

Child protection system failing up to 1.5 million UK children, children's charity warns

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Nine out of ten teachers, police officers and social workers are regularly coming into contact with children they suspect are suffering from neglect yet as many as 40 per cent feel powerless to intervene, according to a major report by the University of Stirling for children's charity Action for Children.

Published today (6 February), *The State of Child Neglect in the UK* reveals that members of the public calling for more support to report rising concerns has almost doubled in the past three years - with studies suggesting up to 10 per cent of UK [children](#) (almost 1.5 million) face the daily reality of neglect.

The study was led by Brigid Daniel, Professor of [Social Work](#) at the University of Stirling and academic advisor to Scotland's centre for child protection [WithScotland](#).

Professor Daniel said: "Professionals are offering neglected children and their families considerable levels of support. However, there is always more that can be done to offer help earlier to the many children who tend to slip under the radar. We need greater interdisciplinary working to tackle the high levels of children experiencing neglect in the UK. For example in [Scotland](#) where there are particularly high levels of parental substance abuse, the government's "Getting it Right for Every Child" initiative offers a real opportunity to help and support to children and their families at an early stage."

Today's report is the most comprehensive current review into child neglect, the second in an annual series by the University of Stirling for Action for Children. Almost 6,000 people including the general public, a range of professionals and 27 [local authorities](#) took part in the research through interviews, polls and focus groups.

Dame Clare Tickell, [Chief Executive](#) for Action for Children, said:

"It is of grave concern that one in every ten children could be suffering neglect. We know that early help has the potential to transform the lives of children and families, yet today's report tells us that the public aren't being given the know-how they need and professionals' best efforts are being hindered by stretched budgets and a lack of resources. With more

and more families struggling, vulnerable children are falling through the cracks of a child protection system that is failing some of those who need it most – sometimes with tragic consequences."

Other key findings from The State of Child Neglect in the UK include:

- 14 per cent of professionals reported a rise in suspected child neglect over the past 12 months
- Of these, many believe deterioration in parenting skills (70 per cent), greater poverty (66 per cent) and more family breakdowns (55 per cent) are contributing factors to the increase in neglect
- Half of professionals feel there are barriers which make it difficult to intervene in suspected cases of neglect, in particular because of a lack of available services and resources like time and staffing
- A third of the general public who had concerns about a child did not tell anyone, mainly because they did not think they had enough evidence or were uncertain it was neglect

Neglect is a factor in 60 per cent of child deaths or serious injuries, investigated by Serious Case Reviews. Research shows it is vital to provide vulnerable families with support at an early stage so that they can change their behaviour and prevent neglect. Yet Government commitment to early help services is inconsistently translated into practice, with only piecemeal delivery in some local areas.

The charity's report found that just 12 per cent of staff in early help services, such as health visitors and teaching assistants, are able to respond directly if they suspect a child is being neglected and many frontline professionals (29 per cent) believe their ability to intervene will become even more difficult as spending cuts continue.

Co-Chair of The College of Social Work, Professor Corinne May-Chahal, said:

"This report reaffirms the need for adequately funded universal early help services to support parents in crisis who may be struggling to care for their children. Targeted early help in suspected cases of [child neglect](#) can enable parents to resolve problems at an early stage, without the need for further intervention, providing outcomes which are clearly in the best interests of children. However The College is increasingly concerned that a reduction in funding for preventative services will put increasing pressure on social workers' ability to source the support that many families need."

In response to public demand and the report's findings, Action for Children is calling on the UK Government to:

- Introduce a web-portal with a postcode function to enable the public to seek the most appropriate help, at the earliest opportunity, for children they are worried about in their local area
- Meet its commitment to early help and put measures in place that support professionals to make timely decisions, meaning neglected children receive effective support across all levels of need from the identification of suspected cases to chronic neglect

Provided by University of Stirling

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