

# RESEARCH INTO *practice*

News from the Scottish Executive about research in social work and social care

No 11 – July 2002

## Variations of practice in assessments of child neglect

Dundee University social work department and three Scottish social work departments worked in collaboration to examine assessment practice with cases of neglect, and to develop formal tools for the assessment of both risk and need. They considered written material in ten cases from each authority, chosen to represent a range of cases where there were long-standing concerns about neglect.

The focus was mainly on children living at home. The research concluded that comprehensive assessment is often lacking in child protection cases.

The files were scored on a grid, listing important elements of assessment drawn from existing formats. A questionnaire was distributed to all social workers involved in child care assessments asking about current assessment practice, and how it was translated into practice and monitored.

Assessments tended to be scattered throughout files, and it was difficult to find a clear outline of the intervention plan. Written assessment was associated with events such as Children's Panel hearings and case conferences. Assessment of finances was minimal, and cultural and ethnic issues were assessed in detail in only one case, even though the children appeared to be of minority ethnic origin in others.

Information about the extended family and informal supporters was patchy, and information about biological fathers and mothers' partners was particularly sparse. There were few direct quotes from children, statements of their views, or recording of

direct observation. Parents' views were not always recorded.

There was considerable attention to the risks to children, and their needs. Assessment of the parenting environment, education and health was more comprehensive. It was rarely clear when an assessment had started or finished, and interventions were often not tied to specified aims, outcomes or timescales. There were examples of effective interdisciplinary working. It was clear from case notes that when there were plans for intervention, these were often undermined by crises.

Practitioners found it hard to identify when to move from evidence gathering in an abusive situation, to intervention. There was often no written intervention plan, or where there was, planned action was not described in detail, nor linked with the identified problems. It was rarely clear how any improvement in the situation would be recognised or measured. The authors suggest there are a number of scales for measuring levels of neglect that could be used, but not all social workers wished to use formal checklists and scales. However these frameworks must be underpinned by professional judgment and skill.

◆ Assessment practice in cases of child neglect: a developmental project; Brigid Daniel and Norma Baldwin, *Practice*, Vol 13, No 4.

## Young disabled people: are we asking the right questions?

Planning the transition to adulthood for young disabled people is often characterised by poor liaison between different agencies and professions, and young people are often not involved in planning for their own future

(commonly because there are very few options for them to choose between).

This emerges from a paper drawing on a range of recent research projects which suggests that the topics covered in transition planning may not be those that are most important to young people and their families. Written information is not readily available nor accessible in appropriate formats. The professionals with whom they are in touch may be unaware of the kind of information young people want.

Professionals may not recognise the important role of the family and community in the transition to adulthood, and young people with the highest levels of need may need to move away when there is inadequate local service provision. Although making and keeping friends is often seen as the most important aspect of their lives to young people, assessments, reviews and services rarely recognise this.

Young people value projects which enable them to access peer support, particularly when project workers share similar experiences and where young people are involved in developing and running activities.

For many young disabled people, further education is an opportunity to compensate for a poor school experience, but training and work experience placements are often treated as 'care' placements rather than a way of gaining qualifications or paid employment.

There is rarely the chance for young disabled people to move into their own homes: they are more likely to be 'slotted into' available service provision, as there is often a lack of suitable housing, and there may be difficulties in bringing together housing with the required support. The only option for leaving their parents' home may often be a move into a 'housing scheme' or group home: the decision about where to live may be determined by available vacancies in services, rather than by young people's choices about where to live.

The paper offers a range of suggestions for policy and practice initiatives. It concludes that all those working with young disabled people need to understand what the barriers are from the young people's viewpoint.

◆ Young disabled people moving into adulthood; Jenny Morris; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, June 2002.

## Anti-racist crime campaign urged to reassure minorities

Scotland's minority ethnic communities are not always confident that racist incidents are taken seriously enough, according to research published by the Scottish Executive's Central Research Unit.

Although the statutory authorities demonstrate a genuine will to tackle racist crime, the report says, a great deal remains to be done to put policies into effective practice.

This research was commissioned to evaluate the impact and use of the new offences of racially aggravated behaviour and racially-aggravated harassment introduced by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

The report recommends the Scottish Executive to consider a publicity drive against racism and racist crime, similar to the Zero Tolerance campaign against domestic violence. The distinction between racist crimes and non-criminal racist incidents should be made clear to the public, as the current situation may create confusion and

lead to criticism of official agencies where racist incidents are not prosecuted, it says.

It also suggests that a standard definition of racist incidents and crimes and a standard format for recording them should be used by all Scottish police forces. Routine feedback to victims of racist crime should be given a higher priority by the Procurator Fiscal Service, which should ensure that relevant details of common law racist aggravations are stored on its computers.

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration should jointly develop a policy for dealing with young people aged under 16 who have been referred to the Children's Reporter or Children's Hearings because of racist offences.

◆ Racist crime and victimisation in Scotland; Crime and Criminal Justice Research Findings No. 58; by Ian Clark and Susan Moody, University of Dundee; Scottish Executive Central Research Unit; [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)

## Conflicting views over misuse of alcohol in Scotland

A summary of the evidence on alcohol misuse in Scotland suggests that children are drinking more and that more women are drinking over the weekly sensible limits.

There are also concerns about the ways in which alcohol is sold and promoted in Scotland and about patterns and locations of drinking, such as binge drinking and heavy weekend drinking.

Tackling alcohol misuse has been identified as a priority by the Scottish Executive. But some trends in the use of alcohol in Scotland are still causing concern.

Although alcohol misuse is now widely seen as causing harmful consequences to the individual and society generally, there remain conflicting views about alcohol in Scotland, as alcohol plays a major part in social activity and heavy drinking and drunkenness are still perceived by some to be socially acceptable.

The evidence collected suggests that the response required to alcohol problems is multi-faceted and should involve a holistic approach which locates alcohol in its social, legal and political context and which focuses on responsible drinking.

◆ Towards a plan for action on alcohol misuse: summary of evidence; Sheila Henderson, Reid-Howie Associates; Health and Community Care Research Programme Research Findings No.11; Central Research Unit

## Special priorities needed in emergency duty social work

Current models of prioritisation and assessment cannot be applied to out-of-hours emergency work, research suggests. EDT workers need expertise across a range of social work, and have to make judgments quickly, on the basis of limited evidence.

This research looks at the role of emergency duty workers, and presents some interim outcomes of ongoing work. It suggests that the variability of priorities and assessments made by duty workers is greater than might be expected.

The paper suggests that the smallest number

## Risks of sexual abuse in residential accommodation

Studies conducted by the authors suggest that the inadequate ways in which sexual behaviour in children's homes is perceived and managed compounds the problems of both the sexually abusive and non-abusive adolescents placed there. There is a continuum of abusive sexual behaviour prevalent in children's homes, in which such behaviour is often seen as 'normal'.

Research undertaken in two local authority children's homes in England found that sexual activity was rarely consensual, reciprocal or non-exploitative. Many of the young women had previously been sexually abused, and exchanged sex for commodities including money, drugs or cigarettes. Young men and women were also at risk of being sexually targeted, abused or groomed for abuse.

There were numerous incidents of peer sexual abuse, which became normalised and accepted by the children. Initiation ceremonies involving boys performing unwanted sexual acts on the girls were viewed by the girls as more of a joke than abuse. Females were often seen by males as existing for their sexual and physical pleasure. Homophobic peer abuse was rife.

Residential staff responses also affect children's sexual behaviour and understanding. Grassroots residential workers had little support, training, policies or guidelines to help them deal with these issues. The most common staff response to sexuality was denial. When they did intervene, it often involved punitive responses and the stopping of any detected activity, without any discussion with the young people.

The research revealed that sexuality issues were mishandled, and that sexually abusive and abused children were rarely dealt with in a sensitive and therapeutic manner.

◆ Adolescents who sexually abuse and residential accommodation: issues of risk and vulnerability; Lorraine Green and Helen Masson; British Journal of Social Work, Vol 32, No 2.

of social workers is dealing with the highest ratio of referrals across Britain, in the most 'hazardous' circumstances, with the most 'dangerous' service users, yet with the least professional, personal and administrative support. The Emergency Duty Team (EDT) intervention is based on minimal information, discussion and worker support, yet may have maximum impact for the service user. Workers need to make speedy decisions, with limited information and without prior knowledge of the service user.

Research methods included an autobiographical diary compiled over three years, questionnaires sent to 23 EDT workers in one local authority in England, semi-structured interviews with the workers, a literature review, and a longitudinal study of EDT referrals. The differences experienced by workers on duty outside office hours are highlighted.

They cannot take a colleague on a visit with them, or share issues with their manager. They may be following-up more than one priority at any time. They may therefore undertake ill-informed, incomplete and rushed assessments, without being able to gather information from other individuals and agencies. Decisions are made on the basis of insufficient information, which may come from people who do not themselves know the subject. The initial assessment and prioritisation process is therefore fraught with difficulties and inconsistencies.

Twenty three workers from the same authority were sent a questionnaire, followed up by a semi-structured interview. They were asked to

prioritise a range of six generic referrals, and indicate the order in which they would visit them. No two EDT workers agreed on the order in which they would deal with these referrals, nor was there agreement on whether all the referrals merited a visit by EDT. On a busy shift, the EDT worker's location may determine whether a visit is made. They may estimate how long a piece of work will take, and the degree of risk. More risks and less intervention occur on busy shifts than on quiet ones, even given the same referral details.

When deciding what course of action to take, the EDT worker takes into account the notions of danger, risk, and threat to life and limb; the working definition the worker has of the role of the EDT (an emergency service only, or an extension of daytime provision); whether the situation can be resolved over the phone; the statutory duties involved; the worker's definition of 'significant' and 'harm', the length of time it will take to 'box-off' the more straightforward referrals before attending to the others; the worker's location and potential travelling time; and whether the matter can wait until the next day.

There is no time to consult assessment schedules or detailed proformas. A set of relevant guiding principles and a specific framework for the EDT is needed. Schedules could be specifically designed, covering the various specialist areas, and geared to the need of EDT workers.

◆ Important yet ignored: problems of 'expertise' in emergency duty social work; Derek Clifford and Glen Williams, *British Journal of Social Work* Vol 32, No 2.

The Scottish Executive is keen to publicise recent, relevant research about social work. If you know about such work, please send details to the Social Work Services Inspectorate, 1C North, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ. Mark your envelope 'Research into Practice'.

*RESEARCH INTO practice* is published by the Scottish Executive every two months as a contribution to good practice and debate within the profession. It can be freely photocopied. Extra copies can be ordered from: Gwen Smith, Social Work Services Inspectorate, 1-C North, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ. Tel: 0131-244 3737. Fax: 0131-244 0481. E-mail: [Gwen.Smith@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Gwen.Smith@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

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**SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE**

# Sites for Scotland: Social Work Internet Bulletin

## Number 5, Summer 2002 – CHILD PROTECTION

Welcome to the fifth reSearchWeb internet bulletin for Scotland. This bulletin includes a selection of Scottish and UK-wide internet resources on child protection issues.

**Errata:** *Sites for Scotland: Social Work Internet Bulletin 4 – Sensory Impairment.* Due to a printing error the heading 'Deaf organisations' was omitted. This resulted in entries appearing under 'Blind and visual impairment organisations'.

The Scottish Council on Deafness points out that it is unhappy with the term 'hearing impairment'.

### In a hurry? Try these first.

- <http://www.children1st.org.uk> Children 1st is one of Scotland's leading child care charities which works to support families under stress and protect children from abuse. The site provides details of services and projects, news bulletins and factsheets to download as well as information about the telephone advice line ParentLine Scotland.
- [http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/CH\\_Home.asp](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/CH_Home.asp) NSPCC Inform contains details of research, information briefings, policy updates and also maintains a free email alert service. An excellent way for trainers and practitioners to keep up-to-date.

### Central Government

- <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/childprotection/> Provides information on the Scottish Executive's Child Protection Review.
- <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/> Scottish Executive Statistics. Use the search facility to find recent statistics on child protection.
- <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialwork/swsil/> Social Work Services Inspectorate site includes details of a tool kit for the safer recruitment and selection of staff working with children.

### Campaigning and Voluntary Organisations

- <http://www.aberlour.org.uk/> The site of the Aberlour Childcare Trust provides details of services operating throughout Scotland, including work with vulnerable children and their families.
- <http://www.barnardos.co.uk/> Barnardos covers the whole of the UK and includes details of campaigns and projects operating in Scotland.
- <http://www.baspcan.org.uk/> The website of the British Association for

the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect is aimed at all professionals working in child protection. Includes details of conferences, the association's journal *Child Abuse Review*, and an email discussion forum.

- <http://www.childline.org.uk/> Childline is a free a 24-hour telephone helpline for children and young people in the UK. The website itself should not be overlooked as it contains a wealth of useful advice and information sheets to download. Separate pages for adults and children.
- <http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk> Children in Scotland is the national agency for organisations and individuals working with children and their families in Scotland. The site includes details of the Scottish Parenting Forum and recent research.
- <http://www.ccpas.co.uk/> The Churches Child Protection Advisory Service is an independent Christian charity advising churches and children's organisations on child protection policy and safe practice issues. It produces a wide range of resources to purchase, and the site also includes online newsletters and

details of its services, including a 24-hour helpline.

- <http://www.kidscape.org.uk> Kidscape focuses on preventative policies to keep children safe from harm or abuse. The site has separate sections for children, parents and teachers and contains a wide range of factsheets and links. Well worth a look.
- <http://www.nchafc.org.uk/> The work of NCH Action for Children includes projects offering therapeutic support for sexually abused children and their non-abusing relatives. The website also contains details of publications and campaigns.
- <http://www.nspcc.org.uk> Although the NSPCC does not cover Scotland in its remit, its site contains useful advice pages and downloadable leaflets. Also includes details of the FULL STOP campaign.
- <http://www.nolanreview.org.uk/> Provides details of the independent Review of Child Protection in the Catholic Church in England and Wales, chaired by the Rt Hon the Lord Nolan. Includes full text of the final report.

## Bullying

- <http://www.antibullying.net> The Anti-Bullying Network was established by the Scottish Executive to enable teachers, parents and young people to share ideas about how bullying should be tackled. The site has separate sections for children, parents and teachers containing advice, information and full text resources.
- <http://www.bullying.co.uk/> Provides information and extensive links.
- <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/bullying/> Maintained by the Department for Education and Skills, with the DFES anti-bullying pack *Don't Suffer in Silence* available to download.
- <http://www.scre.ac.uk/bully/> The Bullying at School Information website has been set up by the Scottish Council for Research in Education to provide information for pupils and teachers.

## Internet

- <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/clickthinking/> ClickThinking: Personal Safety on the Internet is a Scottish Executive website including useful contacts, resources and websites to alert children, their carers and teachers to the risks of using the Internet.
- <http://www.internetwatch.org.uk> The Internet Watch Foundation is an independent non-profit organisation established to address

the problem of illegal material on the internet, with particular reference to child pornography. Includes guidance for parents and children

- <http://www.netsmartz.org/> An educational resource for parents and children on how to stay safe on the Internet. Includes an interactive module for children.
- <http://www.nch.org.uk/itok/> The site of the NCH IT OK Campaign. Includes an informative section on Internet safety.

## Physical punishment

- <http://www.childrenareunbeatable.org.uk/> The website of the Children are Unbeatable Alliance includes details of the campaign and updates on developments in Scotland.

## Child Protection in Sport

- <http://www.sportprotects.org.uk> Child Protection in Sport Unit is a collaboration between the NSPCC and the Sports Councils in England and Northern Ireland. The site contains factsheets and briefing papers relevant to the UK as a whole.
- <http://www.sportscotland.org.uk/contents/whatwedo/youthsport/childprotection.htm> The Sports Scotland website includes some basic principles for sports organisations when setting up a child protection policy.

## Survivors of Abuse

- <http://www.havoca.org> Help for Adult Victims Of Child Abuse provides help, support and information to any adult who is suffering from past childhood abuse.
- <http://www.napac.org.uk/> The site of the National Association for People Abused in Childhood provides information for survivors of abuse. Includes information on relaxation techniques and counselling.
- <http://www.popan.org.uk/> The site of the Prevention of Professional Abuse Network (POPLAN) contains newsletters, factsheets and details of available services for people who have been abused.

Please let us know your views on this bulletin using the contact details below or through the feedback form at [www.researchweb.org.uk](http://www.researchweb.org.uk)

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