Rethinking Child Protection Strategy

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ESRC Workshop
Key interim findings & impact from transformative research
Dr Lauren Devine, February 2016
What is the research?

• **Investigating:** how we ‘do’ child protection in England. It’s a complex mix of law, policy and practice. We identify and have created a new term to describe a systemic problem, the ‘**welfare/policing dichotomy**’ (Devine, 2015)

• **Analysing**: secondary data to gain a strategic overview of how policy has led to an unsustainable position.

• **Creating**: the foundation for a global model enabling a new system and new thinking.
Key findings

• Trend analysis:
  • We have created a new database of trends in child protection & safeguarding referrals & assessments
  • Analysis shows that despite a 311% increase in referrals the proportion of referrals where abuse is found has dropped from 24% to 7%.
  • In its desire to detect more abuse, increased reporting has led to proportionately less detected abuse, and a corresponding drop in efficiency.

• Public Inquiries and Serious Case Reviews:
  • We have created a new database of all available PI and SCR reports, and identified gaps in available data.
  • We are analysing the key characteristics and recommendations of each report using Nvivo10
  • Our analysis shows these reports almost invariably advocate increased reporting. This is contributing to the efficiency problem we have identified from the trend analysis

• Risk:
  • We have conducted a systematic literature review of risk theory and practice in child protection.
  • We have identified the foundational research in risk assessment in CP. Our analysis shows a 97% false positive rate. We are investigating whether this may be the likely error rate in modern risk prediction systems, driving unnecessary referrals.
Impact

• Ministerial evidence briefing issued (3 more briefings planned)
• Invitations to present keynote speeches at national conferences
• Key figures in child protection have read and publicly commented on our work
• Our research quoted by BASW and used to underpin the theme of their national conference 2016.
• Working paper published, commented on by Chief Social Worker for England
• 1st published article relation to the project is the most read article in the journal’s records (Devine, 2015, JSWFL).
• Public lectures (held at London South Bank University and UWE)
• Media engagement (BBC, Guardian, social media & online)
• Formation of the SAFER Initiative, and Safeguarding Solutions CIC with national roll-out & media launch to coincide with our symposia
• New multi-disciplinary collaborations formed
• Leading to a further large funding bid to enable development of the new model of intervention. This will have global significance for process of child protection and other systems of state welfare interventions (e.g. care of the elderly and the disabled).