First generation immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees: learning from case reviews
Summary of risk factors and learning for improved practice

Published case reviews highlight that professionals sometimes struggle to engage with first generation immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Families are often unaware of the services and benefits they are entitled to in the UK or may, for various reasons, be reluctant to make their presence in the country known to the authorities.

The learning from these reviews highlights the importance of putting children's rights as children above any consideration of their immigration status, and professionals should actively promote services to families newly arrived in the UK.

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This briefing summarises the learning from case review reports. It is an analysis by the NSPCC Information Service, highlighting risk factors and key learning for improved practice.
Reasons case reviews were commissioned

This briefing is based on case reviews published since 2010, where parents and/or children who were not born in the UK were the subject of the review and where the reports are sufficiently detailed to be useful for identifying and sharing learning points.

In these case reviews, children died or were seriously injured in the following ways:

- children died following a lengthy period of abuse or neglect, which was not picked up due to social isolation or family movement between countries
- children died or were seriously injured after parents’ legal status left them unable to access the support and care they need
- children killed by parents suffering mental health issues, exacerbated by stress of uncertainty over right to remain and past traumatic experiences.

Moving to a new country can be a stressful and lonely time for parents and children. It presents a number of risk factors for the families involved.

Risk factors for first generation immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees in case reviews

Social and cultural isolation due to lack of a network of family and friends

Families moving to the UK from other parts of the world may lack the network of family and friends that people who have lived here their whole lives have built up.

Language barriers for those who do not speak English
There are a number of risk factors when some or all family members do not speak English.

Lack of knowledge of entitlements and means of accessing support

New arrivals to the UK may not be aware of the services and benefits which they are entitled to.

Transient population increases difficulty in services ability to offer consistent support

Newly arrived families may be relocated to different parts of the country. Moving between local authority areas makes it hard for services to build up relationships with families or ensure consistent support.

Uncertainty over right to remain

Families may have arrived in the UK illegally, or be waiting to find out if they are to be granted asylum. The on-going insecurity can have a considerable effect on mental health. It can also impact families' ability to access public funds; leaving them destitute or homeless.

Families who have not been given the right to remain are less likely to seek help or engage with services, as they will not want any official record of their presence in the country. This seriously limits their access to care, and their ability to access the help and support they need.

A precarious legal status may also leave families unwilling to reveal details of their past experience. Important background information that could help professionals support them may be withheld if it contradicts the story they told on their asylum application.

Trafficking of some families into the country

Some families have arrived in the country through trafficking. This leaves them owing a debt to their traffickers. This limits their ability to speak out, ask for or access help and support.
Periods of separation amongst family

Families sometimes arrive in the UK at different times, leading to periods of separation between parents and children. Some parents struggle to cope with bringing up children without their partner, and families can find it hard to readjust once they have been reunited after a period of time apart.

Exposure to violence and trauma

Some people have left their home countries to escape danger. They may be suffering as a result of their past experiences, for example through post-traumatic stress disorder.

Gaps in knowledge of family history

It can be hard for professionals to build up an accurate chronology of families who have lived in more than one country. Records are not automatically shared between countries, making it hard to identify families where there are pre-existing child protection concerns.

There may also be some uncertainty over children's ages. In some situations, particularly in cases involving child trafficking, a lack of official documentation may lead to children being incorrectly treated as adults, unable to access the protection owed to them by the state.

Learning for improved practice

Sharing records between countries

Professionals should try to build up information relating to newly arrived families by contacting the UK Border Agency or children's services in the family's home country.
Engaging with family members outside the UK

In cases where family members are dispersed it is important to try and contact members of the family from outside the UK who may be able to offer support.

Actively promote services to new arrivals

Professionals should not assume that new arrivals are aware of how to access the support they need in the UK. Families should be helped to navigate the UK health care, education and welfare systems.

Be aware of services available to children whose parents have no recourse to public funds

Children's rights outweigh any consideration of their immigration status. Local authorities have a duty to protect the welfare of all children, and professionals should ensure that children are able to access the support or protection they need.

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Lessons from case reviews published since 2011, where domestic abuse is a

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Lessons from case reviews published since 2010, where culture and faith were
People whose first language is not English: learning from case reviews

Lessons from case reviews published since 2008, where family members do not have English as their first language.

Neglect

Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs. It's dangerous and children can suffer serious and long-term harm.

Domestic abuse

Witnessing domestic abuse is child abuse, and teenagers can suffer domestic abuse in their relationships.
More information and resources

National case review repository

Working together with the Association of Independent LSCB Chairs to make finding the learning from case reviews published in 2014 and 2013 easy to find.

Find out more

PDF / 278 KB

Research briefing: harmful sexual behaviour (HSB)

This research briefing aims to help professionals update their knowledge of the most recent research on HSB.

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