

Two insightful studies re poverty and neglect and current and future requirements of the policy and practice of children's services

Themes

- Those most in need of high-quality services to prevent child maltreatment are least likely to have access to them.
- Challenging dominant and entrenched narratives in England that neither service funding nor deprivation are strong indicators of service quality
- Failure to acknowledge and address their socioeconomic determinants raises doubts about the appropriateness of any restructuring of public services.
- Policies which tackle the deep-rooted issues of failure demand and inequality are needed. This evidence suggests that investment in financial and material support for families, as well as in family support services, may be an effective prescription for addressing these issues and improving service quality.

And

- The current evidence based on measuring child neglect is too weak/limited to effectively inform practice.
- Child neglect is prevalent in children's social work and assessing neglect is complex because it is multifaceted and opaque
- There is a dearth of suitable tools to measure neglect
- Need for robust testing in the social work setting.
- Without clarity on the definition of a concept like neglect, precise and accurate measurement is difficult to achieve, and affects identification, assessment, and support.
- Assessment of need as opposed to a singular focus on assessing risks should be adopted in practice, as neglect can be understood as an unmet need. A risk-focused approach fails to fathom the relationship between the wider economic, social, and community contexts influential in neglect and practice, and can exclude effective assessment of needs and support for these to be met.
- The significant cost of neglect at personal, professional, community, and societal levels justifies the need for a thorough and robust research project to develop a new child neglect measurement tool.
- The study should be practice-informed and focussed on the development of a tool that is accessible and useable in practice The tool should be designed with, as well as for, professionals and families.
- The development of an evidence-based, valid, and reliable child neglect measurement tool, rigorously tested in practice, is likely to improve the standards of social work assessments.
- A tool needs particular attention to validity, reliability, and relevance of the aspects measured, and also capture neglect subtypes, severity, and chronicity.
- Future research should examine both needs and risks approaches for measuring child neglect to ensure a more complete evidence based on the costs and benefits of both approaches for families, practitioners, organizations, and communities.

Austerity, poverty, and children's services quality in England : consequences for child welfare and public services.

[Austerity, poverty, and children's services quality in England : consequences for child welfare and public services \(whiterose.ac.uk\)](https://www.whiterose.ac.uk/research-and-impact/whiterose-research-reports/austerity-poverty-and-childrens-services-quality-in-england-consequences-for-child-welfare-and-public-services)

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Social Policy and Society. ISSN 1474-7464

From Introduction

Children living in more deprived communities are far more likely to: require additional child welfare support; experience abuse or neglect; become subject to child protection investigations; and be placed in care. As adults, they are at higher risk of mortality and other adverse outcomes than the general population.

Potential of proactively addressing demand- and supply-side determinants of intervention; remedying structural inequalities; alleviating or eliminating root causes of child abuse and neglect, principal among them being poverty; and developing community-led infrastructures of family support can prevent the escalation of need or risk; reflects wider calls to invest in preventive services to improve the support offered to children and families, deinstitutionalise children, and reduce health inequalities

Abstract

In England, the dominant policy narrative recognises no association between spending on children's services and quality and a limited association between quality and deprivation. This study combines 374 inspection outcomes between 2011 and 2019 with data on preventative and safeguarding expenditure and Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) scores. A multilevel logistic regression model predicting 'good' or 'outstanding' judgements suggests each £100 increase in preventative spending per child was associated with a 69 per cent increase (95% CI: 27.5%, 124%) in the odds of a positive inspection. A one-decile increase in deprivation was associated with a 16 per cent (95% CI: -25%, -5.7%) decrease. Safeguarding expenditure was not associated with outcomes. Deprived communities have worse access to good-quality children's services and government policies that have increased poverty and retrenched preventative services have likely exacerbated this inequality. Further, inattention to socioeconomic context in inspections raises concerns about their use in 'take over' policies.

Conclusions

Our findings illustrate the size of socioeconomic determinants of quality in children's services, challenging dominant and entrenched narratives in England that neither service funding nor deprivation are strong indicators of service quality.

Policies which direct resources towards preventative spending and poverty alleviation may create overall benefits in quality across the children's social care system.

Over the last decade, investment in preventative services has declined significantly and unevenly).

The number of children living in families experiencing destitution is estimated to have increased by 75 per cent between 2015 and 2019.

Inequalities in and incidence of child welfare interventions associated with deprivation have widened; this article highlights that the quality of child welfare services may also have suffered as a result.

Those most in need of high quality services to prevent child maltreatment are least likely to have access to them.

Much could be learned from policies implemented in response to inequitable access to medical care.

As long as 'inadequate' judgements can be used to justify the 'take over' of services, failure to acknowledge and address their socioeconomic determinants raises doubts about the appropriateness of any restructuring of public services. Policies which tackle the deep-rooted issues of failure demand and inequality, which so often characterise the child welfare system, are needed. This evidence suggests that investment in financial and material support for families, as well as in family support services, may be an effective prescription for addressing these issues and improving service quality.

A Systematic Review of Measures of Child Neglect

[A Systematic Review of Measures of Child Neglect \(sagepub.com\)](https://www.sagepub.com)

Simon Haworth, Jason Schaub, Elaine Kidney, and Paul Montgomery

Research on Social Work Practice

From Abstract

Child neglect is prevalent in children's social work and assessing neglect is complex because it is multifaceted and opaque. This systematic review identifies and evaluates evidence of tools or measures to better assess child neglect. A systematic search and review of measures of child neglect was undertaken. Only two measures, the Child Neglect Index (CNI) and modifications of the Maltreatment Classification System (MCS), met the inclusion criteria. Neither tool was completely comprehensive for child neglect. Findings indicate (a) a dearth of suitable tools to measure neglect and (b) the need for robust testing of neglect measures in the social work setting. The current evidence based on measuring child neglect is too limited to effectively inform policy and practice.

From Introduction

Without clarity on the definition of a concept like neglect, precise and accurate measurement is difficult to achieve

Neglect raises issues for the helping professions in terms of identification, assessment, and support

A number of authors have raised concerns related to the significant limitations and imprecision of the evidence base around neglect

Although evidence-based high-quality measurement tools are important for measuring abuse and neglect, there are currently no gold standards for the measurement of child neglect or abuse

This article presents a systematic review of neglect measurement tools for children's social work. It examined the validity, reliability, and quality of the evidence base and key features of reviewed tool's usability and feasibility in practice, and synthesized the best evidence of the effectiveness of tools or measures for the assessment of child neglect.

From Discussion

This review revealed the limitations of the evidence base for social workers to assess child neglect. The overall evidence base for measures of child neglect can be considered weak. The most significant finding of the review is the lack of rigorous testing of potential measures for assessing child neglect. There is a paucity of high-quality evidence and robustly tested tools, with studies of "popular" tools lacking methodological rigor and robustness. This raises significant issues for social work assessments of neglect and the impact of child neglect means that the lack of valid, usable, and reliable measurement tools is a significant concern. In sum, only four studies met the inclusion criteria, with only one tool, Trocme's CNI, considered simple enough to feasibly be used in practice.

The findings suggest the need for robust testing of neglect measures in social work settings. Robust testing is important for the development of tools that can satisfy the criteria of validity, reliability, and practice/clinical utility. Child protection social workers' time with children and families has been reduced through the COVID-19 pandemic, with in-person home visits becoming less frequent and shorter. This change in practice accentuates the need for assessments to be focused and feasible in terms of time and resources. Because of these changes and issues, it is timely to develop a new evidence-based, short, and easy-to-administer child neglect measurement tool.

Assessment of need as opposed to a singular focus on assessing risks should be adopted in practice, as neglect can be understood as an unmet need. A risk-focused approach fails to fathom the relationship between the wider economic, social, and community contexts influential in neglect and practice, and can exclude effective assessment of needs and support for these to be met.

The current evidence based on measuring child neglect is too limited to effectively inform practice. The significant cost of neglect at personal, professional, community, and societal levels justifies the need for a thorough and robust research project to develop a new child neglect measurement tool. The study should be practice-informed

and focussed on the development of a tool that is accessible and useable in practice. Therefore, the tool should be designed with, as well as for, professionals and families. The development of an evidence-based, valid, and reliable child neglect measurement tool, rigorously tested in practice, is likely to improve the standards of social work assessments.

Any future neglect measurement tool will need to pay particular attention to validity, reliability, and relevance of the aspects measured. Further, it will need to capture neglect subtypes, severity, and chronicity.

Future research should examine both needs and risks approaches for measuring child neglect to ensure a more complete evidence based on the costs and benefits of both approaches for families, practitioners, organizations, and communities.