

How safe are our children? 2017

REPORT BRIEFING: ENGLAND 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 not getting the support they need. 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 England and outlines the trends in this data, the policy landscape, and child protection priorities in England.

Neglect

Neglect remains the most common reason for a child to be subject to a child protection plan. This amounts to 23,150 children in England, or 46 per cent of the total. This number has increased by 25 per cent in real terms over five years, rising from 18,590 in 2011. The figure remained roughly the same as a proportion over that period.

There were 12,352 recorded cruelty and neglect offences in 2015/16 in England, a rate that has doubled since 2010/11.

Neglect continues to be the most common concern for professionals and adults contacting the NSPCC helpline. There were 19,448 contacts across the UK in total throughout 2016/17. In 2,556 contacts the helpline provided adults concerned about neglect with advice. The remaining 16,882 were serious enough to result in referrals to external agencies. The biggest leap has come from referrals, which have increased by 96 per cent.

The rise in reporting and in the number of child protection plans can be the result of the public and professionals

Key findings

- Neglect is the most common reason for contacting the NSPCC helpline. We received 16,809 contacts in England in 2016/17.
- Neglect is also the most common reason for being subject to a child protection plan, amounting to 46 per cent of the total, or 23,150 children.
- Helpline contacts for emotional abuse have increased by 70 per cent over the past five years.
- There were 47,045 police-recorded sexual offences against under 18s in England, more than double in 2011/12.
- Suicide remains one of the top five reasons for Childline counselling sessions.
- The number of children subject to child protection plans in 2016 was 50,310 – a 96 per cent increase since 2002.
- Childline held 12,328 counselling sessions about online safety and abuse in 2016/17. This was a 9 per cent increase from 2015/16.
- The number of police-recorded offences for “Obscene Publications” increased by 64 per cent to 11,992 in 2015/16.

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 England.

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 for the past decade.

There were 47,045 police-recorded sexual offences against under 18s in England in 2015/16, or a rate of 40.3 sexual offences per 10,000 children. This has more than doubled from the 21,443 recorded offences in 2011/12 and the rate of 18.9 per 10,000 children. The data was almost static in the five years leading up to 2011/12.

Looking at specific offences and changes over the past year, the abuse of children through sexual exploitation has increased by 56 per cent from 347 offences to 541, while there has been a 49 per cent increase in sexual grooming of under 16s with a rise from 652 offences to 971.

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



many children may be being sexually abused today due to a lack of available information on prevalence beyond the cases reported.

Across the UK, our helpline data contacts on sexual abuse have seen a rise of 23 per cent in 2015/16, as part of a consistent year-on-year trend, suggesting that adults feel more confident about reporting child sexual abuse.

Mental health and child suicides

Data from Childline shows that mental health is a key concern for children across the UK. Our figures reveal that, across the UK, mental and emotional health issues were the most common reason for Childline counselling sessions with children.

There were 123 suicides where death was recorded as by intentional self-harm and a further 51 deaths of undetermined intent of 15 to 19 year olds in England in 2015. The five-year average suicide rate among 15 to 19 year olds in England was in decline until 2011, but has started to rise in recent years. The combined rate of 41.6 per million 15 to 19 year olds is the highest since 2005, however this figure is down from the high of 58.2 per million recorded in 1991.

Since 2014/15 suicidal feelings was the third most common concern in Childline counselling sessions. In 2016/17, 22,456 children across the UK talked to the service about suicidal concerns. This amounts to 8 per cent of all contacts.

Information on the number of suicides is an important measure of the safety of children and young people, and may often be the result of a combination of other factors such as abuse, neglect, family problems or mental health

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 increasingly see 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. 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 annually asks around 1,700 children aged 11 to 18 from 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.

The number of police-recorded offences for "Obscene Publications" increased by 64 per cent in 2015/16 to 11,992 in England. This is the second year the data has seen a substantial increase, with the figure rising from 4,326 offences in 2013/14 to 7,324 offences in 2014/15.

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 621,470 referrals accepted relating to 547,300 children for the year ending 31 March 2016 in England. There was a slight decrease in the number of referrals and children referred for the second year. However, the number of referrals in England remains higher than those seen in the previous eight years following the increase in 2009/10.

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 199,720 children in need due to abuse or neglect at 31 March 2016, that is, 51 per cent of the total children in need and a rate of 171 per 10,000 children. The total number and rate of children in need due to abuse or neglect has continued to increase every year since 2011/12.

Children in the child protection system

The number of children within the child protection system has increased in all four nations since 2002. In England this is measured by the number of children who are subject to child protection plans. At 31 March 2016 there were a total of 50,310 children subject to a plan, with 63,310 children becoming subject to plans over the course of the year. If a child is subject to more than one child protection plan during the year, each is counted.

The number of children on plans has seen significant increases over the course of several years. Between 2002 and 2016, the number of children on a child protection plan in England has increased by 96 per cent, while the number of children becoming subject to a plan within a given year has increased by 128 per cent.

The main reason for being subject to a child protection plan remains neglect. The proportion of children subject to a child protection plan due to emotional abuse is increasing, and has almost doubled since 2002, rising from 18 per cent to 35 per cent in 2016. Children who are subject to a child protection plan due to either emotional abuse or neglect comprise 81 per cent of all child protection plans in England.

The number of children who have become subject to a child protection plan in England for a second or subsequent time is 18 per cent in the year to 31 March 2016 and this has been increasing slightly every year since 2010/11. 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.

There is evidence that the proportion of children subject to a plan for more than two years is declining. Since 2002 this has decreased from around 10 per cent to fewer than 4 per cent where it has remained at a similar level since 2014/15. This could indicate a reduction in case drifting.

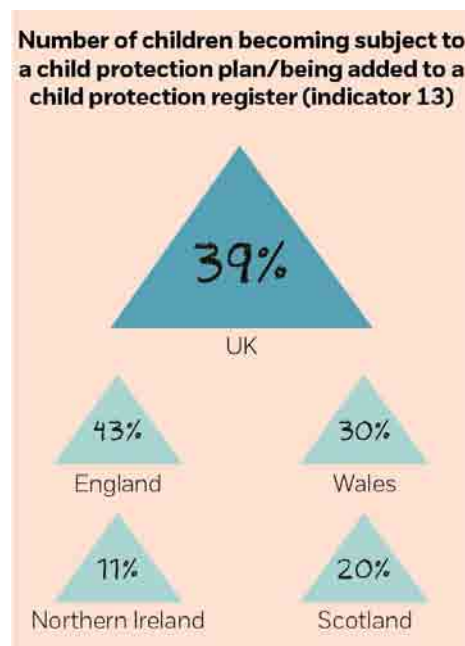
Looked after children

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

There were 42,470 children looked after due to abuse or neglect at 31 March 2016. During the year, 17,440 children became looked after due to abuse or neglect. Sixty per cent of all looked after children in England in 2015/16 were looked after as a result of abuse or neglect. All of these figures are a slight reduction on the previous year.

The proportion of children in care due to abuse or neglect has remained between 60 and 62 per cent for the last decade. The overall number of children looked after due to abuse and neglect has remained relatively stable over the past five years and the data on children starting to be looked after has seen a general increase from 2008

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



Fighting for every childhood

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