) *Child Protection Reform Across the UK*. Edinburgh:Dunedin Academic Press

Vincent S. (2010) *Learning from Child Deaths and Serious Abuse*. Edinburgh:Dunedin University Press.

Stafford A., Vincent S. (2008) *Safeguarding and Protecting Children and Young People*. Edinburgh:Dunedin Academic Press

REPORTS, BRIEFING PAPERS AND ARTICLES

Available at: www.childprotection.ed.ac

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THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH / NSPCC

**child protection
research centre**



NSPCC
Cruelty to children must stop. FULL STOP.

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The Centre was previously known as:
The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC
Centre for UK-wide Learning in Child Protection (CLiCP).
This name is features on publications produced between 2007 - 2011.

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