

How safe are our children? 2016

REPORT BRIEFING: WALES



Background

The NSPCC published *How safe are our children?* our fourth annual state-of-the-nations report in June 2016. *How safe are our children? 2016* provides an overview of the child protection landscape and collates the most up-to-date child protection data that exists across each of the four nations in the UK. Compiling this data is part of our commitment to evidence. We carry out research and evaluation to make sure that the programmes and interventions that we deliver to help children are the right ones. Our annual *How safe are our children?* report helps us to better understand the problems that we, and our partners, are seeking to address.

This Wales briefing accompanies the UK-wide *How safe are our children? 2016* report. It draws out key data from the report that specifically relates to Wales. It also presents the analysis and commentary relating to the trends, policy landscape and priorities here in Wales. At the start of the Fifth National Assembly for Wales, *How safe are our children? 2016* lends evidence to our call for a renewed focus on children and young people. Addressing the issues that children are facing in Wales today will ensure the wellbeing of future generations.

Introduction

The *How safe are our children? 2016* report shows some encouraging changes in indicators that measure the extent of abuse and neglect today. For example, in a UK-wide context, we've seen a **29 per cent rise in the number of contacts to the NSPCC helpline** about abuse and neglect between 2011/12 and 2015/16. While increased reports of abuse can be seen as a worrying trend, it also gives us some reason to be hopeful about the public's and professionals' increased willingness to speak out and keep children safe.

While we welcome these positive changes, this report shows that significant work is left to do in Wales to ensure that all children have safer childhoods.

Mental health and wellbeing: a key concern

In the last year, information collected from ChildLine counselling sessions has shown that mental health **is a key concern for children and young people across the UK**. Figures reveal that a mental health related concern featured in **one in three ChildLine counselling sessions** last year. In 2015/16, **more than 92,000 counselling sessions** were carried out with children and young people across the UK where mental health related issues, such as low self-esteem, unhappiness, depression, self-harm or suicidal feelings, were their main concern.

The high number of ChildLine UK contacts relating to mental health concerns shows that it is important that the right support is made available to children and young people at the right time to overcome their problems.

Key findings

- Mental health concerns featured in **one in three contacts to ChildLine last year across the UK**.
- There has been a **26 per cent increase in the number of recorded sexual offences against children under 16** in Wales in the past year. These figures have more than doubled in the past decade.
- In 2015, the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) identified and worked with partners to remove 68,092 URLs confirmed as hosting child sexual abuse images worldwide – a **118 per cent increase from the previous year**.
- There has been an **increase of 114 per cent in the number of police-recorded offences for "obscene publications"** in Wales since the previous year.
- Neglect **remains the most common reason for a child to be placed on the child protection register (CPR)** in Wales: that's 40 per cent of registrations at 31 March 2015.
- Numbers of **recorded cruelty and neglect offences are at their highest in Wales for a decade**.

A continuing increase in the reporting and recording of sexual abuse

In a continuing trend, the reporting and recording of child sexual abuse has sharply increased across the UK. In 2014/15 police recorded 47,008 sexual offences against children in the UK¹ – the highest number of recorded sexual offences against children in the past decade. As in the rest of the UK, Wales has recorded a **rise in the reporting and recording of child sexual abuse**.

- In Wales, there were 1,857 recorded sexual offences against children under 16 in 2014/15.² This represents a **26 per cent increase in the number of recorded sexual offences against children under 16 in Wales in the past year** (from 1,478 in 2013/14).
- These figures have **more than doubled in the past decade**, from 779 in 2005/06 to 1,857 recorded sexual offences in 2014/15.
- In 2014/15, there were 1,791 recorded sexual offences in Wales. **This is an increase of 24 per cent in the number of recorded sexual offences against children aged under 18 in Wales in the last year.**

It is important to stress that this data does not reflect the total number of sexual offences committed against children, as many offences are not reported to the police. We should view the rise in reported sexual offences as positive, particularly as NSPCC research has demonstrated that disclosing abuse is very difficult for many children – with some never disclosing their abuse.³ Any delay in disclosure can have devastating consequences for children as it delays the provision of treatment to help them recover from their experiences. The NSPCC believes that more needs to be done to think about how children and young people who are survivors of child sexual abuse can be supported to speak out and to seek help and support.

Moreover, it is essential that once children disclose abuse, they are able to access the right support, at the right time, to help them overcome their trauma. The impact of abuse includes mental health problems such as

anxiety, depression, substance misuse, eating disorders, self-harm, anger and aggression, sexual symptoms and age-inappropriate sexual behaviour.⁴ A recent survey of professionals carried out by the NSPCC in Wales suggests that there are insufficient services to help children and young people who have been abused and neglected to overcome their experiences. The NSPCC has recently launched a UK-wide campaign, *It's Time*, to ensure that every child who has suffered abuse can access the right support to recover, at the right time. We will continue to work with partners in Wales to ensure this can be achieved.

We have welcomed the last Welsh Government's announcement of the Together for Children and Young People Service Improvement Programme to improve the emotional and mental health of children and young people in Wales, and the additional £7.6 million investment per year for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). We also welcome the focus on tackling child sexual exploitation through the All Wales Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Action Plan, though we feel it is vital to do more to prevent and tackle child sexual abuse, of which CSE is a subset. Evidence has shown that victims of CSE have often been abused and neglected earlier in their lives⁵, which is why NSPCC Cymru/Wales is calling for a comprehensive and strategic approach to tackle child sexual abuse and neglect.

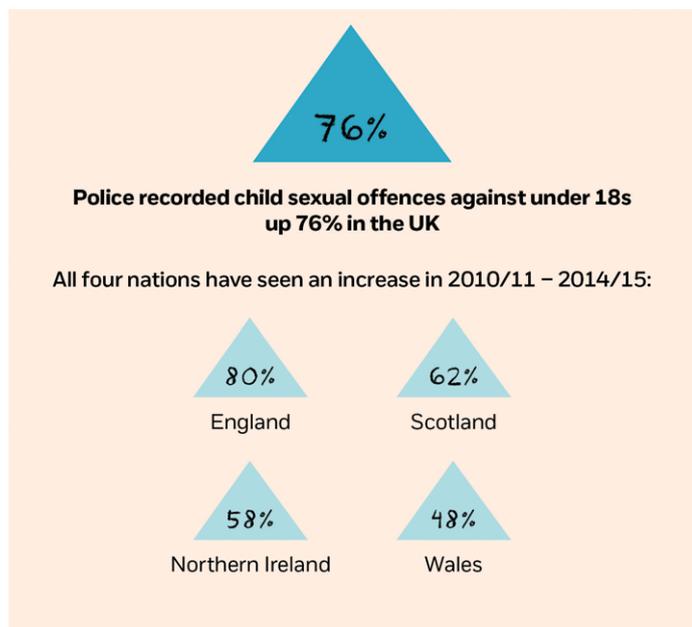
NSPCC Cymru/Wales calls for:

- **The development of a comprehensive child sexual abuse action plan.**
- **A review of the provision of therapeutic services for children and young people who have been abused and neglected.**
- **Improved provision of support services so that the needs of children who have been sexually abused, and their families' needs can be met.**
- **The National Assembly for Wales to ensure that the extra spend of £7.6 million a year for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services is maintained and includes a focus on the specific needs of children and young people who have been abused and neglected.**

New challenges: online abuse

The internet is an extremely valuable resource for children, which they can use to learn, communicate, develop, create and explore the world around them. Conversely, the internet also poses one of the newest threats to keeping children safe. It presents new risks and too often leaves young people exposed to experiences which they find upsetting and can have lasting impacts. The constant evolving nature of the digital world also means the type and scale of the challenge rapidly changes. Although these online risks are not always fully understood, it is essential for children's safety that they are addressed.

Our *How safe are our children? 2016* report reveals that the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) has been working worldwide to identify and remove increasing numbers of URLs that have been confirmed as hosting child sexual abuse images.



- In 2015, the IWF identified and worked with partners to **remove 68,092 URLs confirmed as hosting child sexual abuse images worldwide** – that’s a **118 per cent increase from the previous year**.

In a UK context, we have also seen an **increase in ChildLine counselling sessions about cyber bullying and ‘sexting’**, showing that this is a growing area of concern for young people.

- In 2015/16, there were 4,541 ChildLine counselling sessions carried out where **cyber bullying** was mentioned – a **13 per cent increase** since 2014/15.
- In 2015/16, there were 1,392 counselling sessions on “sexting”, which is a **15 per cent increase on the previous year**.

How safe are our children? 2016 also indicates that **reported offences against children online are also on the rise**, as both professionals and the public become increasingly aware of the changing nature of child abuse in the digital age. In Wales in 2014/15, we have seen a sharp rise of **reported offences related to “obscene publications”** including the production, distribution and viewing of child abuse images.⁶

- In 2014/15, in Wales there were 587 police-recorded offences for “obscene publications”. This compares to 274 police-recorded offences from 2013/14.
- That’s an increase of **114 per cent in the number of police-recorded offences for “obscene publications” in Wales since the previous year**.

The NSPCC is working closely with industry and partners to address the proliferation of child abuse material online. However, despite some early evidence of progress, particularly with the technology industry taking some steps to address the problem, it is clear that much more needs to be done. The NSPCC sees keeping children safe from online harm as a growing area of child protection requiring urgent attention and a commitment to better understand the issues. We believe keeping children safe from online abuse needs to be a priority and we urge the Welsh Government to ensure that Wales is at the forefront

NSPCC Cymru/Wales calls for:

- A comprehensive online safety action plan supported by a digital advisory group to ensure **Wales is at the forefront of keeping children safe online**.
- Children to be empowered to protect themselves and prevent abuse by making lessons on online safety a key element of compulsory age-appropriate Personal and Social Education (PSE) in Wales under the new Wellbeing Strand of the Curriculum for Wales.
- The Wales National Safeguarding Board to make online safety a key part of its new National Strategy.
- Adequate guidance for public service professionals on “sexting” and the law with regards to children and young people.

of keeping children safe online. We believe the National Assembly and Government should be holding direct and regular discussions with industry and relevant partners as well as with counterparts in administrations across the UK, to fight this growing trend.

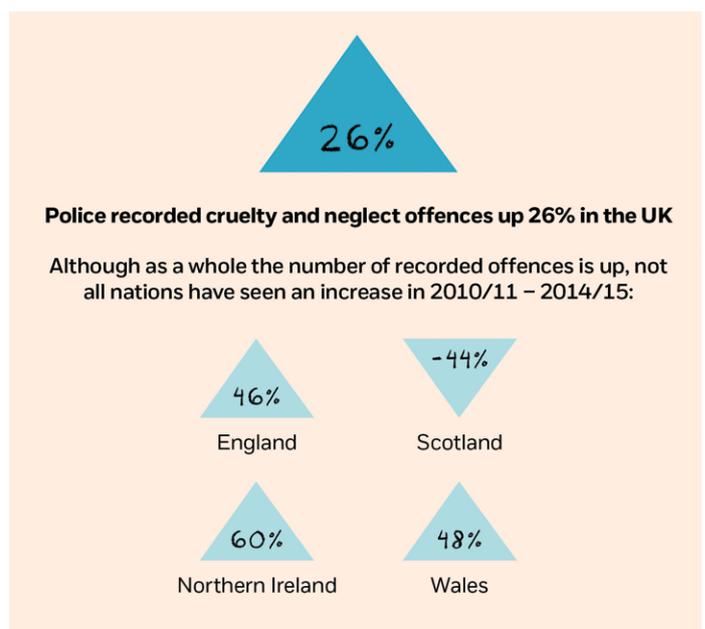
Keeping a focus on child neglect

NSPCC UK-wide research indicates that one in ten 11 to 17 year olds experience severe neglect in their childhood^{7,8} While child sexual abuse continues to dominate the media, *How safe are our children? 2016* reminds us that we must not lose sight of neglect. The report shows that child neglect continues to be the **most common reason for a child to be placed on the child protection register (CPR)** in Wales: child neglect accounts for 40 per cent of registrations at 31 March 2015.

This year we have also seen changes in the numbers of police-recorded cruelty and neglect offences. In Wales we have seen a marked increase, with numbers of recorded cruelty and neglect offences **at their highest for a decade**.

- In 2014/15, there were 415 police-recorded offences of cruelty and neglect in Wales.⁹
- This is a **53 per cent increase in the past year**, from 272 in 2013/14 to 415 in 2014/15.

As police-recorded crime statistics suffer from the problem of under-reporting, the data does not reflect the total number of children who are actually suffering from cruelty or neglect. The NSPCC believes that there are more children suffering from abuse or neglect than those who are known to children’s social services¹⁰. Some may view the increase in police-recorded offences of cruelty and neglect as alarming, though the most likely cause is that more children who are experiencing cruelty and neglect are now being identified, particularly now that emotional neglect is better recognised and the Serious Crime Act 2015 was changed to include psychological harm.



NSPCC Cymru/Wales are pleased that the Welsh Government is determined to tackle child neglect in Wales, and that we were commissioned, together with Action for Children/Gweithredu dros blant, to deliver the **Welsh Neglect Project**. This project aimed to improve multi-agency responses and services for neglected children and their families. We are pleased that the Welsh Government will take forward the work of the Welsh Neglect Project through the Improving Outcomes for Children Strategic Steering Group from 2016 onwards.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales calls for:

- **An enhanced health visiting service and evidence-based family support programmes to new parents of 0–4 year olds in Wales outside Flying Start areas.**
- **A family support strategy that coordinates efforts nationally and locally to ensure children’s needs are met. This must ensure universal services provide early effective support to parents and targeted evidence-based services are available to address issues early.**

Conclusion: prevent, protect and play a part

We fight for safer childhoods – will you?

How safe are our children? 2016 reveals that we face a range of complex and diverse challenges in keeping future generations safe. We know that abuse can destroy a child’s dreams, but it never should. Without help, the damage caused by abuse and neglect can last long into adult life, affecting relationships, physical and emotional development, learning and wellbeing. NSPCC Cymru/Wales believes that with everyone **playing a part** in **preventing** child abuse and **protecting** vulnerable children, damaged lives can be turned around.

Notes

- 1 Based on Freedom of Information data obtained by the NSPCC for England and Wales and data provided by the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Scottish Government.
- 2 This excludes offences that include abuse of a position of trust of a sexual nature (five cases) and abuse of children through sexual exploitation (12 cases).
- 3 Allnock, D. and Miller, P. (2013) *No one noticed, no one heard: a study of disclosures of childhood abuse*. [London]: NSPCC.
- 4 Lanktree, C.B. et al. (2008) *Multi-informant assessment of maltreated children: convergent and discriminant validity of the TSCC and TSCYC*. (Child abuse and neglect, Vol.32, Iss.6)
- 5 Radford, L., Corral, S., Bradley, C. and Fisher, H.L. (2013) 'The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment and other types of victimization in the UK: findings from a population survey of caregivers, children and young people and young adults'. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 37(10): 801–13
- 6 It is important to state that in England, Wales and Northern Ireland it is a crime to create, possess or distribute indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of children. These crimes are recorded in the Home Office Counting Rules under the miscellaneous category of "Obscene Publications", a category which includes a variety of offences relating to obscene material and which **is not focused exclusively on children**. This means that the figures below are the maximum number of possible offences that have been recorded in relation to indecent images of children. **Some of these offences will relate to adults, but we do not know how many.**
- 7 Radford, L. et al. (2011) *Child abuse and neglect in the UK today*. London: NSPCC.
- 8 Child neglect covers a spectrum, and is the outcome of sub-optimal parenting; it is usually the result of the things parents *don't do* that risks affecting a child's health and development. This can lead to devastating, long-lasting effects on children, including mental health problems like depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, difficulty in socialising, little self-confidence/low self-esteem, and a lower IQ and poor school performance. (Core-Info, 2014)
- 9 Please note that figures include offences of abandonment of a child, as this offence was merged with that of cruelty to and neglect of children in 2013.
- 10 Jutte, S. et al (2015) *How safe are our children? The most comprehensive overview of child protection in the UK*. London: NSPCC
- 11 Chowdry, H. and Oppenheim, C. (2015) *Spending on late intervention: How we can do better for less*. Early Intervention Foundation

This report underscores the need for us in Wales to continue to focus our efforts on tackling and preventing sexual abuse, neglect, online abuse and poor mental health and wellbeing. To do this we need to ensure that **we keep child protection and safeguarding at the forefront of the Fifth National Assembly for Wales**. We are pleased that the Welsh Government will continue to prioritise **early intervention**, to ensure that children have the best start in life. In 2014/15, late intervention cost services (such as health, local government, youth justice and police) in Wales **£1.15 billion**¹¹. It therefore makes both economic and moral sense to ensure that issues that affect children’s wellbeing are dealt with early, before they escalate to crisis point and require costly interventions. We also welcome the Welsh Government’s most recent announcement that they will bring forward legislation that will **remove the defence of reasonable punishment in cases of common assault against a child**.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales calls on the Welsh Government to continue to strengthen the delivery of children’s rights and address the issues in *How safe are our children?* to improve outcomes for children and young people.

It’s time to join our fight for safer childhoods.

Feedback and queries

If you have any questions or feedback about the content of this briefing please contact the Policy and Public Affairs Team Cymru/Wales.

Email: Publicaffairs.cymru@NSPCC.org.uk

Direct Line: 02920 108161

THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE
OVERVIEW OF CHILD
PROTECTION IN THE UK
WWW.NSPCC.ORG/HOWSAFE