

# **TACKLING CHILD ABUSE IN SCOTLAND**

A guide for funders

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THE  
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# INTRODUCTION

## Setting the scene

Child abuse is a serious social problem in Scotland. In 2014/2015, more than 4,000 children were added to the child protection register in Scotland, and it is likely that many more than this are at risk of abuse, for a variety of reasons.

Children who are abused experience significant repercussions, including mental illness, poor physical health, academic underachievement, and an increased likelihood of committing crime in later life. Child abuse also has serious social costs, including the costs of healthcare, productivity losses, criminal justice costs, and government expenditure on child care and protection.

## The purpose of this report

Independent funders can play an important role in protecting children and preventing child abuse in Scotland. This report is a guide for funders who want to combat child abuse in Scotland, and aims to help funders choose between the many different charities and approaches that they could support. It has four aims:

- to explain the context for the vital work of charities and funders working on child abuse in Scotland;
- to outline the risk factors for child abuse and priority needs in this area;
- to identify gaps in funding and opportunities for funders; and
- to examine the role of independent funders by setting out some questions that funders can ask themselves when prioritising their activities.

This report is the result of desk research and interviews with charities, funders and academics working on child abuse issues in Scotland. We hope that the frameworks included will enable funders to think through how they can have the most impact on the lives of children and young people who have been abused or are at risk of being abused.

# THE LANDSCAPE OF CHILD ABUSE IN SCOTLAND

In this chapter we estimate the prevalence and costs of child abuse, outline the policy context and state services, and explore key trends.

## Definitions, prevalence and costs

### Defining child abuse

It is important to distinguish between approaches focused on promoting child welfare and those focused on addressing child abuse. Promoting child welfare means advancing the well-being of all children, whether they have been abused or not (while recognising that their needs may be different). Addressing child abuse prioritises a specific group: children who have been abused or who are at risk of suffering abuse.

There is some disagreement over what counts as child abuse. For instance, some people argue that smacking children and bullying are forms of abuse, while others believe that they are not. In this report, we adopt a broad definition of child abuse. The National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland (2014) says: *'Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting, or by failing to act to prevent, significant harm to the child. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional setting, by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger.'*<sup>1</sup> This guidance alerts us to the fact that abuse can include failing to prevent harm to children, and that abuse occurs in a variety of settings. In this report, we use the definition from the World Health Organization's *European Report on Preventing Child Maltreatment* of child abuse<sup>2</sup>:

*'... all forms of physical and/or emotional or sexual abuse, deprivation and neglect of children or commercial or other exploitation resulting in harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.'*

Child abuse is usually broken into four types:

Category	Definition or example behaviours	Notes
Neglect	The ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs, such as healthy food or clothing	The commonest type of child abuse; can lead in severe cases to hospitalisation or death
Physical abuse	Hitting, shaking, burning	Can lead to hospitalisation or death
Sexual abuse	Sexual assault, rape, child sexual exploitation	Evidence suggests a consistent gender difference (girls more likely to suffer than boys)
Emotional abuse	Scaring, humiliating, ignoring a child	Includes witnessing domestic violence; usually excludes bullying

Many children experience more than one sort of abuse. Child sexual exploitation, a form of sexual abuse, is a source of recent policy focus in Scotland. Barnardo's 2014 guidance defines child sexual exploitation as *'exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive "something" (such as food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of performing and/or others performing on them, sexual activities'*.<sup>3</sup>

## The prevalence of child abuse in Scotland

A range of sources provide some insight into the number of children in Scotland who might have suffered abuse in a given year or who might be at risk of suffering abuse at some point in their childhood.

We can start with the number of children in the state child protection system in Scotland<sup>\*</sup>. Figures for both the number of children on the child protection register and the number of children added in a given period are usually considered important because they capture the fluidity within the statutory system. Key figures include:

- Between 1 August 2014 and 31 July 2015, 4,393 children were added to the child protection register.<sup>4</sup>
- On 31 July 2015, 17,357 children in Scotland were looked after and/or on the child protection register (15,404 looked after and 2,751 on the register).<sup>†</sup>
- The peak number of looked after children was 16,248 in 2012. Since then, numbers have been dropping year on year. The number of children on the child protection register shows a general upwards trend, with an increase of a third between 2000 and 2015 (from 2,050 to 2,751).<sup>5</sup>

Some features of the child protection register (using 2015 data) include:

- **Age:** Half of the children on the register are aged under five.
- **Gender:** 50% of children on the register are boys, 45% are girls, and 5% are unborn children.<sup>6</sup>
- **Geography:** In Scotland, 0.3% of children under 16 are on the child protection register, but there is significant geographical variation, ranging from 0.02% in Eilean Siar to 0.63% in Clackmannanshire.<sup>7</sup> Looking at the figures for the child protection register and looked after children combined, 1.76% of under-18s are affected, but the rate is highest in Glasgow (3.58%) and lowest in East Renfrewshire (0.86%). The west of Scotland and urban areas generally have higher rates.<sup>8</sup>
- **Issues:** For children on the child protection register, the most common concerns identified are emotional abuse (29%), neglect (37%) and parental substance abuse (36%).<sup>9</sup>

These figures probably underestimate the number of children who are abused or at risk of abuse. Some child abuse (particularly sexual abuse) only comes to light many years after the event, if it comes to light at all. The Scottish Government does not use self-report studies to measure the extent of abuse, and there is no official measure of lifetime exposure to abuse and neglect.

Information from the child protection system is useful, but other sources provide a slightly different picture of the prevalence of child abuse in Scotland. For example:

- The NSPCC estimates that for every child identified as needing protection, another eight are suffering abuse.<sup>10</sup> The figure of 4,393 children added to the child protection register in Scotland in 2014/2015 generates an estimate of almost 40,000 children in Scotland who may have suffered abuse in that year.
- In a UK-wide survey conducted by the NSPCC in 2011, a quarter of 18 to 24 year-olds reported experiencing severe maltreatment<sup>‡</sup> as a child.<sup>11</sup> The 2011 Census reported that there were 1,042,597 children in Scotland; if a quarter (25.3%) of this group experience severe maltreatment as a child, this generates an estimate of 263,777 children in Scotland who will experience child abuse at some point in their childhood.

<sup>\*</sup> According to the Scottish Government, as outlined in its 2015 paper (p.3–4) [Children's Social Work Statistics Scotland](#). Child protection 'can either be in cases where abuse or neglect has taken place, or in cases where a likelihood of significant harm or neglect has been identified [...] Where a child is believed to be at risk of significant harm, their name will be added to the child protection register. [...] Local authorities have a responsibility to provide support to certain vulnerable young people, known as "looked after children". A young person may become looked after for a range of reasons, including neglect, abuse, complex disabilities that need specialist care, or experience with the youth justice system.'

<sup>†</sup> 798 children are both looked after and on the child protection register, while 84 are in secure care accommodation in Scotland.

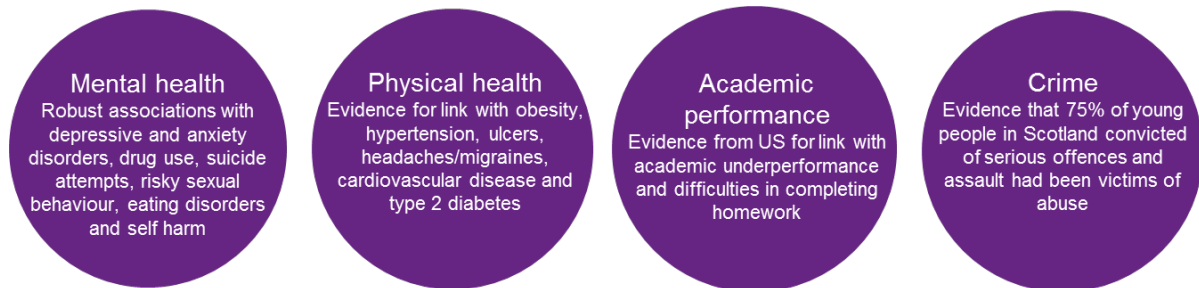
<sup>‡</sup> Defined as severe physical abuse, contact sexual abuse, or severe neglect by parent or guardian.

- In Scotland in 2013/2014, there were 3,742 recorded sexual offences and 1,334 recorded cruelty and neglect offences against children, two child homicides, and one death by assault or undetermined intent of a child.

## The costs of child abuse in Scotland

As Figure 1 shows, being the victim of child abuse is linked with mental illness,<sup>12</sup> poor physical health,<sup>13</sup> academic underachievement<sup>14</sup> and violent crime.<sup>15</sup> Different sources indicate that anywhere between 33% and 92% of children in custody in the UK have experienced some form of child abuse or neglect,<sup>16</sup> while evidence from Scotland suggests that 75% of young people convicted of serious offences and assault are victims of abuse.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 1: Some of the costs of child abuse for the victim



When considering the costs of child abuse in Scotland, the link with poverty in later life is key. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has identified several international studies that show a link between being a victim of child abuse and being in poverty as an adult, using varied measures of maltreatment and adult economic outcomes.<sup>18</sup>

The social costs of child abuse include the cumulative costs of healthcare, productivity losses, criminal justice costs (as a result of abuse survivors committing crimes), and government expenditure on child care and protection. The World Health Organization estimates that child abuse and neglect are responsible for almost a quarter of the burden of all mental disorders in Europe. It also estimates that the social costs of child abuse are comparable to those of all non-communicable diseases (including cancer, obesity, diabetes, and heart and respiratory diseases).<sup>19</sup>

Studies in the US<sup>20</sup> and Australia<sup>21</sup> estimate the total cost (to US and Australia) of child abuse over the lifetimes of all children who suffer abuse. If we take the lowest estimates in those studies and assume similar costs and rates of abuse per head, we estimate that every year, new cases of child abuse, over the lifetimes of those children, cost Scotland over £1bn.

## The policy context of child protection

Child protection policy and legislation in Scotland is the responsibility of the Scottish Government, with the right to protection enshrined most recently in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. Local authority policy and procedure are the responsibility of Child Protection Committees (CPCs), which coordinate the various agencies involved in child protection. The Scottish Government's National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland, updated in 2014, provides key guidance for anyone working in child protection.

Key to the Scottish Government's approach to child protection is 'Getting it right for every child' (GIRFEC). GIRFEC is an integrated strategy for improving outcomes for children and ensuring agencies are working together effectively. It is formed of ten core components for child safety, measured through eight well-being measures.<sup>22</sup> From 31 August 2016, every child under the age of 18 will have a 'named person' (usually a headteacher, guidance teacher or health visitor) to promote the child's well-being and act as a single point of contact if children or their parents want information or advice.

GIRFEC underpins three key interlinking frameworks. The most important in Scottish child protection policy is the Early Years Framework (2008), which focuses on prevention from pre-birth to age eight.<sup>23</sup> The other two key frameworks are Equally Well (2008), which focuses on health inequalities,<sup>24</sup> and Achieving Our Potential (2008), which has a focus on poverty.<sup>25</sup> Though Scottish child protection policy is largely driven by a focus on early intervention, it is a GIRFEC principle not to categorise children too early, in order to avoid the possibility that this labelling process pre-determines poor outcomes.

## Recent policy developments

Jackie Brock, Chief Executive of Children in Scotland, has made a series of recommendations for how the Government's GIRFEC and early intervention approach can be effectively implemented with respect to child protection, with a focus on child sexual exploitation. To avoid duplication, the 2014 Brock Report focuses on the needs of children who are vulnerable but not looked after.<sup>26</sup> In ensuring the effective implementation of GIRFEC, Brock suggests that identifying the long-term economic benefits of early intervention would help local authorities make commissioning decisions to support implementation, *'rather than potentially diffusing it'*.<sup>27</sup>

The Care Inspectorate Triennial Review for 2011–2014 made recommendations on how children's services as a whole could improve, drawing on evidence from over 30,000 inspections. Scottish social care is increasingly outcomes driven, with service users and carers more and more involved in service planning and delivery.<sup>28</sup> In terms of early intervention, the review found significant geographical inequality, with half as many services per head in the most deprived areas of Scotland as in the least deprived.<sup>29</sup> It also noted *'with some concern'* the continued variation in standards of strategic planning and commissioning across Scotland.<sup>30</sup>

In light of the Brock Report and the Care Inspectorate Triennial Review, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Angela Constance MSP, announced in February 2016 that the Scottish Government would develop a programme of action informed by and building upon both reports. Constance promoted the importance of the Brock Report in particular, and pointed partners and ministers in its direction.<sup>31</sup> The Scottish Government is evidently committed to taking a strategic overview of action areas required.

## Trends affecting child abuse in Scotland

### Changes in recorded rates of different types of abuse

Several indicators of child abuse have decreased in Scotland in recent years. Child homicides and child deaths by assault and undetermined intent have decreased since the 1980s, and recorded offences of cruelty and neglect of children have decreased since the 2000s. Other indicators of child abuse have increased, including recorded sexual assaults against children,<sup>§</sup> the number of children on the child protection register, and the number of looked after children.<sup>32,33</sup>

### Changes in public perceptions of child abuse

Public opinion on child protection is often influenced by media coverage of shocking stories. Much media attention has recently been given to child sexual exploitation, which may be skewing public perception away from more widespread forms of abuse, and creating the false impression that child sexual abuse is usually carried out in an organised way by strangers. In reality, as we explore in the next chapter, children and young people are more likely to be sexually abused by someone within their own family or community than by a stranger.

<sup>§</sup> It is difficult to estimate the prevalence of child sexual abuse. It is possible that a recent increase in reports of child sexual abuse is attributable to greater awareness of the issue, rather than greater prevalence of abuse.

## Risks presented by new technologies

Online risks are an increasing source of difficulty for children. Police recorded offences of indecent images of children, sexual grooming and communicating indecently with a child have increased in the UK in the past five years.<sup>34</sup>

## Declining social capital

'Social capital' can be defined as the social bonds and attitudes of trust that form a community. Strong social networks can support parents with parenting and emotional well-being; community support systems can help parents with childcare and give them some time out; and social interaction can help children to form crucial support networks.<sup>35</sup> Yet in the UK, social capital is unevenly distributed and in decline.<sup>36</sup> It is likely that low social capital in a community makes children more vulnerable to abuse.

## State retrenchment and changes in funding sources for charities

The long-term change from voluntary to contract income is being seen in almost all charitable sectors, including the child protection sector in Scotland. Charities are in various sorts of negotiations with the state over the terms and extent of contracts to provide services to children, families and offenders.

The process of state retrenchment or 'austerity' has profound consequences for charities working in the child protection sector. Many charities report an increase in demand for their services as the state withdraws previously valued services—services that protected the most vulnerable in society, centring on the notion of providing welfare support to families in need. At the same time, many charities' contracts are being reduced or removed, sometimes unexpectedly. Funding is more difficult to come by, and more uncertain.

In general, charities are being asked to do more with less, as local authorities retract and leave some of the more complex work to the third sector. This creates an environment in which many charities are *'just hanging in there'*, as one expert put it. In this context, the central question for funders to consider is to what extent they should fund activities that they think ought to be provided by the state.



## PRIORITY NEEDS

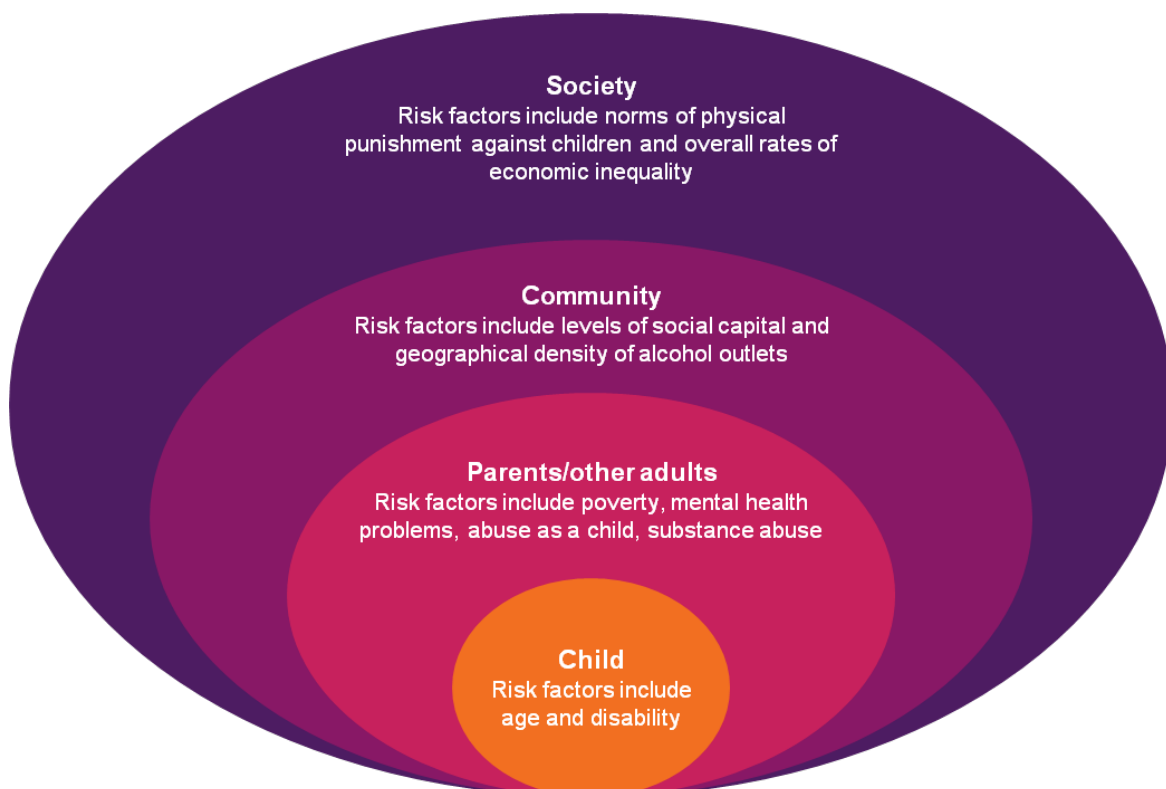
This chapter explores the evidence about the causes of child abuse and neglect in Scotland. We highlight the areas of most acute need, drawing on interviews with experts working in the child protection sector in Scotland.

### Risk factors for child abuse

There is no single factor that causes an individual to abuse a child; rather, a range of biological, social, cultural, economic, psychological and environmental factors interact to increase the risk of abuse. Significantly, most risk factors relate to parents and other adult perpetrators, rather than children.

The risk factors for child abuse exist at four levels, as illustrated by Figure 2. This representation is often called an 'ecological' model, as it puts the child at the centre of an ecology of relationships, starting with parents and branching out to cover the community and broader society. This model fits best with physical and emotional abuse and neglect, as sexual abuse often has other indicators and consequences.

Figure 2: An ecological model of risk factors for child abuse\*



\* Adapted from Sethi, D. *et al* (2013) [European Report on Preventing Child Maltreatment](#). World Health Organization, p. 35.

Largely drawing on the evidence review carried out by the World Health Organization, we can summarise current understanding of the risk factors for child abuse as follows.<sup>37</sup>

## Child-level factors

Some children who have externalising behaviour problems or conduct disorders are at increased risk of being abused or neglected. Two other factors that are of particular importance are age and disability: younger children and children with disabilities are more likely to be abused.<sup>38</sup> Around half of all maltreatment-related deaths and serious injuries in the UK between 2007 and 2009 involved infants under the age of one.<sup>39</sup> There is also evidence that disabled children are three to four times more likely to experience violence than non-disabled children.<sup>40</sup>

## Parent-level factors

Parents who are young, single, or have lower levels of educational attainment are more likely to physically abuse or neglect their children. Parental mental health problems are strongly associated with child abuse; substance abuse problems and domestic violence are also key risk factors.<sup>41</sup>

One of the most important parent-level risk factors is whether parents themselves suffered abuse when they were children. Such are the long-term impacts of child abuse on social and mental well-being that the World Health Organization has found evidence for '*cycles of violence*': adults who suffered child abuse are at increased risk of engaging in violent acts as adults, including family violence, such as abusing or neglecting their own children.<sup>42</sup> In other words, there is the very real risk of 'intergenerational transmission' of child abuse.<sup>43</sup> Many studies have found support for the 'sexually abused–sexual abuser' hypothesis, whereby sex offenders are more likely to have been sexually abused than other offenders.<sup>44</sup> Mostly people who are sexually abused in childhood do not grow up to become adults who abuse children, although they do experience a range of other adversities and problematic issues, including harmful behaviours.<sup>45</sup>

## Community- and society-level factors

Some communities have certain characteristics that increase the likelihood of the children who live there suffering abuse. Communities with high densities of alcohol outlets have higher rates of child abuse and neglect,<sup>46</sup> as have communities that lack social capital<sup>47</sup>. At the societal level, social norms supporting the physical punishment of children<sup>48</sup> and increased levels of social inequality<sup>49</sup> show a correlation with higher rates of child abuse.

## Protective factors

Some factors lower the risk of child abuse and neglect. Many of these protective factors are the inverse of the risk factors discussed above—for instance, higher levels of social capital and higher parental education are both associated with lower rates of child abuse. Other protective factors include good relationships between parents and children, strong parenting skills, and parental employment.<sup>50</sup>

## Priority needs for tackling child abuse

### Children's priorities

The Children's Charter and the accompanying framework of guidance produced by the Scottish Government in 2004 specifies the following children's priorities:<sup>51</sup>

- Get to know us
- Speak with us
- Listen to us

- Take us seriously
- Involve us
- Respect our privacy
- Be responsible to us
- Think about our lives as a whole
- Think carefully about how you use information about us
- Put us in touch with the right people
- Use your power to help us
- Make things happen when they should
- Help us be safe

All of these priorities are important, but perhaps the most relevant to addressing child abuse is the last point—that children should at all times be safe and feel safe. It is our collective responsibility to create a safe environment; as one interviewee put it, *'It's everybody's business to ensure the safety of our children.'*

One of the biggest difficulties in tackling child abuse is that the beneficiaries—that is, children themselves—cannot easily represent themselves politically or straightforwardly express which of their needs should be prioritised. Although there are important movements for children's rights, individual children lack the power necessary to defend their interests. Indeed, one of the most troubling aspects of child abuse is that at its core is the abuse of power and trust. Our definition of child abuse, set out in the previous chapter and taken from the World Health Organization, states that child abuse occurs *'in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power'*.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, abuse may only come to light years later, which makes it almost impossible in many cases to combat child abuse as it is occurring.

### Priority need: Addressing risk factors in families

*'Far too much relative attention is given by the media to sexual abuse by strangers.'*

**Martin Henry, National Manager, Stop It Now! Scotland**

If we want to prioritise need by focusing on the behaviour of adults, the evidence clearly suggests that we should start not with 'stranger danger' but with families and communities—particularly social groups and places (including online) where children and young people spend their time. While public policy, public attitudes and the press all focus on shocking cases of child sexual abuse, creating 'moral panics' around the 'folk devil' of the predatory paedophile, the reality remains that two thirds of sexual abuse occurs in and around the family.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, cases of child sexual exploitation grab shocking headlines, but can give the misleading impression that child sexual abuse is mainly organised abuse by strangers. Although this exists, it is a tiny subset of child sexual abuse, and disproportionate emphasis leads to a misunderstanding of the risks and of the needs of children.

### Priority need: Addressing the role of poverty

*'Since I have been in social work, we're seeing poverty as a problem for families in a way it never has been before.'*

**Liz Dahl, Chief Executive, Circle**

One of our interviewees explained that benefit cuts in recent years have led to poverty becoming an ever greater source of strain for people. The families their organisation works with are turning more to food banks and loan sharks, and many children are suffering from malnutrition and health inequalities.

A recent review of the evidence by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) concludes that *'there is a strong association between families' socio-economic circumstances and the chances that their children will experience child abuse or neglect.'*<sup>54</sup> JRF found evidence to support this association from a range of countries and child protection systems, across different types of abuse, using different definitions of abuse, and using a range of measurement and research approaches.<sup>55</sup> The theoretical model of child abuse here is one that centres on the notion of 'family stress'. Under this model, poverty can have a *direct* effect on neglect (as material hardship may lead to the inability to provide food or shelter) and on emotional abuse (as financial constraints may force women to stay in relationships where their children witness domestic violence). Poverty can also have an *indirect* effect on child abuse through more complex mechanisms, such as parental stress: a lack of money might exacerbate other issues or make it difficult for parents to find relief from stress (by going on holiday, for example).<sup>56</sup>

However, the link between poverty and child abuse is not a deterministic one, and the evidence base is limited, so it is not possible to draw definite conclusions.<sup>57</sup> It is important to be clear that poverty is neither a necessary nor a sufficient factor in the occurrence of child abuse. Not every child from a family in poverty experiences abuse, and not every child who experiences abuse is from a family in poverty.

The January 2016 report of the Independent Advisor on Poverty and Inequality for the First Minister promotes targeted family support that is non-stigmatised and reduces the impact of poverty on our poorest families.<sup>58</sup> When prioritising areas of need, funders should think through how family poverty can be a risk factor for child abuse and neglect, without stigmatising or demonising families who live in poverty.

# PRIORITY SOLUTIONS

This chapter explores some approaches that address child abuse, which independent funders may consider supporting. First, we outline some principles of good practice that may be useful to funders interested in this area. Then we map out various interventions that tackle child abuse and discuss some of the priority solutions in each category.

## Principles of good practice

The best approaches to child abuse focus on relationships, take into account what beneficiaries have to say, and emphasise the strengths of families and young people.

### Focusing on relationships

Charitable interventions have significant potential to add value by focusing on relationships within families, while grounding those relationships in communities. Charities can take a unique position in the lives of vulnerable families—they are able to stand apart from the state and take a family's whole circumstances into account.

### Listening to beneficiaries

An important area of innovation in combatting child abuse is in incorporating the 'beneficiary voice'—listening to the needs and opinions of families and children, and taking them into account in service design and delivery. For instance, a programme working in partnership with care leavers engaged those young people in the design of the service by asking them what they felt they needed. The young people prioritised moving into work over going on to college or university, so the charity brought in literacy lessons and a life coach to help the young people with job applications and CVs. The programme's start time was also made earlier, as the young people wanted practice and help getting up in the morning. Many interventions could still do more to bring the voices of children and families into the way their services are set up and delivered.

### Emphasising people's strengths

State-led, problem-focused approaches to child abuse run the risk of labelling families and defining them in terms of their perceived weaknesses and shortcomings. For better or worse, the logic of prioritisation that underlies the state approach involves a referral process that highlights problems to mark families or individuals as worthy of attention. Many charities are taking a different approach and focusing on families' strengths. Something as simple as changing paperwork can lead to a picture of a family that includes hobbies and interests, rather than just weaknesses. Some organisations are using technology to help families gain insights into the way they interact with each other, for instance, by videoing parent-child interactions. In reviewing the video, a strength-based approach then focuses on good examples and attempts to build on the positives, rather than chiding parents or children for their mistakes.

When considering funding options, we can note that innovation in the child protection sector tends to be limited. Money is rarely given for services to take risks or develop new technology, and the short-term nature of much funding and contract income does not make it easy for organisations to plan new approaches. Nevertheless, charities in Scotland are using new ideas to tackle child abuse and neglect, as we explore in the following section.

## Approaches that combat child abuse

### Mapping approaches

There are a range of ways to tackle child abuse and neglect. We can divide approaches according to the stage at which they hope to make an impact.

Figure 3: A map of approaches to tackling child abuse\*



Figure 3 shows some of the approaches that various organisations use at each stage. The state's approach in Scotland is focused on protection and centred on the child protection system. Identifying and punishing perpetrators of child abuse is a closely related statutory responsibility.

As with all social problems, interventions at the earlier stages (the left of the diagram) tend to be characterised by a decreased ability to target but a potentially larger cost saving (as fewer services are needed at later stages). There is also a cyclical element to the diagram, in that treatment can mean prevention for future.

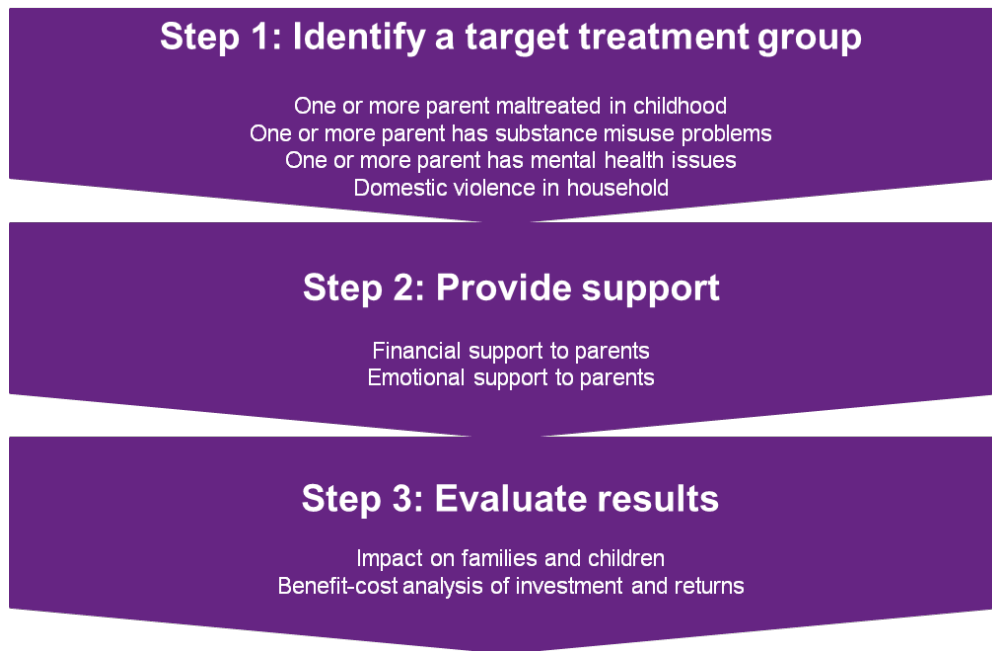
When it comes to evaluating which interventions work best, research tends to focus on specific programmes, which are usually targeted at 'at-risk' families. There is less evidence for the efficacy of 'universalist' approaches, such as mass media campaigns or poverty alleviation programmes.<sup>59</sup> It is therefore not possible to provide a definitive, ranked list of priority solutions. Instead, drawing on the expertise of our interviewees, we highlight the following solutions that donors could prioritise at each stage.

### Prevention: Targeted preventative programmes

Preventing child abuse and neglect has the potential to create significant cost savings. Evidence from the US is compelling: all the evaluated early childhood programmes with child abuse prevention as a key outcome have returned benefit-cost ratios greater than one, ranging from 1.26 to 17.07.<sup>60</sup> In other words, each \$1 invested returned between \$1.26 and \$17.07. Perhaps the most important area of innovation at the moment is the development of targeted preventative programmes. Figure 4 shows the main steps of a targeted preventative programme.

\* Adapted from Goodall, E. and Lumley, T. (2007) *Not seen and not heard: Child abuse: A guide for donors and funders*. New Philanthropy Capital.

Figure 4: The main steps of targeted preventative programmes



Step 1 could include selecting families on the basis of ‘severe and multiple disadvantage’ (SMD), that is, the coincidence of homelessness, worklessness, mental health problems, poverty or a criminal record. There is growing evidence that SMD is a good predictor of a range of negative outcomes.<sup>61</sup>

The support provided at Step 2 could come in various forms, including parenting skills and emotional support. There is potential here for services to test experimental preventative interventions involving financial help, as evidence from the US suggests that direct money transfer of even modest amounts to mothers leads to significant reductions in reported maltreatment.<sup>62</sup>

### Protection: Whole family work

*‘Particularly if you use a family group conferencing model rather than a child protection conference model, we should not treat putting a child on the child protection register as the “be-all and end-all”. Children are protected in families.’*

**Liz Dahl, Chief Executive, Circle**

Charities have an important role to complement the state’s focus on protection. Many charities work with the whole family, establish lasting relationships with families, and provide a community-based service—factors that are key to unpicking many of the interrelated issues leading to child abuse and neglect, and helping families in the long term. In this way, a family’s issues around, say, negative experiences of the criminal justice system or drug and alcohol problems can be integrated into a wider and more balanced picture. The aim is to build on the strengths of the family and help to make a safe and loving environment in which children can thrive. In many cases, it is the empathetic connection that charities offer struggling families that is particularly valuable.

## Treatment: A mental health approach

*'We need to create less of a "witch hunt" atmosphere if we are going to further the interests of children.'*

**Martin Henry, National Manager, Stop It Now! Scotland**

One way of tackling child abuse is to start with people who commit child sexual abuse and help them change their behaviour. Although this approach is becoming more established, it is very different from the suggestions of correct societal responses that arise from media representations of child sexual abusers.

By adopting a mental health approach to child sexual abusers, services can follow a 'psycho-educational' route that aims to give people an insight into what they are doing and why. Since we cannot make children responsible for protecting themselves, we should focus much more attention and resources on changing the way that adults think and behave. This could help those who have offended to break the cycle rather than offend in the first place or reoffend.

## Survivors: A holistic approach

Many charities that work with survivors use a holistic approach that draws on both legal and therapeutic knowledge. For instance, some charities provide trauma care, advocacy and legal advice to children and families following a disclosure of child sexual abuse. By bringing together these three strands, charities can help families recover as well as navigate complex and potentially stigmatising systems.

## Systems change: Advocating a preventative agenda

*'In Scotland, as in many other countries, we pour charitable and local authority resources into picking up the pieces and starve prevention.'*

**An interviewee who preferred this comment to remain anonymous**

Some charities are trying to achieve systemic change in Scotland by campaigning for more resources to be put into preventative approaches and early intervention.<sup>63</sup> In 2011, the Christie Commission found that 40% of public spending in Scotland is only necessary because we do not intervene early enough.<sup>64</sup> Many interviewees argued for the prioritisation of preventative work, with one interviewee saying that it is the duty of funders to keep up *'relentless pressure'* on early intervention and prevention. Indeed, the only real solution to child abuse is to prevent it happening in the first place. The World Health Organization's 2013 *European Report on Preventing Child Maltreatment* called for a European-wide switch to prevention: *'Programmes that intervene early with at-risk families, providing parenting support throughout the first few years of children's lives, are strongly supported by scientific evidence.'*<sup>65</sup>

One interviewee noted that although there is a clear policy intent on early intervention, there is a disconcerting *'mismatch'* with reality in many cases—why is the policy direction of travel towards early intervention not being translated into practice at the rate we might expect? Another interviewee commented, *'Sometimes funders prefer to see visible results of the activities they fund,'* and argued that the emotional case for prevention is different: it is a strong argument to say that there are fewer children in need as a result of preventative work, but it is not possible to illustrate this with pictures or stories. Many funders want to give money to people working with children, so preventative approaches are comparatively under-funded.



# CHARITIES AND FUNDERS

In this chapter we outline the work currently being done by voluntary sector organisations to tackle child abuse in Scotland. We then summarise the ways in which charities and funders can further this work.

## Charities tackling child abuse in Scotland

It is difficult to identify a coherent and unified child protection sector in Scotland, because many relevant charities have much wider aims than preventing or addressing child abuse. For example, some charities offer parenting support to vulnerable families, with evidence that this reduces child abuse, even if it is not the charities' primary purpose. Nevertheless, we can use data from the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) to provide an overview of the sector.

According to OSCR data, 435 charities registered in Scotland work to promote child welfare. It is difficult to offer a more precise analysis, since a keyword search of charitable objectives excludes many organisations that we would like to include. Only 21 charities have children as their primary beneficiaries and preventing or addressing child abuse as one of their core activities. However, many charities that work with children and young people have women in need as their primary beneficiaries. This is significant in view of the fact that witnessing domestic violence in a child is a form of emotional abuse; refuges that take women and children out of domestically abusive situations are tackling child abuse, even if that is not their primary aim.\*

In Scotland, 59 charities include 'abuse' or 'neglect' *and* 'children' or 'young people' in their charitable objectives. The distribution of these charities' annual income is skewed towards smaller organisations, as is common in the charity sector: six have an income of £1m or greater, 29 have an income of between £100,000 and £1m, and 24 have an income of less than £100,000. Although this analysis is not comprehensive, to the extent that it is representative we can note that the child protection sector is dominated by a few very large national or UK-wide charities. These charities are typically the only ones with capacity to campaign on behalf of the sector as a whole, or with enough profile to stand a realistic chance of influencing policy.

The difficulty of identifying a child protection sector is reflected in the variety of approaches and programmes that many funders working to promote the welfare of children might want to fund. In the previous chapter, we identified a wide range of activities that could work with children or families or child sexual abusers in a wide range of contexts. As one interviewee put it, charities whose activities include *'anything that supports children and families'* could arguably be included in the child protection sector.

## The role of charities

### The strengths of charities and the current context

*'There is a feeling of crisis around family support services—the current situation can only last a short time until the pressure becomes too much.'*

Colette Boyle, Home-Start Glasgow South

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\* Analysis of these refuge centres shows them to be unevenly distributed geographically, with most based in cities. Around half have an annual income of between £100,000 and £1m.

The changing role of the state has a strong influence on the role that many charities play—particularly charities that provide services funded by government contracts. The challenging funding environment has a number of knock-on effects on the operations of charities that tackle child abuse. First, the feeling of having to do more with less can have a negative impact on staff morale and lead to significant strain. One expert reported a feeling of crisis among some staff, and worried about the consequences. Second, it is increasingly difficult for charities working in this field to recruit and retain experts, meaning that many volunteers are starting to take the places previously occupied by professionals. Third, charities face some common problems that are exacerbated by strained resources, including unequal geographical access, transport problems, and the costs of staff and volunteer training.

Despite these struggles, the experts we interviewed highlighted several distinctive features that charities have in tackling child abuse and neglect. They can:

- **Offer non-threatening and non-stigmatising help**—in contrast to state agents—to children and families in need and to others affected by child abuse, including offenders and their families.
- **Build long-term relationships with children and families.** This is sometimes crucial given the interconnectedness of many problems associated with child abuse and neglect.
- **Lobby for change to statutory systems.**
- **Play an important ‘bridging’ role**, connecting different statutory services and helping people to navigate the system.
- **Carry out innovation and development work**, which is often outside the scope of statutory agencies.
- **Play an ‘outreach’ function for the state** by establishing deep community relationships. That is, they are able to connect with people who feel alienated from formal state initiatives, and catch problems that might otherwise not be referred to state agencies.

## The difficulties of collaboration

*‘The current situation of competition can be very unhelpful and at times divisive rather than encouraging collaboration.’*

Brigid Daniel, Professor of Social Work, University of Stirling

Many of the experts we interviewed for this report commented that collaboration in the child protection sector is vital, but extremely difficult to pull off. Competition can lead to a duplication of resources and the danger that individuals and families in need might be working with a very high number of organisations simultaneously. However, interviewees were quick not to blame individual organisations, noting that a lack of resources makes people in the child protection sector ‘territorial’ and suspicious of new organisations. Collaboration only seems possible if prefaced by careful consultation (particularly when it comes to larger organisations moving into new areas). One interviewee highlighted the possibility of charities drawing on expertise from state agencies (particularly around housing) in designing and delivering services for whole families.

## The role of independent funders

### Funders tackling child abuse in Scotland

Many funders support children’s issues in Scotland, but few target child abuse. A keyword search of the Funding Scotland database for ‘children’ returns 95 entries.<sup>66</sup> Many of these are small foundations or charitable trusts targeting particular issues, such as respite care for children with life-limiting illnesses. Some, such as the Jeffrey Charitable Trust, provide funding for ‘*prevention of cruelty to children*’. Others provide funding that tackles risk factors associated with child abuse. For example, the MacRobert Trust supports ‘*organisations involved with the care and support of young people through reasons of ill health, poverty or other forms of disadvantage or*

*disability*.<sup>67</sup> The Volant Trust funds projects that ‘alleviate social deprivation, with a particular emphasis on women’s and children’s issues’.<sup>68</sup> Several UK-wide funders also give money to projects tackling child abuse as part of their wider portfolio. For example, BBC Children In Need’s Main Grants programme funds projects working with children who ‘are suffering through distress, abuse or neglect’.<sup>69</sup>

## Funding trends and questions for funders to consider

The priority solutions identified in the previous chapter could hold promise for future funding. Funders could also consider the following two questions when planning their strategies.

### Is there a danger of funding being too short term?

*‘There is a real risk of support being parachuted into problem areas or communities, only to leave shortly afterwards.’*

Colette Boyle, Director, Home-Start Glasgow South

The experts we interviewed were concerned that funding in the child protection sector in Scotland is increasingly being given too short-term programmes. This could have damaging results for the sector. When trusted support disappears, vulnerable families and children are left in the lurch, and beneficiaries lose trust in the third sector. One of the major strengths of charities is that they can build strong relationships with families and young people, and funding must allow time for this to happen. One expert described a common ‘6 or 12-week model’ of funding, which excludes the possibility of building relationships with families. Short-term funding also poses operational difficulties for charities. Multi-year funding can enable charities to take risks and innovate, rather than having to focus on short-term survival. It can also allow charities to offer job security to their staff and avoid poor morale, which may boost staff retention. Longer-term funding also helps charities to measure outcomes over the longer term.

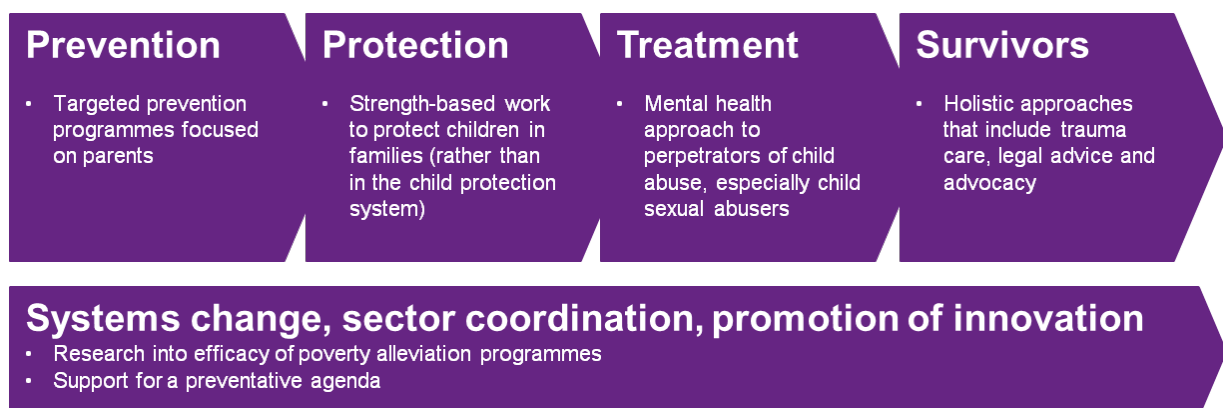
### Can the evidence base be supplemented with a better idea of what works in practice?

There is growing research on the causes and costs of child abuse, but less is known about which interventions work. In particular, there is room in this sector for more funding for action research, which attempts to evaluate how well we can put into practice what we already know.

## Points of leverage

Figure 5 sets out a framework for funders to start to think about where they can maximise the impact of their resources. Independent funders are likely to get most value for money at the points of leverage highlighted.

Figure 5: Points of leverage for tackling child abuse



The points of leverage in Figure 5 focus on parents, other adults and families. This is not to say that community, society and child-level risk factors and solutions are not important, but reflects the family stress model of child abuse, which focuses on children in the context of families. There are various options for funders to consider:

### **Research**

More research is needed into how and in what situations poverty alleviation programmes (particularly with direct transfers to mothers) might be effective. There is clearer evidence for the potential cost savings of preventative programmes, so funders could help to translate policy support into action on the ground.

### **Prevention**

A promising approach is one that identifies and targets parents who have one or more risk factors, and offering support in an effort to prevent child abuse taking place. Protective work could focus on families and their strengths, with the goal of keeping children in their families rather than in statutory protection systems.

### **Treatment**

A mental health approach seems best to serve the interests of children, but there might be a significant roadblock in terms of how ready the public is to accept treatment instead of (or as well as) punishment for those who perpetrate child abuse.

### **Survivors**

The most promising approaches are those that are holistic, recognising the difficulty and complexity of the situation and providing a range of interrelated support options based on the achievement of improved personal outcomes.

The extent to which independent funders can seize opportunities to address child abuse in Scotland is unclear, particularly given the testing funding environment that charities face. But the potential benefits for children and for society as a whole make the endeavour more than worthwhile.

# CONCLUSION

Child abuse is a difficult social problem to address. The full extent and costs of child abuse will always be partly hidden. It is also a deeply emotive and troubling issue. All of these factors combine to make a strategic and effective approach absolutely necessary if we as a society are to fulfil our collective responsibility to the younger generation.

## Summary of findings

The main findings of this report are:

- Child abuse in Scotland is a serious social problem. Precise figures about prevalence are impossible to produce, but we have reason to believe that it is widespread. The costs of child abuse and neglect in Scotland, although difficult to measure, are high for both the individual and society.
- Child abuse in Scotland is caused by a number of factors, including matters relating to parents. Many of the protective factors that once supported young people in communities have fallen away, making many children more vulnerable.
- Child abuse and neglect are not just about the failings of isolated individuals: they are also social problems. Without excusing the perpetrators of abuse, reframing the issue in terms of the complex mental health problems of perpetrators can help to address the problem and protect children.
- Charities have a distinctive role to play within the child protection and welfare system. Third sector organisations typically do not carry the same stigma that is sometimes attached to state actors. However, they face a challenging funding environment.
- In terms of prioritising ways of tackling child abuse, two approaches in particular are worthy of increased attention from funders: preventative work, which looks to reduce rather than address need, and work with the perpetrators of child sexual abuse. These approaches might be unpalatable to funders, but they could have a significant impact. There is strong evidence that preventative work could lead to large cost savings.
- There are a number of difficult questions funders acting in, or interested in, combatting child abuse should ask themselves, all with the aim of developing a strategic approach.

## Recommendations

We have four key recommendations:

- Funders should consider adopting a preventative approach towards child abuse in Scotland by funding targeted preventative programmes.
- Funders should take into account the centrality of whole family work when it comes to protecting children.
- Funders should think hard about how they can fund programmes and build an evidence base around interventions that address poverty as associated with child abuse in Scotland, but that also avoid stigmatising families in poverty.
- Funders should investigate programmes that take a mental health approach (rather than a punitive or vilifying one) to treating the perpetrators of child abuse in Scotland.

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NPC is a charity think tank and consultancy which occupies a unique position at the nexus between charities and funders, helping them achieve the greatest impact. We are driven by the values and mission of the charity sector, to which we bring the rigour, clarity and analysis needed to better achieve the outcomes we all seek. We also share the motivations and passion of funders, to which we bring our expertise, experience and track record of success.

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