

Press release: Neglected older children missed

The joint report [Growing up neglected: a multi-agency response to older children](#), from inspectorates Ofsted, HMI Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and HMI Probation, finds that older neglected children are not always receiving the support and protection they need.

Too often, local agencies are failing to spot the signs of neglect in older children. While neglect of young children is usually better identified, because the signs are more obvious, older children suffering the same abuse are slipping through the cracks.

Older neglected children often experience abuse outside the home as well as within it. Children escaping neglectful homes are more likely to go missing, to be vulnerable to exploitation, and at risk of being drawn into criminal activity. This makes it hard for professionals to meet their multiple, complex needs.

In some cases, local agencies see older children to be the 'problem'. The report shows that front line services work together to tackle issues like youth violence and gang involvement, but often there is little consideration of the underlying causes that contribute to this behaviour, such as neglectful parenting.

The inspectorates saw good practice in some areas, where agencies considered all risks to children, including neglect. In these areas, the child and their family are supported, and parents challenged where appropriate. Professionals understand the impact of neglect on the child, including how neglectful parenting increases vulnerability to abuse outside of the home. However, this was not the case everywhere.

In one relatively affluent area visited for the report, GPs recognise that neglect can happen even in wealthy families. They are alert to different forms of neglect, including emotional neglect, and take steps to address them. For example, when children present with eating disorders or mental health problems, the GP will look beyond the immediate issues to ask questions about life at home, and relationships with parents.

Yvette Stanley, Ofsted's National Director for Social Care said:

Older children are still children, and they need our love and care. They face risks outside the home in a way younger children do not, and need parents to provide clear boundaries and support on their journey to adulthood.

Some older children we saw had been neglected by their parents over many years. These children are incredibly vulnerable. They can seem

'resilient' and appear to be making 'lifestyle choices', when they are in fact finding unsafe ways of coping, like getting involved in gangs or misusing drugs and alcohol.

Behavioural issues must, of course, be dealt with. But unless local agencies consider the role of neglectful parenting, and take action to address it, as well as supporting children in a way that recognises the impact of their traumatic childhood, then their chances of a successful future will continue to be low.

The report also highlights the vital role adult services, including probation and adult health services, have to play in recognising neglectful parenting. But it finds that too often, mental health and substance misuse services do not think about the whole family and the impact of adults' behaviour on children. Information on adults who have limited parenting capacity due to mental health or substance misuse is not always shared with partner agencies.

The report calls for:

- a 'whole system' approach to identifying and preventing neglect, including from adult services working with parents
- better training for professionals in identifying the signs of neglect in order children
- a more co-ordinated, strategic approach across all agencies working with children and parents
- the behaviour of older children to be understood in the context of the trauma they have experienced

Today's findings are the result of inspections of services for children in 6 local authority areas. This includes children's services departments, police, youth offending services, education, health, and probation services.

The inspections looked at how well local agencies are working together to help and protect older children who are neglected or at risk of neglect. Inspectors spoke to professionals as well as children and parents, and looked at a range of cases from children aged 7 to 15 years old.

Yvette Stanley continued:

As inspectorates, we recognise that this is a difficult, complex area, and that many local agencies are working hard to support neglected older children. I hope that today's report helps to galvanise a more joined up approach to this issue, so that we can improve the response to this extremely vulnerable group of children.

Professor Steve Field, Chief Inspector of General Practice at the Care Quality Commission said:

Older children experiencing neglect need proper care and support from a number of services, but proper intervention cannot happen if the neglect they face is misunderstood or goes unseen and unchallenged.

Staff across healthcare and other services must use their professional curiosity to look at the person behind the presentation, ask themselves what their situation might be outside of that moment, and communicate between themselves to fully understand and support the needs of the child. Where inspectors have seen this in practice, we have seen responses and action plans that lead to better outcomes for children and their families.

HM Inspector of Constabulary Wendy Williams said:

These inspections make clear the police's commitment to working with partner agencies to keep children safe. We did however find that older children suffering from neglect and abuse go under the radar for too long, too often, with wider patterns of risk not recognised or responded to in a sufficiently timely way. This is an area that needs to be improved.

The police may well be a vulnerable child's first point of contact. It is therefore vitally important that the police are properly equipped to identify signs of neglect and abuse in children – especially in older children, where abuse is not always obvious.

However, all the agencies we inspected have a duty of care to protect children from further harm. I hope that, by working together more closely, more vulnerable children will have access to the support and services they deserve.

Dame Glenys Stacey, HM Chief Inspector of Probation, said:

We strongly support the findings of this important report. Key to the success of any interventions to address the neglect of older children is improved collaboration and information sharing across the many agencies involved. The National Probation Service, CRCs and those delivering youth offending services have a key role to play and should look closely at the policies and practices they have in place to support early identification of older children who may be the subject of neglect and then using that information to work across all agencies on early intervention strategies.

The areas inspected were [Stockton-on-Tees, Cheshire West and Chester, Haringey, Bristol, Peterborough and Wokingham](#).

About Ofsted

About the Care Quality Commission

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is the independent regulator of health and social care in England.

We make sure health and social care services provide people with safe, effective, caring, well-led and responsive care, and we encourage care services to improve.

We monitor, inspect and regulate services to make sure they meet fundamental standards of quality and safety and we publish what we find to help people choose care.

About HMI Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

On 19 July 2017 HMIC took on responsibility for fire & rescue service inspections and was renamed HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

HMICFRS is an independent inspectorate, inspecting policing in the public interest, and assesses and reports on the efficiency and effectiveness of police forces to tackle crime and terrorism, improve criminal justice and raise confidence. HMICFRS inspects all 43 police forces in England and Wales together with other major policing and law enforcement bodies. HMICFRS will inspect all 45 fire and rescue services in England.

About HMI Probation

Please contact John Steele, Chief Communications Officer, on 020 3334 0357 or 07880 787452, or at john.steele@justice.gov.uk for more information relating to HMI Probation.