ExChange

# Identifying and Responding to Child Neglect in Schools in Wales:

Key findings and messages for practice

University of BRISTOL

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# Welcome

Dissemination of findings

Key messages for practice

Space for discussion & application

Recommendations

# Today's workshop

1. Aim of the study

2. Design & methods

3. Challenges of data collection & analysis

4. Findings (i) & (ii)

5. Round table discussions (i) & (ii)

6. Key messages for practice

# Background & context

o **1,090** children registered for neglect, further 120 registered for neglect with physical and/or sexual abuse (41% of all registrations 2017)

o Neglect is often chronic, rather than based on a specific incident, makes it more difficult to identify whether the care a child receives is poor enough to be labelled neglect

o Multidimensional, from a range of causes, makes it challenging to provide comprehensive and timely help

o At school children are seen for many hours, by a wide range of school-based staff, able to observe their interactions with their parents and peers in different contexts

o Absence of data regarding the nature and level of support given to children experiencing neglect in mainstream education (Stevenson, 2005; Allen, 2011)

*(Pithouse & Crowley, 2016; Stats Wales, 2018; Stevens & Laing, 2015; Welsh Government, 2015)*

# Aim of study

The project was funded by Welsh Government (Health and Care Research Wales) and undertaken between 2015-2018 and aimed to provide **insight into the role of schools in identifying and responding to child neglect:**

The study asked three key research questions:

1.  What is the extent of involvement of schools in identifying and responding to child neglect?

2.  What is the nature of the relationship between schools and social services?

3.  What are the experiences of school staff from a range of different roles?

# Methods
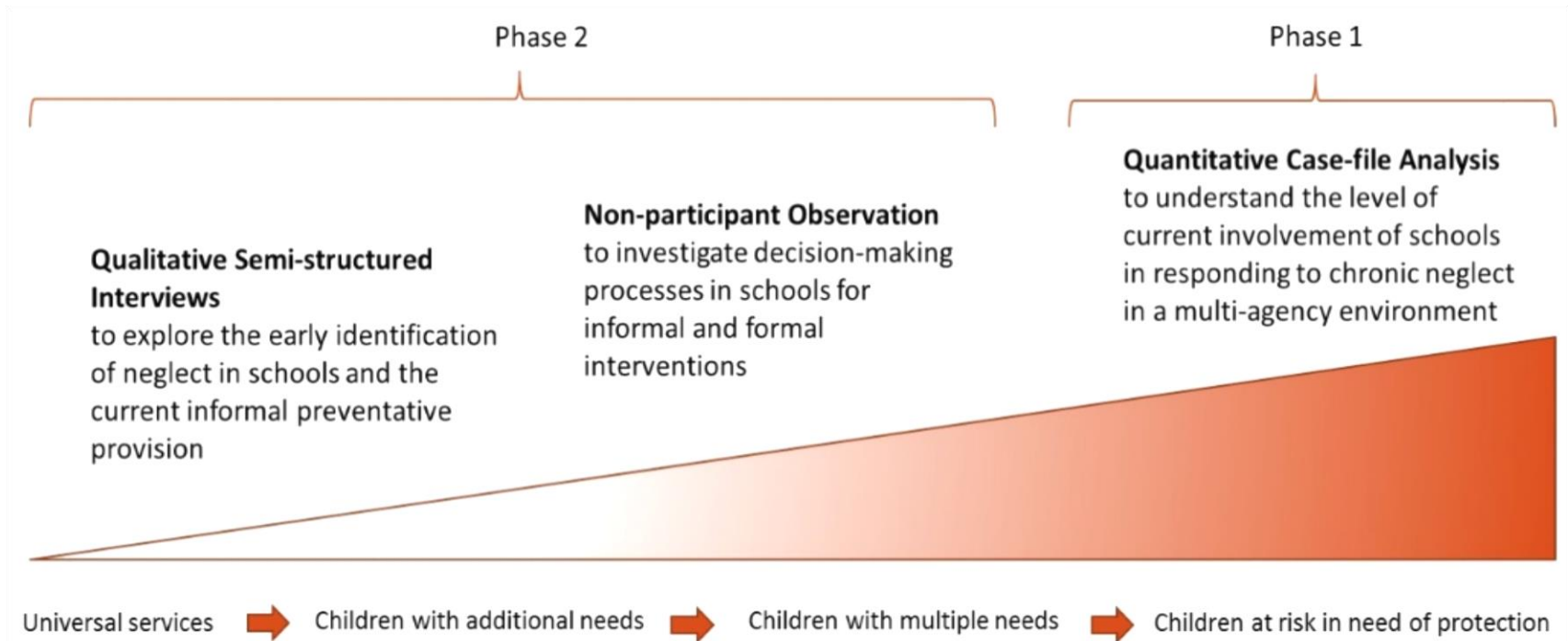
# Phase 1 data: the sample

The three Welsh Local Authorities were chosen in accordance with the study's principles for selection:

1. Geographic - urban, rural and valley locations
2. Annual levels of low and high rates of neglect (per 10k) on the Child Protection Register
3. Low, average, and high levels of deprivation in Wales (at the 10% LSOA)

Each Authority provided access to a selective sample of up to 50 case files in accordance with the study's sampling frame:

o The school was the referrer to Social Services
o The child was of school age
o The child was registered under the category of 'neglect' on the Child Protection Register at the first Case Conference

*n=119 case files*

# Challenges of Data

**Problematic nature of data**

o  inability to achieve desired sample size for study

o  different electronic software systems

o  challenges of archived paper files

o  long duration of data collection

o  variances in culture of social work recording

o  length & legibility of information available

o  3 levels of data: referral, child, local authority

o  missing data (SEN 52%, religion 46%, language 27%)
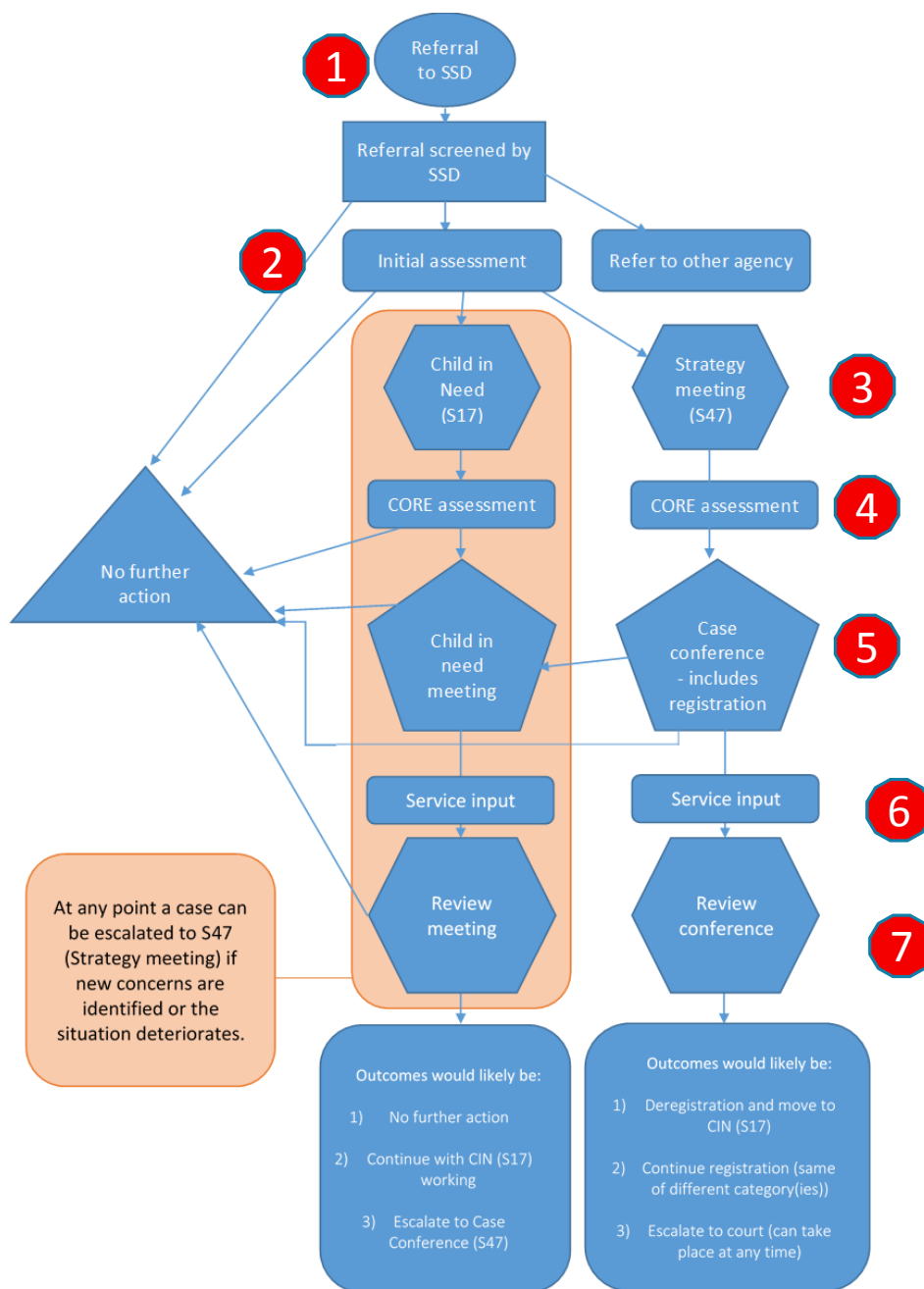
# Phase 1: common patterns

- more boys (58%) in the reported sample living with neglect than girls
- educational neglect (51%) most frequently cited in referral, closely followed by physical neglect (45%)

- mainstream education (88%)

- primary school age (73%)

- had one sibling (30%)

- mean age of 9.6 years old

- child's ethnicity was predominantly White British (88%)

- not previously registered on the child protection register (58%)

*n=119* case files

# Child protection practice



Level of Ongoing Involvement of Schools in the Child Protection Process (%)
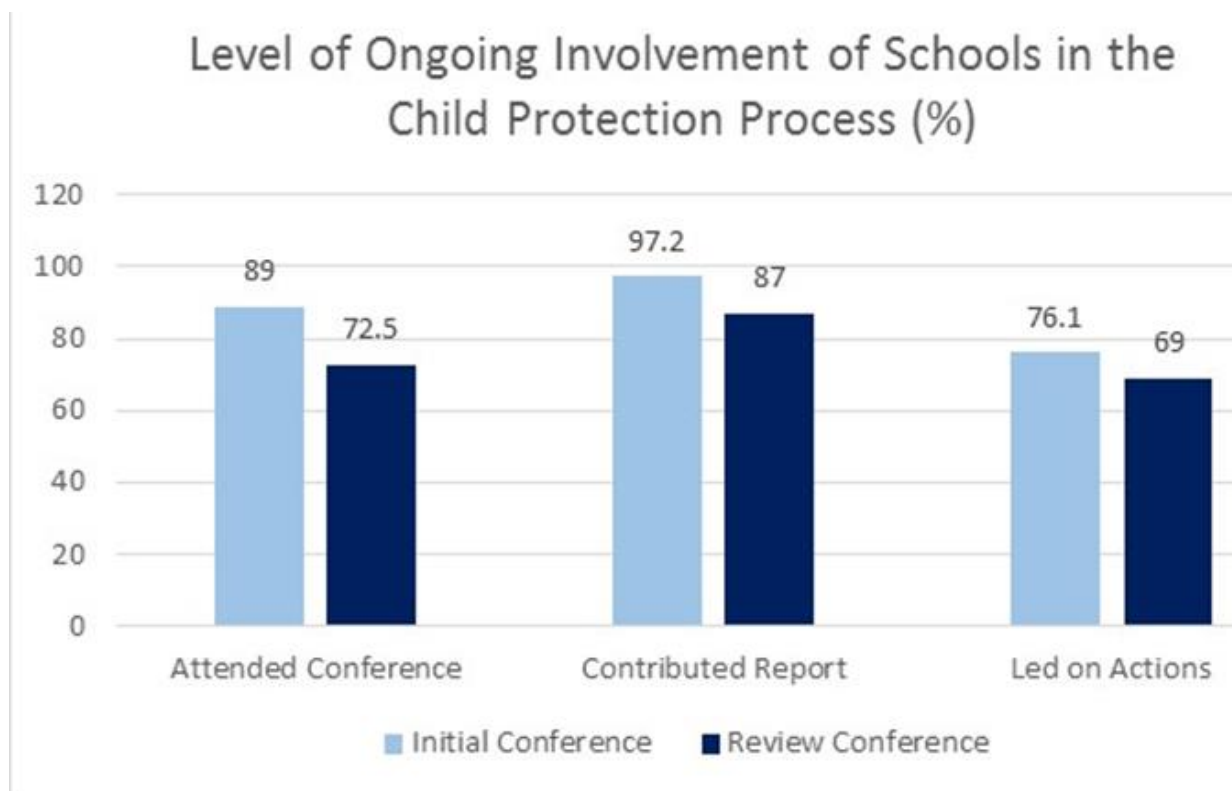
# Round Table Discussion

o   Is this suggestive of school staff being less involved due to the perceived lead role/ power of Social Services once a referral is made?

o   Or is it poor Local Authority organisation around meeting planning and communication with outside agencies?

**Are these findings reflective of your own experiences of working with child neglect in your individual roles?**

# Coffee break……..

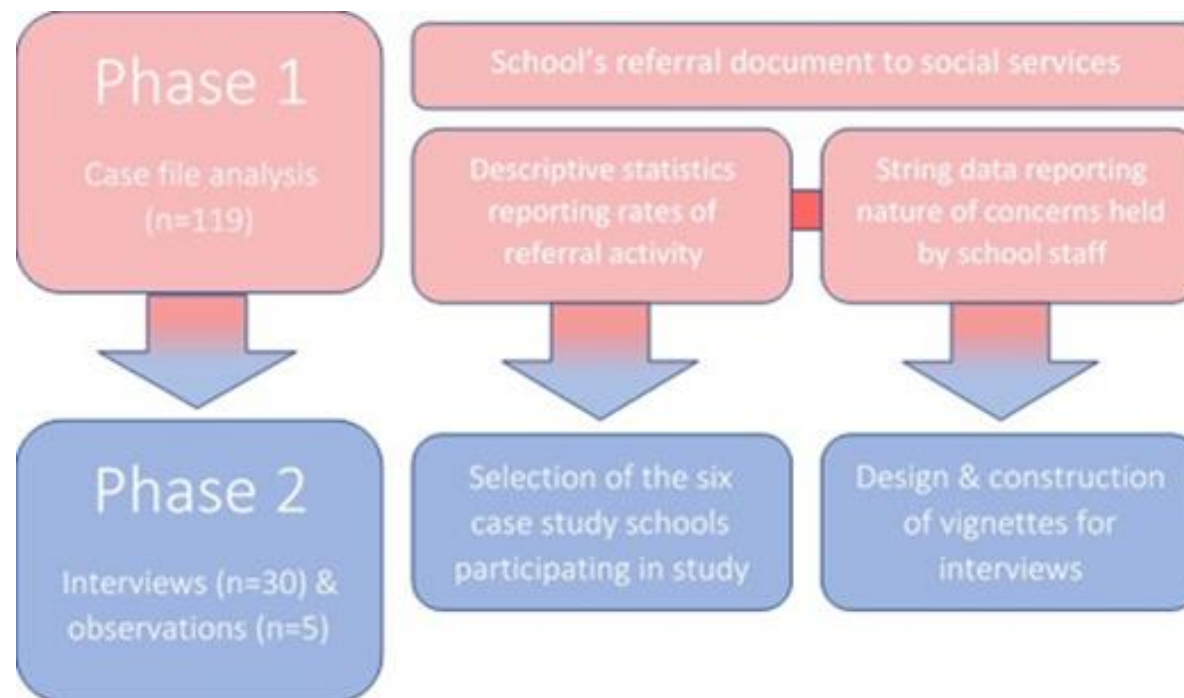Further information available and full findings:

Sharley, V. (2018). 'Identifying and Responding to Child Neglect in Schools in Wales'. PhD Thesis. Cardiff University.

http://orca.cf.ac.uk/115691/

# Phase 2: design

The study employed an explanatory two-phase sequential design:



Phase 1 — Case file analysis (n=119)

School's referral document to social services

Descriptive statistics reporting rates of referral activity

String data reporting nature of concerns held by school staff

Phase 2 — Interviews (n=30) & observations (n=5)

Selection of the six case study schools participating in study

Design & construction of vignettes for interviews

*(Creswell, 2003; Teater et al, 2017)*
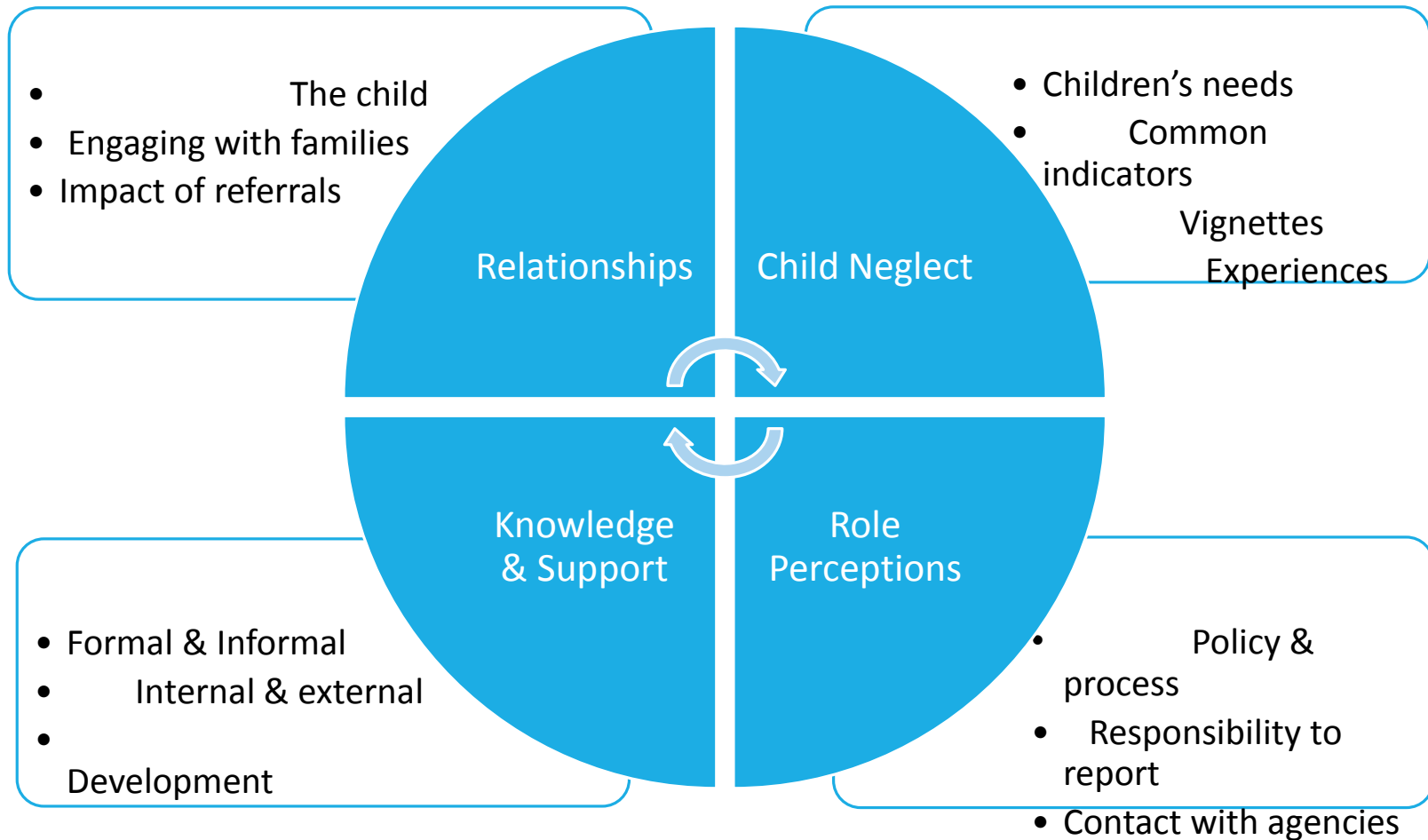
# Participant selection

To generate a broad range of staff knowledge, experience, and expertise from a wide range of roles, staff were identified with the assistance of Head Teachers from five different categories:

to promote diversity in the sample and reduce potential bias:

1. Management and strategic staff
2. Teaching staff
3. Pastoral staff
4. Education support staff
5. Support staff

| Category | | Role |
|---|---|---|
| A | Management/Strategic Staff | Head Teacher<br>Assistant/Deputy Head Teacher<br>Senior Management/Leadership Team<br>Deputy Head Teacher |
| B | Teaching Staff | Head of Year<br>Subject Specific Teacher<br>Class Teacher<br>Newly Qualified Teacher<br>Safeguarding Lead Officer<br>SENCO |
| C | Pastoral Staff | School Counsellor<br>School Nurse<br>Education Welfare Officer<br>School Social Worker<br>Parenting or Family Support Worker<br>Pastoral Support Worker |
| D | Education Support Staff | Teaching Assistant<br>Nurture Assistant<br>Sports Club Staff/ Sports Coaches<br>Specialist Behaviour Teaching Assistant<br>Education Mentor<br>Librarian<br>School Escorts<br>Play Staff |
| E | Support Staff | Reception staff<br>Administrators<br>Canteen Staff/ Dinner staff<br>Breakfast or After School Club staff<br>Playground staff |

*(Baginsky, 2003; Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005; Hodgkinson & Baginsky,, 2000; Webb & Vulliamy, 2001)*

# Interviews

- The child
- Engaging with families
- Impact of referrals

**Relationships**

**Child Neglect**

- Children's needs
- Common indicators

Vignettes

Experiences

**Knowledge & Support**

**Role Perceptions**

- Formal & Informal
- Internal & external
- Development

- Policy & process
- Responsibility to report
- Contact with agencies

*(n=30)*

# Thematic analysis & findings

Three levels of difference emerged:

i.    Between & within local authority practice

**ii.    between each field of responsibility**

**iii.  between individual schools**

# (i) Key findings

Common themes highlighted differences in responding to child neglect-practice in the two settings: school staff and social workers

1. the 'visibility' of neglect and staff needing to observe neglect on a child

2. the nature of professional relationships (child & other agencies)

3. power held by, & stigma attached to social services

4. rules and routines which govern safeguarding procedures

5. lack of professional confidence school staff had in their ability to respond to child neglect

*(Baginsky, 2008; Witte et al, 2015)*

# Visibility of Neglect

o  being drawn to the observable presentation of the child

o  talking about the visible indicators of neglect on a child at school in terms of observing different forms of neglect

o  Needing to be able to 'see' the child's hunger or distress, or physical evidence of neglect, in order to gather tangible proof to validate concerns held

o  the process of monitoring neglect over a period of time, building a comprehensive picture or chronology with the purpose of legitimising their decision to refer concerns to Social Services

o  struggles with articulating concerns of neglect or 'gut feelings' and ability to conceptualise worries effectively to Social Services

*(Thompson, 2016; Davies & Ward, 2012)*

# Data Extracts

*'I'm not in the home, I don't know; but I suppose I sit in meetings with the social worker who does go into the home – and other agencies - I think I do have a relatively good idea that it's more lack of awareness and understanding on the parents' behalf. But as a classroom teacher, when the only contact you have is maybe a phone call or a parents evening- I wouldn't have a clue.'*

*Special Needs Manager & Class Teacher, (Urban Authority)*

*'…maybe there are other concerns then, you know, that they get to see <u>outside</u> of the school that we wouldn't necessarily know about, you know we only see and we only deal with the ones we see <u>in</u> school…'.*

*Learning Support Assistant, (Valleys Authority)*

# Power & stigma of Social Services

o Power imbalance between agencies

o utilise social workers' expertise to help guide practice or defer to social work knowledge and professional decision making in more formal contexts such as Child Protection Conferences

o Paradox where staff also talked about how they felt better positioned in terms of daily relationships with the child over a long period of time to hold increased knowledge about a their lived experiences

o Professional identity as educators not social workers concerned with welfare

o Utilising differences to disassociate from Social Services to mitigate stigma and engage families more positively

o Many staff spoke of the stigmatisation families were perceived to attach to Social Services and the challenges this brought to their roles within schools

o Using leverage and power of the 'threat' to involve Social Services to engage families in voluntary/ school-based support

*(SCIE 2016; Ferguson, 2011)*

# Data extracts

*'I do know if I need advice on certain things it would be going straight to, not so much the social workers,, but their bosses, just giving them a ring. .."right I've got this scenario...where am I going?" ...on the whole you'll agree with the social worker because they've done all the sort of background work. They give you their report, so you tend to go with them....I don't think I have ever had to go against the social worker'.*

*Head Teacher (Rural Authority primary school)*

*'Some students see social workers as the 'Big Bad Wolf' because the social worker is the one that says "I am sorry, we're whipping you away". And sometimes you can be that balancing factor because you know you can say "well look, person X is here to help you, they are not here to take you away!" – we can be seen as that 'in-between' you know'.*

*Pastoral Manager, (Valleys Authority secondary school)*

*'More concerns were expressed and more 'threat' is the wrong word – it was 'suggested' that if they didn't attend the next set of appointments, a referral would be made'*

*Class Teacher/ ALENCo (Urban Authority primary school)*

# Rules & routines

o Concerned with the culture of reporting and making safeguarding referrals to Social Services

o Staff spoke about the strong order of rules and routines within the school system with the *Designated Safeguarding Person (DSP)* in 'Keeping Learners Safe in Education' policy to speed up decision making, whilst easing pressures on staff's daily roles

o 'Passing-on' or 'passing-up' of concerns through a hierarchy in the school

o Reporting comfort for fulfilling role within the system, and discomfort for stepping outside of prescribed responsibilities

o Feeding information to Child Protection Officers (DSPs) and 'doing their bit', but lack of feedback about outcomes or accountability for following up referrals made

o Emphasises a divergence in national policies for each organisation

*(Thompson, 2016; Davies & Ward, 2012)*

# Data extracts

*'I don't make any referrals at all to agencies, if I've got any worries, if I'm dealing with a pupil…I'll always refer down to the child protection officers and everything will go to those two members of staff.  What I've been told is that if you've done that, you passed on the duty then to the children Protection Officer.'*

*Class Teacher (Rural Authority secondary school)*

*'We couldn't refer to Social Services without the Safeguarding Officer being involved'*

*Reception Teacher (Rural Authority, primary school)*

*'I've emailed the head of Year just to say my concerns, so I know I have passed that on; and should anything happen to him, I've done my bit. That sounds awful – "I've done my bit and that's OK" – its not OK, but I've done what I should do; or feel I should do; because its not in my power to go an further than that. If that sort of makes sense?'*

*Attendance Officer (Valleys Authority, secondary school)*

# Round Table Discussion

*(i) Differences between school and social work practice*

*Take 15 minutes to discuss the following two questions on your tables with colleagues, then feedback to the room:*

- o Do these findings chime with your own experiences of working with child neglect in your role? If so, in what way?

- o How can you overcome some of the identified barriers when working across agencies in your own role?

# (ii) Key findings

Significant variation in school practice across factors:





1. **Proactive/reactive:** the approach taken by the school and whether the infrastructure of the institution was built upon a proactive safeguarding framework

2. **Learning and training environment:** created for staff by staff or management in the school to develop expertise

3. **Relationships with families:** school staff's individual relationships with the child's parent(s), carer(s) or family members

*(Davies & Ward, 2012; Guest, 2008; Munro 2011a & 2011b)*

# Proactive or reactive frameworks

o All schools good organisation of safeguarding and reporting processes
o Multi-agency models of practice are crucial to 'jigsaw practices' (Thompson, 2016)
o Smaller (sized) schools reported proactive and consistent approaches

o Good practice evident in schools that took individual approaches to working with child neglect
o Minimises long term effects to health, but reduces cost of reactive services
o Preventative strategic priorities and early intervention and investment
o Clear vision and ethos, culture of practice in day to day organisation
o Staff spoke of inclusion and wellbeing of all pupils
o Creative ways of engaging and connecting with parents
o 'Neglect Champion' leading on school-based expertise and training

# Learning & development

o Staff's perceptions of the environment had influence upon their learning and knowledge child on neglect
o Informed their capacity to respond effectively to concerns held
o Informal and formal spaces were identified as supportive and important for staff resilience and retention

o Positive structures facilitated sharing of expertise from more experienced colleagues or other school-based practitioners
o The intimacy and familiarity of smaller schools fostered good communication and support amongst colleagues
o Formal training (when available) delivered by Local Authority
o Informal in-house learning opportunities
o Whole team discussions to unpick complex situations and seek advice on decision-making from colleagues
o Existence of 'communities of practice' provided effective learning contexts within the school (Wenger et al, 2004)

# Relationships with families

o The quality of relationship staff had with families was identified as significant to the efficacy of their practice

o Existing relationships were supportive in challenging inadequate levels of care

o Staff living within the community were able to provide wider information and knowledge about a family or child's circumstances

o Interactions with, and knowledge of families was advantageous to reporting practice

o Long term relationships allow staff deeper understanding

o Challenging partnership with parents and long term relationships

o Stronger or developed relationships enabled reluctant/hostile families to engage with voluntary school-based support

o Whilst other issues can then come to the fore

# Round Table Discussion

*(i) Differences in practice in individual schools*

*Take 15 minutes to discuss the following two questions on your tables with colleagues, then feedback to the room:*

o Do these findings chime with your own experiences of working with child neglect in your role? If so, in what way?

o Are the key messages useful? How can you apply aspects of good practice to your own roles when responding to child neglect?

# Summary of findings

Findings highlight the complexity which exists in the relationship between schools and Social Services when responding to the complexity of child neglect

Messages are transferable to all agencies providing preventative support and working with children's social work departments

Central positioning of schools at the heart of the community is key to effective practice

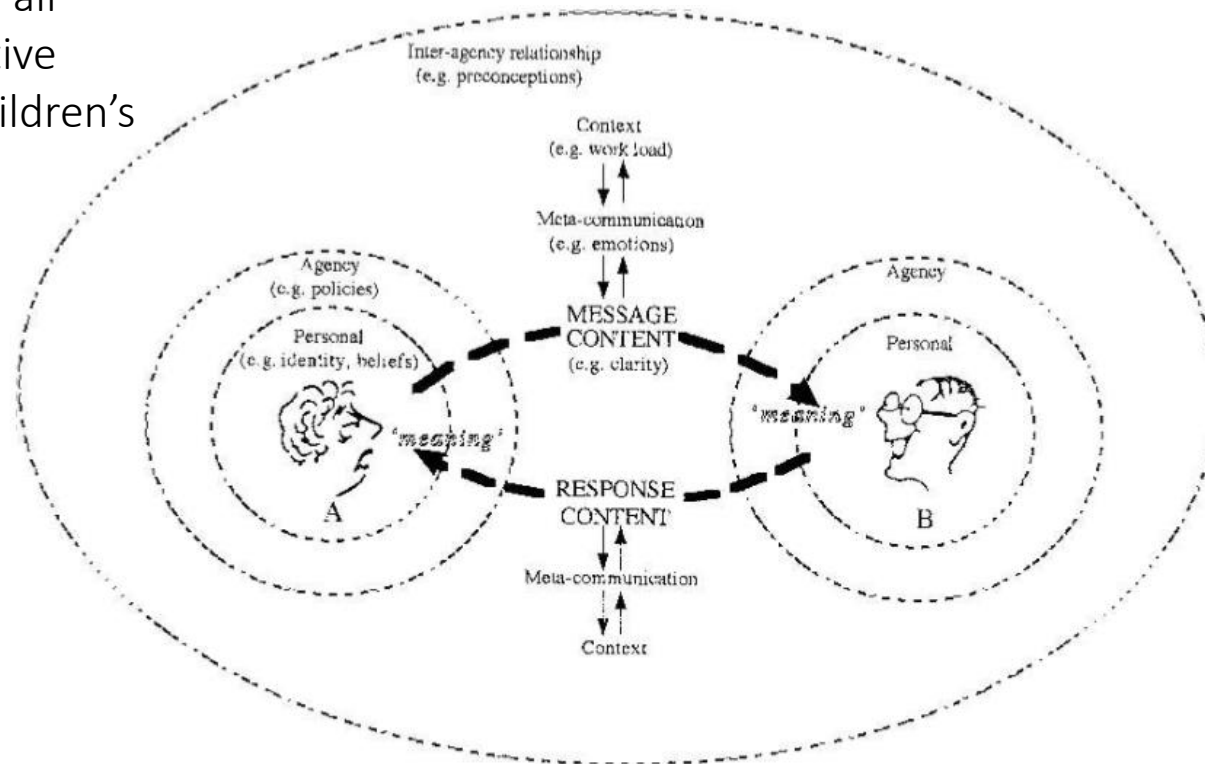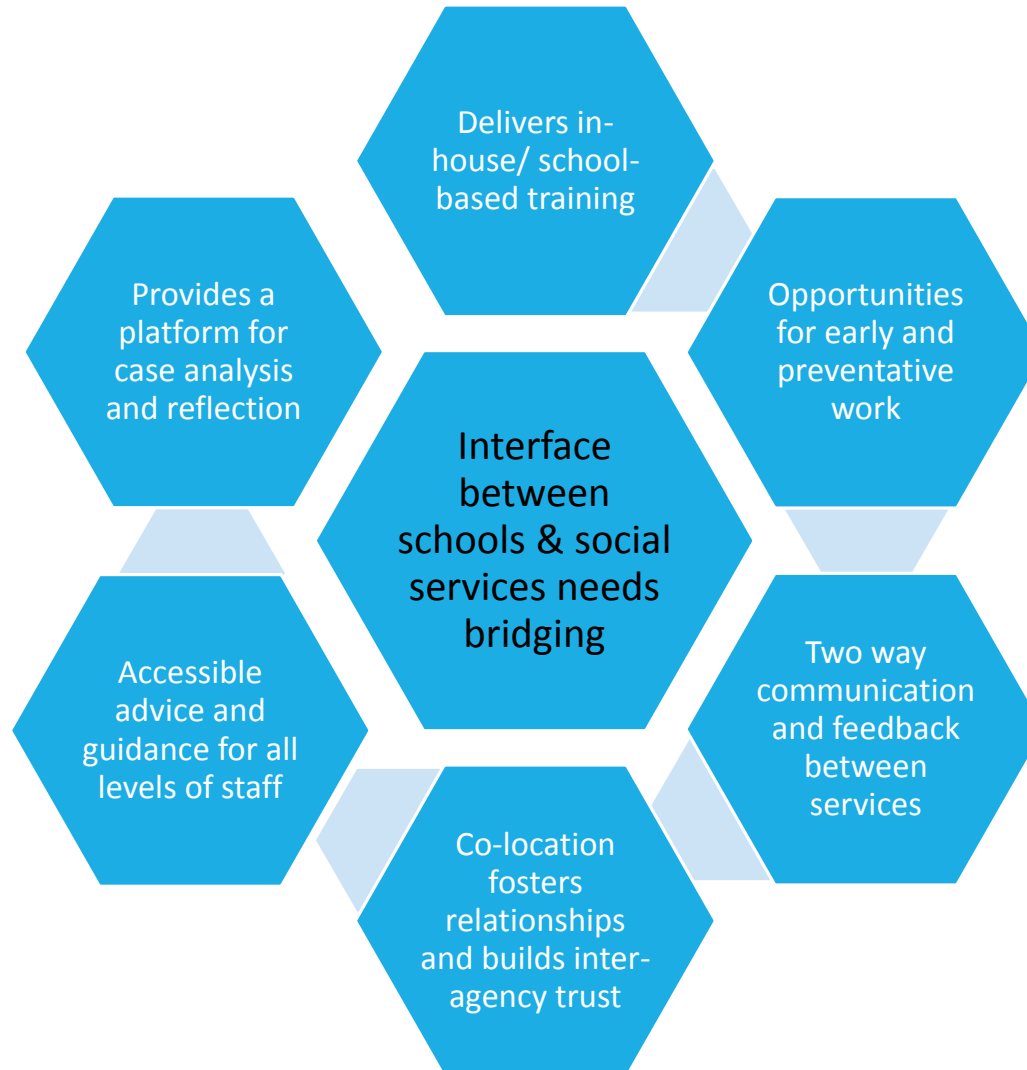Able to provide rich insights and valuable knowledge to identify and intervene in neglect early

**Figure 1.** Multilevel influences on interprofessional communication.

*(Image: Reder & Duncan, 2003: Understanding Communication)*

# School Social Workers



Delivers in-house/ school-based training

Opportunities for early and preventative work

Provides a platform for case analysis and reflection

Interface between schools & social services needs bridging

Two way communication and feedback between services

Accessible advice and guidance for all levels of staff

Co-location fosters relationships and builds inter-agency trust

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# Recommendations

o   Scale up research at a national level, also enhance collection of core data on social work case files to improve data availability and analysis for knowledge in this area

o   Build personal relationships across partner agencies to share knowledge and understand barriers to inter-agency collaboration

o   Identify or create in/formal opportunities for inter-professional collaboration through regular multi-agency meetings to share information, spending time in partner organisations, co-location, integration of professions, secondment opportunities

o   Use local authority's threshold guidance as a tool for reflective discussion across agencies, to inform decision making, and develop a 'shared language' to articulate concerns (and discuss referral outcomes)

o   Schools recruit strategic staff who demonstrate a commitment to developing expertise in neglect and promotion of children's well-being in the school setting

o   Develop effective 'communities of practice' within schools to complement existing formal training on neglect and safeguarding

o   Implementation of the School Social Worker Role

# Discussion & Reflection

How could you put these recommendations into practice in your own roles? (either in a school or local authority setting?)

Can you identify any potential barriers in doing so, and suggest strategies that may help to overcome them?

# Potential barriers

- Different organisational contexts– <u>time & work pressures!!</u>

- Lack of clarity around safeguarding processes, procedures, objectives

- Lack of funding for delivery of specific services, either for staff (e.g. school social workers), or for families through particular interventions

- Impact of power dynamics (statutory duties and organisational lead)

- Status and hierarchy within and across teams: levels of experience, knowledge, training, and expertise of practitioners

- Dominant or passive personalities, egos and organisational outlooks

- Team member recruitment and retention (Research In Practice, 2015)

- Diverse personal experiences, values, and individual cultures when considering what is 'good enough' parenting or care

- Different perceptions of risk and harm and understandings of thresholds for intervention

*(Horwath, 2006; Davies & Ward, 2012; Platt, 2006)*

# Future directions

Areas where the research could be developed further:

1.  <u>Interviews with Social Workers</u>' to investigate their experiences of working with school staff – are there similarities in the data?

2.  <u>Evaluation of the School Social Work role</u> in Wales, although informally discussed greater insight can be gained into the efficacy of the role

3.  <u>Interviews with children and young people</u> of school age about their thoughts, feelings and experiences of accessing support in a school context when experiencing child neglect

4.  <u>Scale up study at a national level</u>, and in-depth analysis to investigate whether **school staff's perceptions of child neglect are either 'raced' or 'gendered',** (in light of the under-reporting of children from a BAME background and the slightly higher representation of boys in the sample)

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