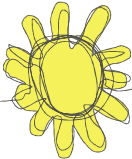



The State of Child Neglect in the UK

Kate Mulley
Head of Policy and Research
Action for Children





as long as it takes





Research questions

- Do we know how many children are currently experiencing neglect in the UK?
- How good are we at recognising children who are at risk of, or are experiencing neglect?
- How well are we helping children at risk of, or currently experiencing neglect?



Action for Children

- Action for Children helps the most vulnerable and neglected children and young people in the UK
- We are campaigning to tackle child neglect because:
 - Child neglect is a major feature of life in the UK
 - It is the main reason for child protection registrations (46% in England): and these figures are just the tip of the iceberg
 - Studies suggest that up to 10% of children experience neglect
 - It has a devastating impact on children's lives



Methodology

- Collation of UK statistics about children already 'officially' labelled as neglected, children in need and those affected by parental substance misuse, mental health issues and domestic abuse
- Analysis of policy documents
- Survey of local authorities and LSCB's across the UK
- Focus groups
- Online poll:
 - 2,062 / 3,263 adults in the general public
 - 2,174 / 2,153 professionals (including social workers, police, health professionals and teachers)


The annual reviews into child neglect

- Undertaken by Action for Children in partnership with the University of Stirling
- A series of annual reviews to gauge the current situation on child neglect and monitor the effects of changes in national and local policy and practice
- We have published two UK reviews and a Scottish extension of the 2011 review

How many children are currently experiencing neglect?

- It is relatively easy to find out about the *tip* of the iceberg.
 - In both reviews neglect is the most common reason for children being made subject to a child protection plans 42-49%
- Less than half of the areas surveyed could give us figures about the *rest* of the iceberg
 - Data is not collected or is inaccurate
 - This makes it impossible to plan effective services to meet the needs of neglected children
- Local areas do not consistently know if services are working (there has been some progress but this needs embedding)



The public are increasingly worried about neglect, but do not always report it



- The overwhelming majority of the adults agreed that people should become involved where they have concerns a child is being neglected
- Fear of the child protection system
- But they do not always report it, only 67% told anyone mainly because of concerns about a lack of evidence
- 44% of people say they do not have enough information about who to contact, with 52% stating they would like information from a government website



Conclusion



- Greater recognition and an increasing desire to take action
- But neglect remains a major cause for concern
 - The policy intention to shift to early help has not been embedded
 - The interface between social care and universal services is a major point of tension
- We are still a long way from meeting neglected children's needs



Are children getting help early enough?



- There is a shared concern and desire to tackle child neglect
- Professionals know who these children are but struggle to respond as effectively as they would like
- Around half of professionals feel that there are barriers which make it difficult to intervene in suspected cases of neglect
- The reasons given for this were primarily around a lack of available services and resources
- Staff stretched beyond capacity
- Rather than slipping through the net, children are, in effect, stuck in it (unhelpful thresholds)



Recommendations



- Increase early intervention services
- Revise the inspection framework and conduct a thematic review on child neglect focused on early intervention
- Implement the integrated child health and welfare check
- Help the public to seek help for children they are worried about



The interface between universal and more targeted services



- Just 12% of those in a universal role offered a service themselves
- The value of universal services in identifying and tackling neglect needs to be recognised and understood
- Intervention has to be within a model that does not split 'child protection' from 'family support'
- Effective family support is protection, effective protection is supportive.



Making the link to practice:



Research tells us to focus on:

- Early intervention
- Home visiting
- Relationship building within families
- Being explicit about concerns about neglect
- Addressing the complexity of neglect by dealing with more than one issue at a time
- Long term approaches
- Evidence based programmes



The Action for Children UK Neglect Project



- We commissioned the University of Salford to work with a number of our services to review the impact of our targeted family support interventions in addressing child neglect
- The purpose of the research was to identify which interventions correlated with successful outcomes for children under the age of 8
- This UK wide evaluation ran from 2008 – 2012



Learning form the research: what worked



- A combination of parenting programmes and home-visiting was the mainstay of intervention.
- The vital significance of staff being able to form relationships with parents hostile to other interventions.
- Addressing the complexity of the problem
- Skills and support for practitioners
- The Action for Children Assessment Tool enabled practitioners to establish a joint understanding of problems and to plan for staged improvements. It also provided a valuable source of evidence of objective assessment and review.
- Early intervention was vital (early age and early stage)



Evaluation of the Action for Children UK Neglect Project



- The study included 85 cases of children under 8 years of age in seven centres across the UK
- Data was collected between 2008 and 2012 through quantitative recording of the level of concern about neglect
- Review of textual data in files was undertaken for detail of issues on referral, specific interventions, and evidence of outcome for the child
- Serial review of the files and scores allowed for the longitudinal recording of progress, or lack of it, in each case
- Data analysis centred on identification of recurring factors and patterns of factors, with correlation of presenting factors, interventions, and outcomes.



Conclusions



- The study demonstrated the ability to intervene successfully in most cases of neglect, even when neglect was a most serious concern.
- The ability and willingness on the part of parents to engage with services was a crucial factor in deciding whether progress would be made or children taken into care.
- In cases where parents refused or were unable to respond positively, children benefited from an expedited move into care.
- Further work is needed to investigate the factors in parents that support or militate against a positive response to offers of help for efficiency in the approach to borderline cases to be enhanced.



Findings from the UK Neglect Project



- Prevention of or improvement in the level of concern about neglect was shown in 79%, and in only 21% was no improvement made.
- In 59% of cases, concern about neglect was removed completely.
- In a further 9%, intervention to prevent the expected development of neglect was successful.
- In the remaining 32%, concern about neglect remained on closure of the case. Most of these resulted in children being taken into care.
- In cases where parents refused or were unable to respond positively, children benefited from an expedited move into care



What next?



- Innovative services and funding solutions
 - Family Partners
 - Taking our practice to a higher level of impact achievement
- Hard hitting campaign and influencing
 - Action on recommendations
- Sharing learning
 - Training
 - Action on Neglect

