



# The relationship between poverty and child abuse and neglect: new evidence

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# The Relationship Between Poverty and Child Abuse and Neglect: New Evidence

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## **Role of poverty as a contributory causal factor in child abuse and neglect now widely accepted**

Aims for this review:

- How exactly does poverty lead to abuse and neglect?
- Is there evidence that deep poverty, persistent poverty, economic insecurity and inequality add to the strength of the relationship?
- How are different groups and different places affected?
- How effectively are national governments and local services engaging with family poverty to prevent or mitigate harm to children?

## What did we find?

- A much stronger evidence base
- 90 papers from 15 countries
- All found a relationship between poverty and abuse
- NB Be careful if transferring evidence from one country to another

## What did we find?

- 18 quasi-experimental studies
- Compared rates of abuse and neglect in 2 large populations with a change in economic circumstances the only difference
- All found statistically significant differences – cumulatively large in effect

## Recommendation 1: more research!

- Disability, poverty and abuse and neglect
- Ethnicity
- Inequality as well as poverty
- Evaluations of interventions

## **Recommendation 2: better engagement with families' socio-economic circumstances by front line services**

- Poverty too often unaddressed, sometimes responses make things worse for families
- This can make families feel their needs are unrecognised, adding to stigma and shame
- Poverty too often seen as background rather than foreground
- Poverty is not one of a list but inextricably connected to other factors in complex ways

## **Recommendation 3: national government has the central responsibility**

- Macro-economic policies: income, benefits, employment, housing
- Anne Longfield: ‘Only the government can act with the speed needed to tackle this crisis. The Chancellor must introduce new emergency measures.’
- Other mid-range contextual policies: social security, housing, employment, immigration
- Social care policy: priorities, funding, courts, data, guidance, Ofsted, workforce planning



## Last word

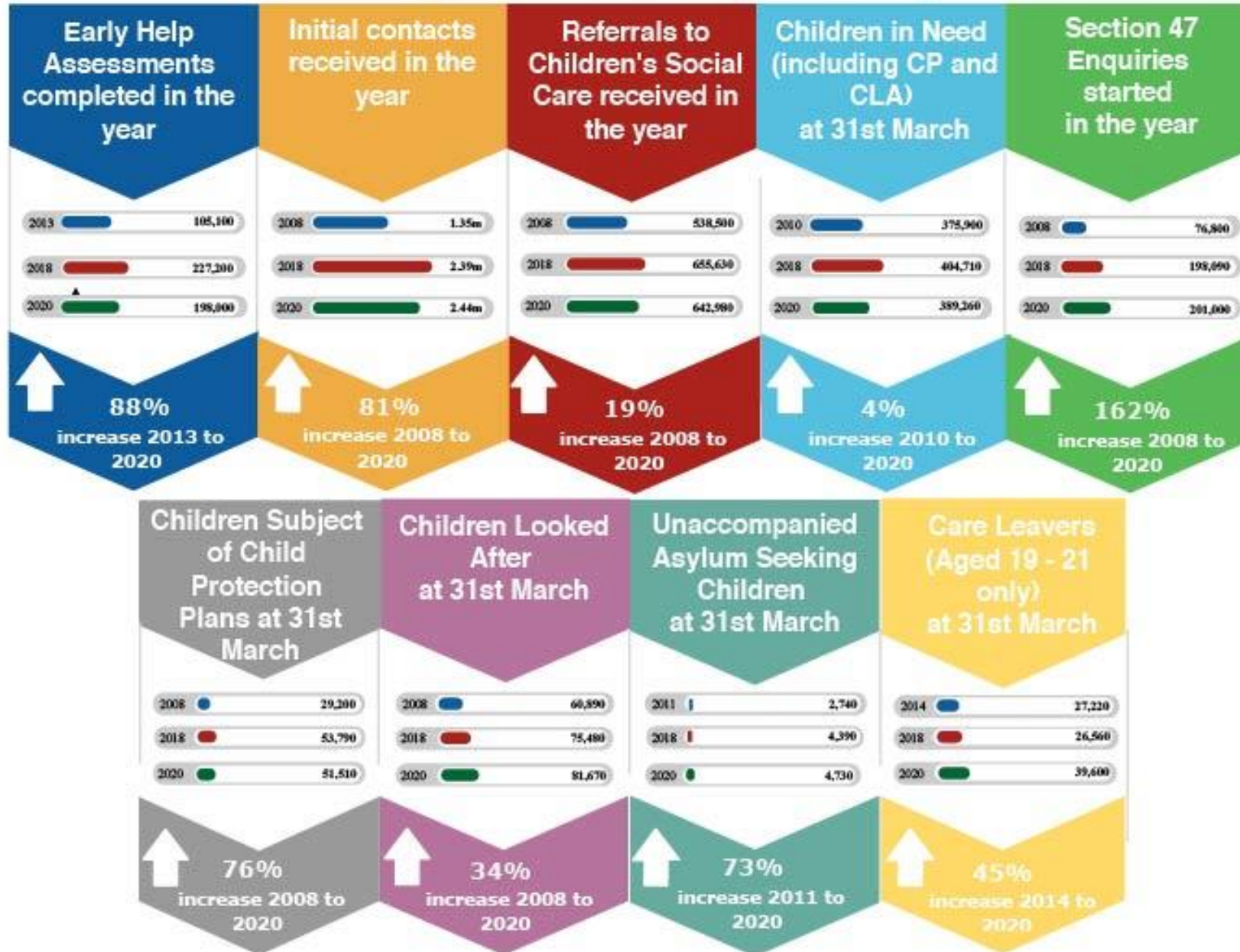
- The tone matters
- Setting the context for children's social care to function effectively – families' basic needs met and real help when you're struggling - is a key challenge for the Care Review
- Understanding better, in conversation with families, to do better

# **Poverty and Child Abuse and Neglect: A Policy and Practice Response**

**Charlotte Ramsden,  
Immediate Past President ADCS and  
Strategic Director of People, Salford**

# Safeguarding Pressures:

## Change in children's services activity



# A National Response

## Immediate Mitigations:

- Furlough
- Free School Meals and Holiday Activity Fund
- Winter Grant

## Long Term solutions:

- Supporting Families Fund and Family Hub
- Pupil Premium
- Children's Social Care Review
- Levelling Up

**This scratches the surface – need a long term Child/Family Poverty Reduction Strategy**

# A Local Response

## Immediate Mitigations:

- Food banks and management of short term grant funding
- Varied investment in Welfare Rights and Debt Advice, plus homelessness prevention

## Long Term solutions:

- Holistic family assessments and interventions at all levels of need
- Multi-agency services including social work aware of the impact of poverty (toxic trio plus one?)
- Expansion of current multi-agency teams for proper response to poverty – true family help
- Expansion of education, employment and skills support
- National and local poverty strategy and investment – true levelling up



# Links to related resources shared by webinar attendees

We have collated these links shared at the webinar, but the content does not necessarily represent the views of the Nuffield Foundation or those of the speakers.

# The “trio of vulnerabilities”

Research and articles on the impact of domestic abuse, mental ill health and substance misuse, often referred to as the ‘toxic trio’

- Bennett, K., Booth, A., Gair, S., Kibet, R., & Thorpe, R. (2020). Poverty is the problem – not parents: so tell me, child protection worker, how can you help? *Children Australia*, 45(4), 207-214. doi:10.1017/cha.2020.39
- Guy C. M. Skinner , Paul W. B. Bywaters, Andy Bilson, Robbie Duschinsky, Keith Clement, Dustin Hutchinson (2021) The ‘Toxic Trio: How good is the evidence base? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 120 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105678>

# The “trio of vulnerabilities”

Research and articles on the impact of domestic abuse, mental ill health and substance misuse, often referred to as the ‘toxic trio’

- Nicholas Kofi Adjei, Daniela K. Schlüter, Viviane S. Straatmann, Gabriella Melis, Kate M. Fleming, Ruth McGovern, Louise M. Howard, Eileen Kaner, Ingrid Wolfe, David C. Taylor-Robinson (2022). Impact of poverty and family adversity on adolescent health: a multi-trajectory analysis using the UK Millennium Cohort Study. *The Lancet Regional Health – Europe*. 13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanepe.2021.100279>.



# The “trio of vulnerabilities”

Recommended article dealing with the impact of domestic abuse, mental ill health and substance misuse, often referred to as the ‘toxic trio’

- Rick Hood, Allie Goldacre, Calum Webb, Paul Bywaters, Sarah Gorin, Keith Clements (2021). Beyond the Toxic Trio: Exploring Demand Typologies in Children’s Social Care. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 51, 6, 1942–1962, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcab058>
- [The 'alarmingly weak' evidence base for the 'toxic trio' - Community Care](#)

# Child poverty

Data, research and contacts linking to the discussion of child poverty

- Data on child poverty in the UK: <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/key-facts/>
- *Social Distance in Social Work: COVID Capsule One* by David Watters: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Social-Distance-Work-COVID-Capsule-ebook/dp/B096YF5GTQ>
- If you are interested in joining the End Child Poverty Coalition, email Rachel Walters (rachel@endchildpoverty.org.uk)

# Overloaded parents

NSPCC video linking to the discussion of 'overload': stresses parents may experience and may make caring for children more difficult



When parents or carers are burdened with stresses like the loss of a job or lack of support, the weight of these problems can cause parents/carers to feel overloaded and make caring for their children more difficult. We can provide social supports that offload these sources of stress, supporting parents in their difficult job of being a parent. (<https://youtu.be/hbRuzRS4AoY>)

# Language and child welfare

The International Parent Advocacy Network, Parent Families Allies Network and Social Work Action Group hosted a webinar on the same day titled: Barriers to relationships in child welfare: why language matters. Here are some of the speakers and their work in this area:

- Tammy Mayes, Co-Chair of PFAN and SWAG | Language in Social Work Campaign: <https://youtu.be/70k6MkxuZRU>
- Dorothy Roberts, author and child welfare expert | Latest book: [Torn Apart: How the child welfare system destroys black families—and how abolition can build a safer world](#)
- Richard Wexler, Executive Director of NCCPR | [Wounded Innocents: The Real Victims of the War Against Child Abuse](#)

# Child neglect in affluent families

The discussion referred to research into cases of child neglect in affluent families. A link to this paper was shared:

- Bernard (2018). Recognizing and addressing child neglect in affluent families. *Child & Family Social Work*. 24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12619>.

# Other links to external resources

Links to other organisations, campaigns and articles shared in the chat:

- In Wirral the council/children's services have introduced the Family Toolbox, aimed at empowering families to seek solutions: <https://familytoolbox.co.uk>
- WinVisible's Disabled Mother's Rights Campaign: <https://winvisibleblog.wordpress.com/disabled-mothers-rights-campaign/>
- Support Not Separation, a campaign group focused on avoiding the removal of children from families: <https://supportnotseparation.blog/>
- Global Women's Strike and Women of Colour GWS campaign for Care Income: <https://globalwomenstrike.net/careincomenow/>