

# Normalisation of Neglect

In the context of poverty

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*The views in this presentation are those of the research team, not necessarily DfE or BSCP.*



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# What is neglect?

Severe  
deprivational  
neglect

Medical neglect

Accidents  
(context)

Physical abuse  
(context)

Suicides and  
self-harm

Adolescent risk-  
taking

Adolescent  
harm through  
CSE or criminal  
exploitation

# Indicators of neglect

Smelly or dirty.

Inadequate or unwashed clothing.

Particularly hungry.

Untreated injuries.

Medical and dental issues.

Skin sores, scabies, flea bites, ringworm.

Anaemia.

Not meeting developmental milestones.

Obsessive behaviour.

Anxious, withdrawn, depressed.

Signs of self-harm.

Is not brought to appointments.

## **Serious case reviews 1998 to 2019: continuities, changes and challenges**

December 2022

Jonathan Dickens, Julie Taylor,  
Laura Cook, Jeanette Cossar,  
Joanna Garstang and Julia Rimmer

## **Learning for the future: final analysis of Serious Case Reviews, 2017-19**

May 2022

Jonathan Dickens, Julie Taylor, Laura Cook,  
Jeanette Cossar, Joanna Garstang, Nutmeg  
Hallett, Eleanor Molloy, Natasha Rennolds,  
Julia Rimmer, Penny Sorensen, Russell Wate.

## **Annual review of local child safeguarding practice reviews**

December 2022

Jonathan Dickens, Julie Taylor,  
Laura Cook, Joanna Garstang,  
Nutmeg Hallett, Cynthia Okpokiri  
and Julia Rimmer

# Key sub-themes identified from the SCRs

Desensitisation to neglect: *in the context of poverty and austerity*

Complexities around identifying neglect

Information exchange

Hidden in plain sight: *a pattern of withdrawal from services*

Dealing with difference: *cultural competence and biases*

The long term impact of living with neglect

Poverty is when a family lack the finances or resources to provide an adequate diet or appropriate living conditions. 29% of families across the UK live in poverty.

Neglect can be wilful and intentional, but it can also be as a result of other circumstances which render a parent unable to provide what their child needs, eg drugs, mental ill health.

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# Poverty in the UK

Child poverty has been rising since 2011, mostly within working families.

High levels of income inequality; weak redistributive effects of taxation and benefits.

Austerity policies.

'Wallpaper of practice.'

# Furthermore...

Resources and opportunities are shaped by the way economy and society are structured, and by political decisions about resource distribution.

How much is 'enough' money? Exclusion. Social norms.

Lack of resources in household often compounded by lack of resources in local community.

Social experience of negative interactions with society.

Poverty is multi-dimensional.

Cumulative.



# Bywaters et al

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Definitions and measures. Of neglect. Of poverty.  
Weak evidence base.

*Poverty is neither a necessary nor sufficient factor in the occurrence of CAN. Many children who are not from families in poverty will experience CAN in some form and most children in families who are living in poverty will not experience CAN. CAN is caused by many interlocking factors*

## Inverse intervention law (Bywaters et al 2014; 2015)

**Table 5: Proportion of children on child protection plans (per 10,000 children) in neighbourhood deprivation quintiles (5 = most deprived) in affluent (top third) and disadvantaged (bottom third) local authorities ranked by overall Index of Multiple Deprivation scores, 2011/12**

Quintile	1	2	3	4	5	All
Bottom third local authorities	3.3	9.3	19.8	29.1	51.0	40.5
Top third local authorities	10.6	20.7	31.6	57.1	101.9	33.8



# Families at increased risk of poverty include:

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Lone parents (usually mothers).  
Bangladeshi and Pakistani households.  
Disabilities.

Direct effects  
Indirect effects (often circular)

# Challenges living in poverty

Physical and mental ill-health.

- Material factors
- Psychosocial factors
- Structural factors

Parental conflict and family breakdown.

Social isolation and lack of social support.

- Inappropriate child employment
- Caring responsibilities

Uncertainty, instability and periods of crisis.

- Lack of space
- Access to community spaces
- Rising costs of basic goods
- Parental choices to go without

Poverty exacerbates the every day struggles of parenting

It shames and disempowers, reducing confidence and perception of competence

Poverty is gendered and some minoritised populations are overrepresented in all phases of the CP process

# Connectedness of socioeconomic factors

More complex than 'cycles of abuse'.

Spoiled identities.

Need for recognition: handling child behaviour.

Lack of resources impacts on supervision.

Impact of the child as an actor.

Role of services.



# Elephants

Impoverished families are significantly more likely to feature in child protection systems

Struggles associated with parenting in poverty

Increased surveillance of the poor

This relationship is complex

The practice and policy dilemmas are fundamental to child welfare practice



However....

Signs of Poverty:	Signs of Neglect:
	<i>Poor hygiene and cleanliness*</i>
	<i>Inappropriate uniform, shoes or clothing*</i>
	<i>Lack of food provided or money for food*</i>
	<i>Malnutrition*</i>
	<i>Missing school equipment or other required items*</i>
	<i>Poor or inappropriate living conditions*</i>
	<i>Negative impact on mental health and self-worth*</i>
	<i>Tiredness or inability to concentrate at school*</i>
	<i>Stealing or taking things to use, eat or sell*</i>
	<i>Children being left home alone*</i>
Parents requesting support from school	No or limited access to health care
Children working jobs outside school	Repeated absence from school
Children concerned about parents and situation	Lack of parental involvement

*\*Many of the signs are the same for both neglect and poverty and professional curiosity must be used to find out more about a situation so action can be taken.*



What does poverty-aware practice look like?

# Poverty-Aware Practice tips

Building an intervention.

Child-centred responses.

Engagement with family.

Create a sense of safety.

Increase parenting sensitivity.

Comprehensive, multi-layered and flexible response.

Value family knowledge.

Ask about achievements.

Notice what is going well.



research  
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## Neglect in a context of poverty and austerity

Dartington

[www.rip.org.uk](http://www.rip.org.uk)



## The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: an evidence review

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Paul Bywaters, Lisa Bunting, Gavin Davidson, Jennifer Hanratty,  
Will Mason, Claire McCartan and Nicole Steils

This report examines evidence on two key aspects of the relationship between poverty and child abuse and neglect: how poverty affects a child's chance of being abused or neglected, and the impact abuse or neglect in childhood has on poverty in adult life.

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## Children and Youth Services Review

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/childyouth](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/childyouth)



### Re-envisioning professional curiosity and challenge: Messages for child protection practice from reviews of serious cases in England

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