

How safe are our children? 2017

REPORT BRIEFING: WALES CONTEXT



Introduction

The NSPCC has published the *How safe are our children? 2017* report, our fifth annual overview of child protection in the UK. The report sets out 20 different indicators, providing an overview of the child protection landscape and collating the most up-to-date data that exists across each of the four nations in the UK. Compiling this data is part of the NSPCC's commitment to gathering evidence. It helps us to track the progress of how we are keeping children safe, and sets out what we need to do to protect children.

The data reported shows that collectively we are all doing more to try to keep children safe. It does not show the number of children who may be suffering abuse or neglect and are not known to the system. In 2011, the NSPCC estimated that for every child who was subject to a child protection plan or on a register, another eight were experiencing maltreatment but not getting the support they need. But the lack of recent prevalence data means that the true extent of child abuse and neglect today is unknown. This is why we are calling on the UK Government to launch a new study to assess the extent of abuse and neglect.

This briefing accompanies the UK-wide *How safe are our children? 2017* report. It draws out key data in Wales and outlines the trends in this data, the policy landscape and child protection priorities across Wales.

Neglect

For more than a decade, neglect has been the most common reason for a child to be on the child protection register (CPR) in Wales. Neglect remains stubbornly high as a concern and in 2015/16 it was the sole reason given for 45 per cent of children on a child protection register in Wales. This is up from 40 per cent of all children on a register in 2014/15.

Over the past five years we have also seen an increase in recorded offences of cruelty and neglect of children under 16 by a parent or carer in Wales. The number of recorded offences in 2015/16 was 109 per cent more than in 2010/11. In 2015/16, there were 585 recorded offences of cruelty and neglect, which is a 41 per cent increase in recorded offences since the previous year.

Neglect continues to be the most common concern for professionals and adults contacting the NSPCC helpline. Across the UK, there were 19,448 contacts in total throughout 2016/17. In 2,556 contacts the helpline provided adults concerned about neglect with advice. The

Key findings

- The number of recorded cruelty and neglect offences in Wales continues to rise. The number of recorded offences in 2015/16 is 109 per cent more than in 2010/11.
- There has been a 50 per cent increase in police recorded offences for "Obscene Publications" – including the production, distribution and viewing of child abuse images – in Wales in the past year.
- In Wales in 2015/16, there was a 25 per cent rise in the number of recorded sexual offences against children under 16 compared to 2014/15.
- In Wales there has been an upward trend in the proportion of children on a child protection register (CPR) due to emotional abuse. Together with the consistently high numbers of children on a register due to neglect, this means that 79 per cent of children on a register in 2015/16 were there for reasons other than physical or sexual abuse.
- Mental/emotional health were the top reasons why young people from Wales contacted Childline.

remaining 16,882 were serious enough to result in referrals to external agencies. Overall, the number of contacts has increased by 61 per cent over the past five years. The biggest leap has come from referrals which have increased by 96 per cent.

This rise in reporting and the number of children on the child protection register could be the result of the public and professionals feeling more confident at spotting and responding to signs of neglect. However, due to a lack of data on prevalence we cannot be certain of the underlying extent of neglect suffered by children in Wales.

Sexual abuse

All UK nations saw an increase in the number of recorded sexual offences against children in 2015/16. The rate of recorded sexual offences across the UK has doubled since 2005/06, and this year we have seen the highest number of recorded offences in the last decade.

In Wales, there were 2,329 recorded sexual offences

against children under 16 in 2015/16, which is a 25 per cent increase on the previous year. There has been an increase in the majority of sexual offences in Wales over the last year, with notable changes including a 52 per cent increase in rape of a male under 13 (from 95 offences to 144), and a 40 per cent increase in sexual activity involving a child under 13 (from 234 offences to 328). Similar to the trend seen in other nations, recorded sexual offences against under 16s in Wales have increased significantly over the past five years, with a 145 per cent rise since 2010/11. This data only reflects the year in which an offence was reported and not when it was committed. A proportion of offences may not be recent. It is not possible to say how many children may be sexually abused today due to a lack of available information on prevalence beyond the cases reported.

Our helpline data from across the UK, shows that there has been a 23 per cent rise in contacts about sexual abuse in 2015/16, as part of a consistent year-on-year trend, suggesting that adults feel more confident about reporting sexual abuse.

We welcome the recent work which has focused on tackling sexual abuse in institutions, and child sexual exploitation in communities. However, it is important to note that NSPCC research has shown that 90 per cent of sexually abused children were abused by someone they knew, and other research has shown that a third of sexual abuse is committed by other children and young people.

Mental health

Data from Childline shows that mental health is a key concern for children across the UK. Our figures reveal What's changed since the last UK prevalence survey?: 2009/10 – 2015/16



common reason for Childline counselling sessions in 2016/17 for both the UK as a whole and for Wales in particular.

In 2016/17, for the seventh year running, there was an increase in the number of Childline counselling sessions with children across the UK about suicidal issues.

Online abuse

For children there is no distinction between their online and

offline lives. While the internet can be extremely beneficial for children, it can also leave them vulnerable to risks. The data charting online abuse and risk remains an emerging area, however we are steadily gaining a clearer picture of children's experiences through research such as the NSPCC's Net Aware report, analysis of Childline sessions, and police recording of "Obscene Publications" offences.

We are increasingly seeing children turning to Childline in order to receive support about the issues they face online. Our data shows that online safety and abuse including: cyberbullying, child sexual exploitation online and sexting are all growing areas of concern for young people talking to Childline Counsellors. In 2016/17, Childline delivered 12,248 counselling sessions about online safety and abuse across the UK. This is a 9 per cent increase from 2015/16. Of these, 5,103 sessions mentioned cyberbullying, a 12 per cent increase on the previous year. Childline also delivered 2,132 sessions on online child sexual exploitation. This is an increase of 44 per cent from 2015/16. In 2016/17, there were 221,840 page views of the Childline website explore pages about sexting, making this the most viewed topic for the fourth consecutive year.

For our Net Aware study, the NSPCC asks around 1,700 children aged 11 to 18 across the UK to review the top social networking sites, apps and games that young people are using. In 2015/16 young people were most likely to say that they had seen bullying on social networks, while in 2016/17 violence and hatred was the most common type of inappropriate content, with 30 per cent of young people's reviews reporting this content. There were 21 per cent of reviews reporting seeing sexual content and 17 per cent reported seeing adult or illegal material, including content that related to gambling, drugs or alcohol.

In Wales, we have seen a significant rise in recorded offences relating to "Obscene Publications": there were 881 recorded offences in 2015/16, which is a 50 per cent increase in recorded offences since the previous year.

Pioneering research by Swansea University and its Digital Economy Centre (CHERISH-DE) has explored how groomers operating online communicate with their victims. NSPCC Cymru/Wales has partnered with Swansea University to ensure that cutting edge research in linguistics on this topic is informing professional practice. Later this year we will be launching a set of materials based on this research to inform and improve professional practice on Online Grooming. This partnership project forms part of the NSPCC's approach to ensuring that we harness the latest knowledge to achieve equal protection between the online and offline worlds by setting out consistent child protection and safeguarding practices across all areas of a child's life.

Child protection referrals and children in need

A referral is the first stage of the child protection process when aspects of a child's life give cause for concern. There were 33,536 referrals accepted for the year ending 31 March 2016 in Wales. Since 2009/10 there has been a downward trend in the numbers of accepted referrals in Wales.

A child is in need if they are unlikely to achieve or maintain, or have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services; or if the child's development or health is likely to be significantly impaired or further impaired without the provision of such services. There were 10,060

children in need due to abuse or neglect in Wales at 31 March 2016. This comprises 53 per cent of the total children in need in Wales. The rate per 10,000 was 160.

Children in the child protection system

There were 3,059 children on a child protection register in Wales on 31 March 2016, and 4,400 children were added to a child protection register during that year. Where a child has moved onto the register several times during the year, each registration is recorded. In Wales, between 2002 and 2016 the number of children on a child protection register increased by 60 per cent and the number of children added to the register per year increased by 85 per cent. Wales had the second largest rate of children in the child protection system across the UK.

In Wales, neglect remains to be the main reason for being on the child protection register. The second most common reason for being on the child protection register is emotional abuse. The proportion of children on the child protection register due to emotional abuse has declined over the last two years, following a significant increase between 2007 and 2014. Children on the child protection register due to either emotional abuse or neglect comprise 79 per cent of children on the register in Wales. This means that 79 per cent of children on a register in 2015/16 were there due to non-contact (sexual or physical) abuse.

The number of children who have been put back on the register for a second or subsequent time in Wales has increased this year to 18 per cent of children on a child protection register in the year to 31 March 2016. This percentage has remained fairly constant since 2008/09, being between 15 and 18 per cent. These re-registration rates can suggest that the reason to remove a child from a plan was premature or that the circumstances in a child's life have changed.

Looked after children

Looked after children are those children who are cared for by the state. Children might be taken into care after suffering abuse or neglect, or because they are at risk of abuse. Children might also become looked after if a parent is ill or disabled or if they are absent. The state can also look after children on a voluntary basis for a short period of time with agreement of the parent/s.

Between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016, 1,305 children became looked after due to abuse or neglect in Wales. On 31 March 2016 there were 3,720 children looked after due to abuse or neglect in Wales. Although the number of looked after children at the end of March 2016 has increased from the number at the same time in 2015 (3,655), the total is still lower than the peak in 2013 (3,925). The proportion of children in care due to abuse or neglect has consistently been between 65 and 68 per cent for the past five years.

Fighting for every childhood

The evidence presented in *How safe are our children? 2017*

What's changed since the last UK prevalence survey?: 2009/10 – 2015/16

Number of children becoming subject to a child protection plan/being added to a child protection register (indicator 13)



indicates that together we are doing more as members of the public and as people working with children to fight for every childhood. We know this is making a big difference, yet more could be done. The lack of recent data means that the true extent of child abuse and neglect today is unknown. We do not know if levels are increasing or decreasing. To prevent child abuse we need robust knowledge of what is happening in children's lives.

While Childline and research give us important insights into what's happening in children's lives, we need the big picture too. Without it, it's difficult to demonstrate the scale of the task and the resources needed to support the child protection system. It makes it hard to target the scarce resources that we do have where they are needed most. The potential impact of abuse on a child's life – and on the health of wider society – is too significant to leave to guesswork based on old data.

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THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW
OF CHILD PROTECTION IN THE UK

[NSPCC.ORG.UK/HOWSAFE](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/how-safe)