

# **All Babies Count Campaign**

**NSPCC Northern Ireland Briefing**

**The vulnerability of children under 1**

**November 2011**

## Introduction

This paper has been developed to support NSPCC's All Baby's Count Campaign which has been launched across the UK to highlight the vulnerability of under 1s. It will see the launch of awareness-raising materials on the vulnerability of babies, research and the development of new services and projects.

## Campaign Background and rationale

Both international<sup>1</sup> and UK evidence consistently show that babies under one are more at risk of fatal injury, physical abuse and neglect than any other age group<sup>2345</sup>. While there is no single explanation of child maltreatment parental problems such as mental illness, domestic abuse and drug and alcohol misuse are commonly identified risk factors which can increase infant vulnerability<sup>67</sup>. Crying can also present a major challenge for many parents and is recognised as a primary trigger for the physical abuse of young children.

For most parents the 1<sup>st</sup> year of their child's life is a wonderful and exciting time, a time in which they watch their child develop and the bond between parent and child grows and deepens. However, we also know that the first year of a child's life can bring a number of stresses for parents, particularly first time parents. Lack of sleep and concerns over their child's health are common concerns but many parents are also struggling with other stressors. Mental health problems are common and 1 in 5 babies in NI are living in families where one or either parent/caretaker is at high risk of depression or serious anxiety<sup>8</sup>. Mothers who have experienced violence from their partner or who report hazardous levels of alcohol consumption are also at increased risk of experiencing mental health difficulties<sup>9</sup>.

Many parents receive high levels of support from partners, family members, friends and professionals, in particular health visitors and GPs. However 8% of mothers in NI report

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation (2007) Preventing child maltreatment in Europe: a public health approach

<sup>2</sup> Smith, K (ed.) et al (2011) Homicides, firearms offences and intimate violence 2009/2010: supplementary volume 2 to crime in England and Wales 2009/2010, London, Home Office.

<sup>3</sup> Sidebotham, P and Fleming, P (2007) Unexpected death in childhood: a handbook for professionals. Chichester: Wiley

<sup>4</sup> Brandon, M., Bailey, S., Belderson, P., Gardner, R., Sidebotham, P., Dodsworth, J., Warren, C. & Black, J. (2009) Understanding serious case reviews and their impact: a biennial analysis of serious case reviews 2005-2007. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

<sup>5</sup> Brandon, M., Bailey, S., Belderson, P., Gardner, R., Sidebotham, P., Dodsworth, J., Warren, C. & Black, J. (2007) Understanding serious case reviews and their impact: a biennial analysis of serious case reviews 2003-2005. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

<sup>6</sup> Ofsted (2011) The Ages of concern: learning lessons from serious case reviews. London: Ofsted.

<sup>7</sup> Department for Education (2010) Building on the learning from serious case reviews: a two year analysis of child protection database notifications 2007-2009

<sup>8</sup> Statistics generated from analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study, Wave 1, conducted in 2000/1 - weighted by country. - refers to mothers living with a partner (usually the child's father)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. - refers to mothers living with a partner (usually the child's father)

having no-one with whom to share their feelings<sup>10</sup>. Five per cent of mothers in NI also reported that their child's crying was problematic for them and 3% had constant or very frequent feelings of annoyance or irritation when caring for their baby<sup>11</sup>.

Most parents want to do the best for their children. However there are some parents who are more vulnerable and who find it hard to provide the care and attention their baby needs. Sadly there are also some who will fail to protect their children or harm them. Currently close to one in ten children on the Child Protection Register in NI are under the age of one<sup>12</sup> and over the past 5 years, 6 babies have been the victims of homicide<sup>13</sup>. However, the NSPCC believes, with the right support, most parents can be helped to care for their children.

### Policy context in Northern Ireland

In recent years in Northern Ireland there has been a range of significant policy developments relating to children and families. These include:

- Ten Year Strategy for Children & Young People (OFMDFM)
- Families Matter Strategy (DHSSPS)
- Regional Children's Services Plan (Health and Social Care Board)
- Review of Health Visiting and School Nursing in NI 2009-2011/12 a consultation document (DHSSPS)
- Healthy Futures (DHSSPS)

We have seen the development of new structures such as the Public Health Agency and the creation of integrated Children's Services Planning within the context of the 10 year Executive Children and Young People's Strategy, family support hubs and proposals to designate Northern Ireland as an early intervention zone. The outworking of the Families Matter Strategy and renewed focus on health and social care prevention along with the development of the role of the Health Visitor provides opportunities to develop early intervention work and preventative strategies with under 1s in particular.

Currently in NI, as in other parts of the UK, there is a growing awareness of the importance of early intervention to promote the health and wellbeing of infants and young children. The tragic deaths of six young babies and incidents of babies suffering significant injuries at the hands of their carers has raised public concern in recent years in Northern Ireland. This has been reflected in statements made by the Health Minister recognising the need to tackle inequalities in health and social care, develop interagency working and the importance of early intervention approaches.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. - refers to all mothers

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. - refers to all mother

<sup>12</sup> DHSSPS (2011) Children Order Statistics at 31st June 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Data provided by PSNI Statistics Branch

## New NSPCC Services in Northern Ireland

NSPCC is playing its part in the development of services in Northern Ireland with a new service being launched next year initially at the Royal Maternity Hospital. **I Promise my Baby** – is a hospital-based education programme for all new parents, which involves showing them a DVD to help them cope with the stresses of having a new baby, and understand the dangers of shaking a baby. This programme draws inspiration from a similar programme in the US which achieved a dramatic 47% reduction in rates of Non-Accidental Head Injuries.

## What can the Northern Ireland Executive do to protect vulnerable babies?

There are several actions that the NI Executive and NI Government departments could take forward which would help protect babies.

### **1. Provide adequate resources**

To ensure adequate funding continues to be put into early intervention and frontline services working with babies, including both universal health visiting services and more targeted evidence-based programmes such as the Family Nurse Partnership.

### **2. Raise awareness and skills**

Develop, through the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and Public Health Agency (PHA), a strategy which tackles the vulnerability of young babies and helps parents cope with the pressures and responsibilities of new parenthood. This should include access to training and continuous professional development for those working with vulnerable families during pregnancy and infancy, such as GPs and health visitors.

### **3. Review early intervention and prevention programmes**

Identify where there are gaps in current service provision and measure the effectiveness of any current programmes.

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