

Public Understanding, Expectations and Views about Child Protection in Scotland

Report

Research Study Conducted for
Scottish Executive

(Child Protection Review Team)

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Introduction

Background to the Research

The Child Protection Review Team of the Scottish Executive Department has commissioned MORI Scotland to conduct a programme of research. The overall aim of this research was to assess levels of public knowledge and understanding of the current child protection processes and within this, look at expectations that the public have about the role of the individual, community and public agency in child protection and the degree to which each should take responsibility or become involved.

It is anticipated that the results from this survey will feed into the Child Protection Review Team's recommendations to Ministers on reducing children's experiences of abuse or neglect, to be published in the summer of 2002.

Methodology

MORI Scotland conducted a series of eight focus groups (each comprising 8-10 respondents) at a range of locations across Scotland, among a cross section of the general public. These were conducted between 19th November and 11th December 2001.

For the recruitment, which was conducted face-to-face by MORI interviewers, flexible quotas were set on a variety of factors. Each group was recruited on a selection from the following factors:

- Gender
- Age
- Social Class
- Children in Household (Yes, No)

The composition of the focus groups are outlined in the table below. Quota sheets and the recruitment questionnaire utilised are appended.

	Age	Class	Location	Town	Urban/Rural
1	18-29	ABC1	Aberdeen City	Central	Urban
2	40-54	ABC1	Glasgow City	Central	Urban
3	30-39	ABC1	North Ayrshire	Kilmarnock	Rural
4	55+	ABC1	Fife	Glenrothes	Urban
5	18-24	C2DE	Glasgow City	Central	Urban
6	40-54	C2DE	Aberdeen City	Central	Urban
7	30-39	C2DE	Fife City	Glenrothes	Urban
8	55+	C2DE	North Ayrshire	Kilmarnock	Rural

An incentive was offered to each person who attended and the group discussions were tape-recorded.

Topics for Discussion

The discussion focused on the following issues:

- Life in Today's Society
- Awareness of Child Protection System
- Scenarios
 - A neighbour hears a child crying for most of the night
 - You witness a toddler being smacked fairly heavily in a supermarket
 - You regularly see an unhappy child in a street (i.e. in the neighbourhood) who is always hungry.
 - You notice a child with some form of injury (e.g. a black eye)
 - Someone you know (e.g. relative) behaving in a sexual manner towards a child that makes you feel uncomfortable
 - Your next door neighbour is privately fostering a child from Nigeria. You are not sure she is a *'proper'* foster parent.
 - Observation of neighbour or friend's child constantly being 'told off' (i.e. always seeming to be blamed)
- Perception of Areas of Responsibility
 - Responsibility of the Individual
 - Community Responsibility
 - Agency Responsibility
- Information Needs
- Key Priorities for the Scottish Executive Child Protection Review Team

A copy of the complete topic guide is included in the appendices. This report **highlights the key findings** of the research. Verbatim comments have been incorporated throughout the report. These have been selected on the basis that they are illustrative of key points raised by either female or male respondents which are pertinent to each sex, or alternatively, on the basis of the age of the respondent. It should be noted, however, that, in general, the majority have been selected on the basis of it being illustrative of the key themes which have ensued from the research.

Executive Summary

Life in Today's Society

In discussing the public's perception of '*life in today's society*', the main area of concern tends to be focused on '*drugs*' – '*I think the social behaviour that comes off drugs and the crime related to it is of concern*'. Other issues of great concern encompass crime, violence, money, education and employment. In particular, the increase in crime levels, or more specifically media coverage of it was a continuing theme.

On the subject of the public's views on life for children in today's society the main issues raised encompassed parents' fears that children were being wrapped in cotton wool because there is an increasing fear to let them out of their sight thus culminating in a more restricted life: '*Parents are saying to kids, don't go out it's dark. When I grew up it was quite safe*'. Conversely, there are those who feel that due to public perception of '*punishment*' and '*smacking*' that children today are becoming increasingly difficult to discipline: '*You can't hit a child, you can't do this, we've seen what's happened since they got rid of punishment – you've got teachers being assaulted*'.

A review of how the general public would typically react if they found themselves witnessing certain incidents including: **dropping litter; breaking and entering and a group of young people picking on a toddler** produced fairly mixed opinion depending on the age and gender of respondents. In the instance of litter dropping, opinion ranged from those who did not consider it sufficiently serious to warrant rebuke to those who felt quite strongly about it and insisted that they '*would make them go and pick it up*'. Conversely, there were those among the older generation who were considerably more wary about being confrontational for fear of retribution. When faced with witnessing a potential break in, respondents among the older generation were once again wary of being confrontational and would restrict action to contacting the police while females in all age groups maintained that '*there's no way that I would tackle somebody*'. On the other hand, younger males, e.g. 18 – 39 years old are more inclined to become more actively involved: '*if there's some guy going through a window and you can keep a hold of him till the authorities turn up then it would be criminal not to*'. As one would anticipate when discussing the third scenario reference was made to the James Bulger case and recollections of this would prompt many to intervene if they witnessed a child being harassed by a group of young people to assess whether there was any cause for concern. Once again, older respondents, e.g. 50+, in particular men, would be extremely wary about approaching: '*you just can't touch children today, you'll finish up in jail... I think you've got a better chance if you're a woman*'.

Awareness of Child Protection

Respondents were asked to consider the term '*child protection*' and to describe what immediately comes to mind when thinking about this term. Many cited traditional views held incorporating: '*abused kids*'; '*neglected*'; and '*in need*'. Conversely there are those who regard it in more general terms, for example, '*I think it is everyday protection*'. As one would anticipate, there are those who associate the term with a governing body or agency, e.g. social work, '*you sort of get the impression of heavy handed intervention by an unseen body*' and '*a body of people who are there to protect children if need be*'.

This research has revealed that, in general, the public's awareness of '*child protection*' is dictated primarily by what they have seen or heard through media coverage. People still recollect and cite the instance of the James Bulger case and the incident in the Orkney Islands: '*I think things like that get a lot of bad press because of the likes of the Orkney Islands and things like that*'.

It would appear that levels of awareness are relatively low with regards the provision of child protection services. In the main, respondents cite '*social work*' (and/or social services) and '*the police*'.

'Social services try very hard and it's the government that really is trying to sort it because it's the government's funding social services, and police help, everybody helps in a way, the school help, even the churches help with a lot of their voluntary groups, family.'

Others mentioned include: '*Children in Need*', '*Childline*', '*Esther Rantzen*', the '*Children's Panel*' and '*charities*'. The current provision is perceived as being inadequate as it is felt that it is an area which would benefit from (i) formation of alternatives to existing structure; and (ii) further investment to facilitate a more effective service provision.

In relation to whom respondents consider child protection to be for, opinion ranged from those who regarded it as having '*no barriers*' and '*it's not just for working class areas, it's right across the board*' and '*child protection should be there for every kid*' to those who maintain that it is for abused children with particular reference made to '*sexual abuse*'. Interestingly, there are those who are concerned about the effect that media attention has had, i.e. with particular reference to the coverage which '*Childline*' has received, on children's attitudes towards their parents making it subsequently difficult to discipline them: '*they are not getting slapped because they know they can go straight to the Child Helpline*'.

Scenarios

Respondents were presented with various '*scenarios*' in relation to certain situations that children may find themselves in. The main objective of this was to ascertain how they would themselves respond and, in particular, to what extent they would get external organisations involved. The '*scenarios*' reviewed encompassed:

- a neighbour hears a child crying for most of the night;
- witness a toddler being smacked fairly heavily in a supermarket;
- observe a neighbour or friend's child constantly being told off;
- notice a child with some form of injury (e.g. a black eye);
- regularly see an unhappy child in a street who is always hungry;
- the next door neighbour is privately fostering a child from Nigeria (you are not sure she is a '*proper*' foster parent); and finally,
- someone you know (e.g. a relative) behaves in a sexual manner towards a child which makes you feel uncomfortable.

In the main, respondents felt that they would intervene personally if they knew the person involved, e.g. a neighbour, friend or relative: '*I think if you saw a child being heavily knocked about I think most people would intervene*'. In the event that it is a complete stranger, respondents are more reticent, but nevertheless feel that some action is called for: '*you can really only do what you feel is right in your conscience*'. In addition, there was reticence shown among men in the over 50's group who felt that any 'approach' should be instigated by women rather than by men. Although some felt that, irrespective if you know them or not, one should say something to alert the neighbour to make them aware it has been noticed. It is hoped by many that this will have the appropriate effect.

Recollections of media coverage where a child has been neglected and has resulted in a subsequent death is foremost in most people's minds and will consequently motivate people to respond in some form or another. Many feel that in cases where a child looks '*bruised*' then it is the responsibility of schools and hospitals to pick up on this and act accordingly.

The majority of respondents are wary of involving social work or the police in the event that they may have '*got it wrong*' and of the repercussions which may ensue, i.e. the child being taken into foster care, etc. It was felt that any organisational involvement should be co-ordinated centrally with respective agencies and relevant intermediaries, e.g. hospitals, social work, education and the police all working together.

'If all the agencies worked closer together I think it could work a bit better. I mean the hospital has their information, the social work has their information and it's not coming together.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

'Aye. I would go to the school and say I seen Jimmy Bloggs in the supermarket with his mother and I think she's a wee bit out of order here. It leaves a wee bit of room for people making accusations for nothing but again if all these systems are working together or the school then local government they put it in the main computer and if a neighbour has made the same report to the police, somebody else has made the same report to the social work, they all come together and flag it up as being a possible abuse case. (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

In the instance of 'fostering', the consensus view is that systems were and/or should be in place to ensure that the proper security checks were being instigated, particularly in view of media attention which fostering and/or adopting a child from overseas has received.

As one would anticipate, the particular 'scenario' involving potential sexual abuse by a relative provoked much heated debate. Views were fairly mixed ranging from those who would react violently by taking matters into their own hands: '*my first instinct would be my hands on the throat*' to those who felt that it should be dealt with internally by the family. Conversely, there were many who felt that it was definitely a situation in which schools and the social work department should become involved:

'whatever it takes, social services and governmental support, whatever it takes to get them through it'.

'I mean schools – social workers are allocated to schools, they have a specific social worker that we go through and we've got psychologists and everything else, but again their resources are limited'

Perception of Areas of Responsibility

On the issue of responsibility, respondents were asked to comment on the roles which they as an individual, or the community and agencies have to play in child protection. There are mixed views with regards the degree to which they as individuals should become involved. As previously highlighted, the public tend to be more willing to act when they know the person involved. In the case where a stranger is involved it is felt that it is more difficult to act other than to refer it to the appropriate official body, i.e. depending on the particular instance: '*I don't think you can do much except reporting it to the police or school or doctor or whatever*'. In addition, there are those who hold the view that if individuals are to be '*socially responsible*' then ultimately they will need the support of external organisations, e.g. the police.

It would appear that media attention has had both a positive and an adverse effect on people. Awareness raising of the outcome of some cases through the media has made the public more vigilant with the subsequent result that people are motivated to take appropriate action: '*I think that most people would intervene*'.

Unfortunately, media attention has had an adverse effect on some members of the general public, in particular, the 50+ male population who appear to be more reticent to act in view of how it might be perceived if they were seen approaching a young child and therefore deemed it more appropriate and easier if a woman were to intervene.

There are those who hold the view that ultimately it is the responsibility of social work and/or the police, although it is apparent that many feel that intervention is in vain as there is the perception that *'nothing is getting done.'*

In the ensuing discussion involving the role of the community, it is felt by some that where there is a strong sense of community then the community has an important role to play: *'when you've got a strong community of people around you, then they already play a role protecting your kids'*. However, it is felt by many that there is very little *'community spirit'*. There are those also who are of the opinion that, in view of government cuts, there is now more of a role for *'voluntary organisations'* within the community. It is felt extremely important that whatever support is made available – whether this is through voluntary or more formal organisational support – that this is provided by *'professional'* and *'trained'* personnel.

As previously highlighted, respondents are confused about the level of agency support available with some citing problems of access, while others feel that there is a proliferation of agencies providing support therefore causing confusion as to the appropriate agency from which to seek assistance: *'I think there are too many agencies for irrelevant things. You don't know where to go for help. What help is provided and who it is for?'* It is apparent that in the public's view there is a greater need for more **centralised partnership working** to ensure a more effective service provision.

'The social workers, schools, nurseries. Every agency there is to do with child protection, get them together and they all work together. So that it's not just wee bits and pieces here and there, it's all the one.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

It is important to note, however, that irrespective of the level of support currently in existence, many are reticent about approaching agencies as they are apprehensive of the potential outcome, particularly if they have *'got it wrong'*. It is felt that schools, in particular, have an important role to play. This is due to the fact that the public feel more comfortable about approaching the school if they are aware of a problem rather than the social work department. It is important to emphasise, however, that it is not seen as a role for mainstream teachers, but staff specially allocated a guidance role.

'They are maybe needing a different type of teacher to be going in as well, more on the counselling line or like a back up for the teacher in the class that can just sit back and say right well, I can see this is going downhill or give the teacher support as well.' (30 – 39 year olds, C2DE, Glenrothes)

Information Needs

On the issue of where one would currently access information many find it difficult to know where to source information on the provision of child protection service support: *'I actually was helping someone trying to look up a telephone number for one of these types of agencies and it was a nightmare'*. Of those mentioned, the main sources which respondents felt were available encompassed: **Citizens Advice, Doctor's surgery, internet, telephone book, council offices, police and local government web-sites.**

As awareness of where to source information was relatively low, respondents were asked to recommend where they thought it should be made available. Of all the suggestions made, a national advertising campaign was the most popular made by the majority of respondents: *'a national number that can give you help or either right away or if it suits you better put you in touch with somebody in your immediate area where you can go and get help face-to-face if you want'*. Other suggestions cited include: **newspapers/magazines, through schools, libraries, information leaflets through doctors'/dentists' surgeries, Citizens Advice and local organisations' publications.**

Key Priorities for Scottish Executive

When respondents were asked to identify the key priorities which the Scottish Executive should focus on, it was generally conceded that *'there's no really easy cure there.'*

The key message is that the whole process needs to be made easier: *'I'd just think it should be easier; if you see somebody breaking into a house you know to go to the police, if you're concerned about a child you don't really know what to do, but you need to make it a nice simple easy route so that we can just do our bit.'* This has implications for any strategy devised by the Scottish Executive with regards any awareness raising initiatives implemented. As previously stated the consensus is that there needs to be a national campaign to raise awareness of both the issue of child protection and equally importantly to advise where the public can find out more information. The purpose of this would be that it would enable people to have a first point of contact which in turn would enable them to access and be referred to a relevant local contact.

This leads onto another key message emanating from the research which is **accessibility**. It was further considered vital that any strategy adopted by the Scottish Executive should involve more localised initiatives involving the local communities, in particular, the distribution of information leaflets through schools and doctor's surgeries. It is considered important that the former becomes involved in the provision of information to children and that children will feel more confident about approaching teachers if they have a problem which will in turn be referred by the teacher to the appropriate organisational body.

The other issues raised include:

- centralised co-ordinated working partnerships;
- accessibility (i.e. of social work departments);
- investment (i.e. in the community).

Key Findings

Life in Today's Society

Prior to the main discussion taking place which focused on the public's views of child protection the opening discussion focused on the public's perception of *'life in today's society'*.

Areas for Concern

The main areas of concern which respondents have in living in today's society tends to focus on drugs. This was a view shared by both young and older respondents.

'I think the social behaviour that comes off drugs and the crime related to it is of concern'. (30 -39 years old, ABC1s, Kilmarnock).

'Walking down the street in the past few years, drugs has been a much bigger problem'. (18 - 29 year olds, ABC1s, Aberdeen)

Other areas of concern include: money, crime, teenagers, youth crime, public transport; employment (i.e. redundancy), violence (i.e. stabbings/slashings) and education.

'Employment as well, getting yourself in a job. If you're working it's half the battle.' (18 - 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

'Crime probably is the thing most people are concerned about, if it concerns your own safety when you're moving about, but mostly criminal assaults and stuff like that. That would be the first one that I would choose'. (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

In the ensuing discussion the increase in crime and violence in today's society was a continuing theme and one that the majority of respondents are concerned with. Admittedly, some feel that it is not necessarily levels of crime which have increased but rather the levels of awareness due to the media coverage over the last few decades.

Life for Children in Today's Society

In sharing their views about the concerns they have themselves, the discussion moved onto their perceptions about what young people, in particular, children have to contend with and, if and how, this differed from when they themselves were children. The main themes which ensued from the discussion focused on lack of facilities for children today and peer pressure as illustrated:

'I'm the community safety officer, the crime prevention officer for the area and I do talks in the schools, community safety talks, I do drugs' talks and awareness talks. A lot of the kids, their main complaint is there's nothing for them to do which is the reason for them just hanging about the streets.' (40 – 55 year olds, ABC1s, Glasgow)

'I think things have changed to make kids change. Society, in general, has changed which changes kids' attitudes, and parents.' (40 – 55 year olds, C2DE, Aberdeen)

'The kids are getting a lot of negative feelings off the parents, the pressure on them is to provide what everybody else has.' (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

In addition, there were extremely mixed views among respondents who were divided into two camps, i.e.

- (i) those who were concerned about the safety of their children, and;
- (ii) those who felt that due to the laws changing regarding 'punishment' that children were becoming increasingly difficult to deal with due to lack of discipline.

The former view is held by those who feel that parents are forced to wrap their children up in cotton wool and subsequently find it extremely difficult to allow children to be out on their own as highlighted below:

'What we do is try and pin a label on it. I mean they say now the amount of crime...and every night on television...it's like crimes against children, child witness, it hasn't increased. But it's in your face. So we're all bringing our children down to school in cars and we're taking away that walk to school that they should have. We're trying to protect them and trying to make it all correct, but we're slowly destroying their future but that's what we need to get hold of, we're the ones that are doing the wrong as a whole group not individuals, but the whole society, we're trying to be too correct to the kids.' (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

Single parents it's more complicated and there's more issues with the children, we come from a different world. I mean parents are saying to kids don't go out it's dark. When I grew up it was quite safe, there were gangs but it was safe'. (40 – 55 year old, ABC1, Glasgow)

'You have fantastically stringent controls but if you don't have discipline at that stage in a child's life, I mean at the end of the day all they want to do is make sure that those kids turn into adults that are fit for society and will play their part. It is already saying you can't hit a child, you can't do this, we've all seen what's happened since they got rid of punishment, its now....you've got teachers being assaulted and there's no way to control them and you can't have teachers like yourself being assaulted by pupils. You need something that's going to keep the order and respect.' (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

Public Perception of Everyday Incidents

Prior to commencing the main themes around child protection, respondents were asked how they would react if they found themselves in or, alternatively, witnessed specific situations. The instances cited included:

- Dropping litter;
- Someone breaking into a neighbouring house;
- A group of young people picking on a toddler.

Each is discussed in turn below:

Dropping Litter

Views on this varied and action taken depended on the age of the particular person(s) dropping the litter as illustrated:

'wouldn't get involved....depend on what the person looked like.' (18 – 29 years old, ABC1, Aberdeen)

As previously cited, opinion differed from those who would definitely be proactive in making a comment to those who regard it as not sufficiently serious to warrant interference or rebuke.

'Litter is not a high reported crime. It's when you get a lot of complaints about it, that's when you tackle it and you hope that's going to do the business for that area'. (40 – 55 year olds, ABC1, Glasgow)

Conversely, there were those among the older generation who felt quite strongly about it and maintained that they '*would make them go and pick it up*', or alternatively who because of their age would be too afraid to tackle someone on this issue due to '*a fear of the abuse you would get*' and further maintained that they would subsequently '*rather pick it up*' themselves for fear of retribution.

Breaking and Entering

In the instance where one witnessed a potential break in, most respondents, particularly in the older groups, maintained that they would be concerned about being confrontational and would therefore restrict any action on their part to contacting the police.

'I would like to think we would do something, at least go into the police station or phone, report it, something I wouldn't confront them'. (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

'Yes, definitely and even if I thought this looks a bit suspicious I would telephone and if its not suspicious, if it's a man locked out of his house, then fine no harm done. Anything I thought isn't quite right I would definitely phone' (40 – 55 year olds, ABC1, Glasgow)

'If it was a close neighbour I would challenge. If it was somebody I didn't know, I'd phone the police' (40 – 55 year olds, C2DE, Aberdeen)

Conversely those who are younger, e.g. 18 – 39 and male would be more inclined to become more actively involved as individuals while females maintain that '*there's no way that I would tackle somebody*'.

'I've tackled shoplifters, I've seen them coming out on a couple of occasions. As a member of society it's your responsibility that if you're there and you're capable, then you have to take an active part in the situation, even if it's just struggling to keep a hold until the authorities or others turn up on the scene, but to just stand back and go...if there's some guy going through a window and you can keep a hold of him till the authorities turn up then it would be criminal not to.' (30 – 39 years old, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

A Group of Young People Picking on a Toddler

This particular instance, once again, caused mixed opinion from those who would approach cautiously in the event that it was 'innocent' (i.e. sibling of the youths) to those who would make their disapproval known by approaching the youths to ascertain whether there is any cause for concern.

'How do you know the toddler is not with the youths and you might be intervening and actually the tables could very, very quickly be turned on you because it might be somebody's wee brother'. (40 – 55 year olds, ABC1, Glasgow)

'They'd maybe see a bit of sense if they can see an adult showing a bit of concern you know. You canna just walk past that. You canna phone the police for something you don't know about. You've got to go in and ask and sort of use your common sense.' (40 – 55 year olds, C2DE, Aberdeen)

'That's a sort of personal thing if I was walking down the street and if I'd seen a kid getting smacked, yes, if it were punching, getting abused or whatever, then yes I would step in and say something about it but if it was just a smack I don't know what's happened in that family, I don't know what that kid had done. And is that not what you're saying' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

As one would anticipate there are still, even now, recollections of the 'James Bulger' case in people's minds which automatically motivates some to become more proactive.

'Everybody's mind has got to flash back to what happened to Jamie Bulger. You've always got that in the back of your mind. That's something I could never live with myself if I thought that somebody had taken away... , I think I would have to do something' (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

Conversely, there were those among the older generation, in particular, the men, however, who would be extremely wary about approaching youths or toddlers. This is due to a concern as to how it may be perceived if an older male member of the general public, in particular, and men in general, was witnessed with young people as illustrated:

'I mean, basically it's an unfair society but you can't talk to a child in a pram now because you think somebody's thinking they're a pervert or something like that.' (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

'You're likely to be in trouble. If a man goes to a child and says anything he's going to finish up in the jail. Because all the kids'll say he hit him or whatever, you just can't touch children today, you'll finish up in jail.....I think you've got a better chance if you're a woman.' (55+ year olds, C2DE, Kilmarnock)

'You made a good point. I think very often you find that a woman often is so incensed at what she sees, that she'll be actually flying without thinking and that might be a factor because the man, he's maybe a shade more cautious and he'll think about what the likelihood is.' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

Awareness of Child Protection System

Definition of Child Protection

When asked to consider the term '*child protection*' many respondents immediately cited the traditional views held when using this terminology encompassing the following adjectives '**abused kids**', '**neglected**', '**in need**', which is reflected in the following comments.

'Abuse obviously, they need protecting from the abuser.'
(30 – 39 year olds, C2DE, Glenrothes)

'Yes, I mean, I think its parents basically, it's protecting them from parents and their own people. That's what I think child protection is.' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

On the other hand, there are also those who regard it in more general terms.

'I think it is everyday protection' (40 – 55 year olds, C2DEs, Aberdeen)

'The care of children.' (18 – 29 year olds, ABC1s, Aberdeen)

'I would have said a safe haven, somewhere.' (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

There are then those who tend to associate the term '*child protection*' in relation to a governing body or agency, e.g. '**social services**', '**social work**', '**the word agency comes in your head very quickly**', '**Childline**'.

'you sort of get the impression of heavy handed intervention by an unseen body moving in.' (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

'Well, I think of child protection I think of a body that protects children from their own circumstances rather than from children being attacked in the street.' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

'I'd view that as a body of people who are there to protect children if need be.' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

Conversely, however, there were those who regarded '*child protection*' as encompassing the whole family unit and not just for children as illustrated below.

'The way I see things is that the child protection is family protection, the whole family, not just one single child, it's the whole family, the adults, the siblings, it's the lot. It's not only protection of that child it's protection of the whole family to make things right and sort it out.' (40 – 55 year olds, ABC1, Glasgow)

'First of all you're speaking about family circle as a first primary protection for the child. After that there's a public personnel who're supposed to see to the children, but it's quite a wide subject really.' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

And then there are those whose views are motivated by what they hear in the media as illustrated in the following reference made to the Orkney Islands.

'I think things like that get a lot of bad press because of the likes of the Orkney islands and things like that. I don't know a hell of a lot about it but I think in some instances it's good and yet in other instances it can be pretty bad.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

Who Needs Child Protection

Once respondents had discussed their views of what the term '*child protection*' meant to them, they were asked specifically to comment on whom they thought it was for. There were those among both the young and older generation who regarded it as having '*no barriers*' and that it was there for everyone irrespective of class or background.

'It's across the board, it's not just working class areas, it's right across the board.' (40 – 55 year olds, ABC1s, Glasgow)

'Child protection should be there for every kid.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

Once again, views as to who needs child protection varied to being specifically available to children who are abused to the whole family – with particular reference made to sexual abuse.

'Any sexual abuse in the family.' (40 – 55 year olds, ABC1, Glasgow)

'Children whose parents aren't protecting them adequately.' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

'For any sexual abuse, obvious one, neglect.' (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

'In a situation where the child has collapsed beyond the state of repair where there is no normality and there will not be any form of normality through drugs, sexual abuse, violence – when it's gone beyond and it's just not a normal situation. Where it's been a normal situation then that's where the child is removed. Before that there should probably be intervention to try to patch up and repair the situation, but again educate the people and need to draw the line somewhere.' (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

As previously highlighted, there are those who associated '*child protection*' with protection for the '*family*' and not only the child.

'I think sometimes like it's child protection, but I think parents need help as well to deal with situations instead of saying well it's the kids that need taken away or they get a child that's needing help, but the parent needs as much help sometimes as the child.' (30 – 39 year olds, C2DEs, Glenrothes)

'It's most kids out there that need child protection.....they're not being looked after properly so in that case then the child needs protection, needs taken care of and steps taken to help the family'. (30 – 39 year olds, C2DEs, Glenrothes)

Interestingly, there are those who are concerned about the effect that media attention has had on 'child protection' and how this is now often either abused by children, particularly in reference to the attention surrounding 'Childline' which is used against parents when the child is displeased as illustrated.

'The thing is they are not getting slapped and stuff any more because they know if they do they can be straight over to the Child Helpline and then your parents are in trouble, it's a vicious circle' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

Other examples were also cited where when one's actions – often innocent – are perceived in a negative and dangerous light.

'Certain things that get taken to extremes as well. Another story that's in the paper is the guy who put his photographs into Boots and it's a photograph of his daughter in the bath you know and the police are onto him, his wean and all that, which is totally out of order. All it was a simple photograph. Taking things to extreme.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

Provision of Child Protection Service

When asked to name agencies whom they considered provided services, levels of awareness appear to be relatively low with the main providers cited including social work department, followed by the police. Others cited incorporated: **'Children in Need', 'Childline', 'Social Services', 'Charities', 'Esther Rantzen', 'the Children's Panel'**, youth groups and schools.

'Social services try very hard and it's the government that really is trying to sort it because it's the government's funding social services, and police help, everybody helps in a way, the school help even the churches help with a lot of their voluntary groups, family. For people that were saying how they are protective, who offers child protection and really the people that are helping all the way down the line.' (40 – 55 year olds, ABC1s, Glasgow)

'We have a thing in Scotland, Children's Panel but I don't know what they do'. (40 – 55 year olds, ABC1s, Glasgow)

Discussions suggested that the public feel that it is an area where improvements could be made either in,

- (I) the formation of alternatives to that which is currently available which is deemed as being either inadequate or over stretched, and;
- (II) the provision of more funding to facilitate a more effective service provision.

'There's so many cases where major bodies that are supposed to be organised and have the appropriate information and authority to deal with it, and yet so many of them are falling down, so you sometimes wonder if the child protection in that particular area is as good as it might be. You feel that perhaps the child protection should be – you can't say it could be a bigger slice of the budget because it gets quite a big slice of the budget, but it's not producing the absolute 100% that those people are looking for'. (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

'I feel that with organised bodies people in charge should be seeing that all the cases that come before them are properly scrutinised, the proper solution is arrived at and the proper action is taken and I think in these three areas, that's not always the case'. (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

'I think you need a specialised government agency which is made up of the correct professions'. (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

Scenarios

Various '*scenarios*' were presented to respondents, the purpose of which was to establish their reaction to certain situations involving children. Respondents were asked to describe how they would respond to particular situations and, in particular, whether they would get other organisations involved, or alternatively, if they were to take responsibility what type of support would they require to assist them.

Each '*scenario*' is reviewed and commented on in turn below.

Scenario 1: A neighbour hears a child crying for most of the night

Scenario One involved a child crying continuously for most of the evening which is subsequently heard by a neighbour. Reaction varied and included those who would approach with caution to assess what the situation is,

'I don't think you would get involved by phoning or contacting anybody until you'd spoken to your neighbour first.' (18 – 29 year olds, ABC1s, Aberdeen)

Once again there was reticence shown among men in the over 50's group who felt that any 'approach' should be instigated by women rather than by men.

'Because I wouldn't want to go to somebody's door, but I would like my wife to go if it was annoying me that much. You know if a man goes to a door, he's likely to get abuse, but if you send a lady along she can usually talk to the other lady. I wouldn't get involved, I don't know if I would phone the police right away.' (55+ year olds, C2DEs, Kilmarnock)

In general, respondents would check the situation out to assess whether there was any cause for concern. They would be hesitant about contacting and involving an external organisation in this particular instance, particularly in view of the fact that there is a lack of awareness among the public as to when is the appropriate occasion for involvement and, of course, people are genuinely concerned about the repercussions of involving social work or the police.

'Unless you know somebody or you've had dealings with them yourself, the thing is with social services is knowing what's involved in it.' (18 – 29 year olds, ABC1s, Aberdeen)

Scenario 2: You witness a toddler being smacked fairly heavily in a supermarket

As one would anticipate there are mixed views on the issue of smacking and views vary depending on the age of the respondent. For example, those among the older generation who were brought up in a society where admonishing the child by smacking it was de rigeur would hold one opinion, while those among the younger generation who have been brought up in a world where smacking and/or hitting a child is perceived in a negative light, would hold another.

'I don't think I would necessarily report it to the police. I might say something to the parent, say something like is that really necessary and if it continued, to me it would totally depend on how harsh the smacking is. I personally believe smacking is necessary and I just can't believe that we are trying to introduce laws to stop smacking of children' (40 – 55 year olds, ABC1s, Glasgow)

'If you see a mother smacking a child in the street, and all of a sudden there's a polis coming beside you, you've no right to touch that child...it'd mark you for life.' (55+ year olds, C2DEs, Kilmarnock)

'It depends on the circumstances again. It depends where they got smacked, what they were doing at the time. If you've obviously just hit them for no reason and smacked them across the head.' (18 – 29 year olds, ABC1s, Aberdeen)

'I'd think that's a shame. It's just the way some people bring their children up – it's maybe the way they were treated. It doesn't mean to say it's right, but there's no good in reporting it to social services for it.' (18 – 29 year olds, ABC1s, Aberdeen)

On the subject of whether respondents would, in this instance, involve other external organisations, once again, opinion varied from those who found it difficult to judge how they should respond to this type of situation, to those who would make their decision based on whether the child and/or parent was known to them.

'It's hard to say but how do you get an organisation involved? Do you dial 999 and ask the police and say somebody's hit their child, or do you go up to them and ask can I have your name and address, I'm going to report you to the child services.' (18 – 29 year olds, ABC1s, Aberdeen)

'You can only really do what you feel is right in your conscience, you can walk away from it and then thereafter if you don't confront it in the supermarket there's not a lot else you can do, as long as you can walk away happy. Then you are going back to the bigger circle, a circle, a school teacher, social services, neighbours, people who do know them do pick up on it and actually act on it.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

'Aye. I would go to the school and say I seen Jimmy Bloggs in the supermarket with his mother and I think she's a wee bit out of order here. It leaves a wee bit of room for people making accusations for nothing but again if all these systems are working together or the school then local government they put it in the main computer and if a neighbour has made the same report to the police, somebody else has made the same report to the social work, they all come together and flag it up as being a possible abuse case.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

Scenario 3: Observation of neighbour or friend's child constantly being 'told off' (i.e. always seeming to be blamed)

This perpetuating theme of becoming involved and intervening depending on whether you know the people concerned is also continued in the next scenario which looked at respondents' views on a child constantly being 'told off'. Although some felt that irrespective if you know them or not, one should say something to alert the neighbour that it has been noticed and that this will – one hopes - subsequently have the appropriate effect.

'Well, I think if you knew your friend or neighbour for any length of time there'd be no question about interfering at all, if you knew them well enough. So they're not abusive people, I don't think you'd have anything to say.' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

'I would definitely think of going to the door and speaking about it, if for no other reason than to warn that people are aware that this is happening to the kid. I think in a case where it's just an occasional bruise, I think it's very difficult to make up your mind.' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

'There's no need to get anyone else involved in that, not unless you've said something and it doesn't seem to get any better and you don't seem to take any heed of anything anyone says to them, then maybe at that outside case, you might consider it.' (18 – 29 year olds, ABC1s, Aberdeen)

'In the case of continual evidence, these cases are in the papers so often where there is evidence over a period and nobody has thought to do something positive, but I agree with your point that if you know the people it makes a difference.' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

On the other hand, there were those who felt that this type of situation is not one which should make people feel overly concerned. This was due to the fact that many felt that some children who are continually *'playing up'* deserved to be told off.

'Could it be that the child's been awful? You get – everybody thinks oh you should like children, but - you get some horrible children and some horrible adults. And quite often horrible children grow into horrible adults and I mean, you don't like everybody you know, so it could be they're being really horrible and their parents are having to keep telling them off!' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

"Do they deserve to be told off? That's the thing isn't it. Your observation would show you whether they deserve to be told off because like where I stay, you can see the children that cause the shit stirring in the street and when they get away, and I know the ones that cause the trouble'; (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

Scenario 4: Notice a child with some form of injury, (e.g. black eye)

In discussion about this, most respondents maintained that they would intervene in some respect, particularly as once again there were recollections of media coverage of similar situations in which there were serious outcomes as a result of nothing having been done.

'I think if you saw a child being heavily knocked about, I think most people would intervene in some way or another.' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

'There was that wee boy down south who has since died, they'd all seen him so many times, same injuries week in week out for months and months and found dead'. (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

In relation to the possible involvement of organisations it would appear that many feel that this is the responsibility of schools and hospitals to pick up on this.

'You are relying on the social work, the schools, etc. to pick up on that, the people who do know the kids.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

'I think the likes of hospitals and stuff should be first to act on it if a child has been injured because that's the first place they go if their parents are in any way concerned and I think they should question it. I don't mean go over the top and get the police involved and stuff.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

In particular, it was felt that action should be co-ordinated centrally with respective agencies and relevant intermediaries, e.g. hospitals, social work, education and police working together.

'If all the agencies worked closer together I think it could work a bit better. I mean the hospital has their information, the social work has their information and it's not coming together.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

Scenario 5: You regularly see an unhappy child in a street (i.e. in the neighbourhood) who is always hungry.

Most people, when presented with the scenario of witnessing an unhappy child in the street who appears always hungry, felt that it was important to keep an eye on the situation to assess how regularly it is happening. It was also emphasised, however, that in today's society children and young people often look hungry in their attempts to appear thin as illustrated below.

'I've got a friend, her daughter she's 16, 17 and if she walked into this room just now you would think she was being seriously abused, neglected. You can't see something and think you're doing right because it's a very fine line, a very fine line. This young lassie's anorexic. You try and feed her it's a disease so you can't just say she's not being fed or abused, but this is self inflicted. It's very very hard.' (30 – 39 years old, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

In the majority of instances, respondents considered that 'schools' should be the first port of call when one thought that there was cause for concern.

'I think I'd phone social services and I would tend to go more to the school first. Because obviously they know the person, they see them every day, see them at closer range than what you're seeing them.' (30 – 39 years old, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

'You could speak to a guidance teacher or something like that, they may have confided in them, so they might be aware of what's actually happening themselves, just lets the school know that you, that somebody else knows.' (30 – 39 years old, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

'If you knew them, if you knew where they lived and what their name was, then you've at least even got the option of writing to the school, to social work, to whomever.' (30 – 39 year olds, C2DE, Glenrothes)

Scenario 6: Your next door neighbour is privately fostering a child from Nigeria. You are not sure she is a 'proper' foster parent

The consensus was in presenting the scenario of fostering a child from Nigeria that systems were and/or should be in place to ensure that the proper security checks – particularly in view of media attention which adoption/fostering from overseas currently receives - were being instigated to ensure that nothing untoward was occurring.

'I would always take it that foster parents are safe place anyway, they're always checked before they're allowed any kids.' (30 – 39 year olds, C2DEs, Glenrothes)

'That's against the law right away if it's private. Well if you go to a foster home and go through all the rigmarole here. If you go to Nigeria ...look at the couple from Wales.' (55+ year olds, C2DEs, Kilmarnock)

'There's children in Scotland and Parentline and Childline and NSPCC, at least they can probably check out their credentials and check out that they were fostering for adoption.' (30 – 39 year olds, C2DEs, Glenrothes)

Scenario 7: Someone you know (e.g. relative) behaving in a sexual manner towards a child that makes you feel uncomfortable

Some respondents were presented with the potential situation whereby a relative behaves in a sexual manner towards a child. As one would anticipate, this particular scenario caused much heated debate. Views were fairly mixed and included those who would react fairly violently by taking matters into their own hands.

'My first instinct would be my hand on the throat.' (40 – 54 year olds, ABC1s, Glasgow)

'As far as punishment goes? No let the rest of the family deal with it, without consequences to the family. If the family want to kill him fine, fair enough. It's like a private firing squad so to speak. If you want to do it and so you should be allowed to.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

'I'd torture them if you could but they would probably get protected, they get put in different prisons you know when they are separated and it's all paedophiles you know so they don't beat on each other. I think they should put them into the main prison. The mark that it leaves on a child or it must leave on a child that she knows somebody doing that to them, no it doesn't go away.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

In discussing further what the outcome of any such situation should be, respondents found it difficult to know what they should do while other comments were influenced by recent media attention regarding paedophiles as illustrated below.

'See that's the thing about going on about child protection and all these people who abuse children and rape them and all the rest of it and these, I don't know who it is that's trying to protect them, it was in one of the papers they were saying that they should be all named and shamed all these paedophiles and things, well I do agree with that because my neighbour could be somebody like that, you know what I mean.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

'It's a hard one to call.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

In the discussion that ensued with regards the potential role which external organisations have to play within this type of situation and the type of support required for individuals and families to deal with this, some found it difficult to know in which direction to turn as illustrated.

'I know as someone who's never had any dealings with social service, I wouldn't know what department to contact, cos I think it's too wrapped up in with bureaucracy whereas the police should be a straight phone call'. (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

Others held mixed views from those who would deal with it internally within the family unit to those who would get social workers and the schools involved.

'Well, I'm trying to visualise this but if you take an instance and say it was a brother of mine, and he was approaching one of his children sexually, then I would definitely go to the mother. Most definitely go to the mother. Now I think that there would be something done about it then.' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

'Knowing our family, we would deal with this ourselves'. (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

'I think it would have to be dealt with internally, if possible'. (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

'If a legislation is made that says right ok you have done a terrible act, your family can deal with you and no consequences on the family, let the family do what they want to do and forget about it.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

'No, not because there's any shyness about the subject but what I was going to say, it would depend on how serious the offence was. If it was a very serious one, then the local authorities, child protection group or whoever you go to, after having a word with the offender, your sister or whoever it may be I think these things have got to be brought out in the open, not letting them lie, get away with it again and again and again I think I say depending on how serious we are talking about, I'm not talking about rape, but a serious offence'. (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

'I mean schools – social workers are allocated to schools, they have a specific social worker that we go through and we've got psychologists and everything else, but again their resources are limitedthey can just make social work aware or refer a child to a psychologist, to the educational psychologist, and that educational psychologist can't take it any further than the educational basis, so then you have to wait to get the next psychologist or the next therapist, - and it all takes years'. (30 – 39 year olds, C2DEs, Glenrothes)

'Victim support is one of the things that has been set up, a voluntary thing they put you in contact with other agencies that deal better with these situations'. (40 – 55 year olds, ABC1s, Glasgow)

'Whatever it takes, social services and governmental support, whatever it takes to get them through it.' (18 – 29 years old, C2DEs, Glasgow)

'Counselling for the whole family first and foremost'. (18 – 29 years old, C2DEs, Glasgow)

Perception of Areas of Responsibility

On the issue of responsibility, respondents were asked to comment on the roles which they as an individual, their community or agencies have to play in child protection.

Responsibility of the Individual

Once again, there are mixed views with regards the level to which we as individuals should become involved. It would appear from this sample that the public, in the main, are only willing to intervene when they know the person involved, e.g. when it is a relative, friend or neighbour. It is felt, however, that when it is a stranger it is much more difficult to take action other than to refer it to the appropriate official body.

'I think it's about strangers. If it's people you know like a friend or a neighbour that you know and you can approach and say something in a casual manner, you'd do something then, but if it's a stranger, it's none of your business, but it's more having the courage to go over and say something and probably it does. If people think it's right to hit and some people think it's not. And you know everybody's got their own opinions on how things should be done. I doubt anybody would sit and not say anything to a friend if they thought it was that bad, or a neighbour or a family member or something but approaching strangers in supermarkets and saying I think what you're doing is wrong if they're hitting a child, they'd probably say something about us if they knew what they'd done to the child'. (18 – 29 year olds, ABC1s, Aberdeen)

There are, for example, those who hold the view that ultimately it is primarily the responsibility of social work ('services') and/or the police to become involved in child protection as illustrated.

'I think it's on the parent to begin with to treat the child well and on you after that to report something if there's something to report. And finally it's reported but it's social services' responsibility after that to protect the child. Ultimately it goes back to social services, they should be the last in the line, it shouldn't need to go any further.' (18 – 29 year olds, ABC1s, Aberdeen)

'I don't think you can do much except reporting to the police or school or doctor or whatever.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

On the other hand, there are some who hold the view that if individuals are to be 'socially responsible' then ultimately they will need the support of external organisations, e.g. the police.

'If we are all going to be socially responsible and police our own country we need the support coming from the government through police to help us to do it. I mean we shouldn't be doing it ourselves, we should be able to help but it should be their responsibility'. (40 – 55 year olds, ABC1s, Glasgow)

Conversely, there are those who as individuals in particular professions, e.g. teaching, feel that it is very difficult to act.

'From a legal perspective you know, we are not allowed, teachers are not allowed to question. If they say I'm going to, we're not allowed to say how or why, we've just got to pass it on and let social services question further and the police'. (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

It is apparent that many who do feel that assistance and support should be sought nevertheless feel that in many instances intervention is in vain and there is a perception that 'nothing is getting done'.

'If anything's going to get done or that kid's going to keep on getting neglected and put back into the same situation and you're like, what's the point in it? If nothing's getting done, it can be quite heartbreaking. You can only push the system so far and if they're not going to help you then'. (30 – 39 year olds, C2DEs, Glenrothes)

Community Responsibility

On the subject of the role that the community has to play, once again, there are varying opinions. It is felt by some that, where a strong sense of community exists, then they have an important role to play.

'I think when you've got a community, when you've got a strong community of people around you, then they already play a role protecting your kids – they see them on the street and something's happening'. (18 – 29 year olds, ABC1s, Aberdeen)

'We need to let go a little bit, let the children live like children, but as a community, not just watch our own, but be watching everything else that's going on and be willing to take responsibility.' (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

It is considered particularly vital that support of some kind is provided within the community as it is felt by many that there is very little *'community spirit'* in existence nowadays.

'I don't think there's a lack of community action, I think there's a lack of community to begin with – if there's isn't a community there for it to do anything' (18 – 29 year olds, ABC1s, Aberdeen)

'If you roll the clock 50 years, the community, everybody watched everybody's kids when they were out playing and made sure the environment they were playing in was safe, and there was the community spirit, everybody was in it together.' (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

The level of support provided will vary depending on the area. For example, within the Glasgow area it is generally considered that there is a proliferation of initiatives being implemented as the following comment highlights:

'There are a lot of initiatives within the community. The inter agency thing and Community Spirit, all this sort of thing Partnership. From the government to the local Council to local communities and the police are trying to work together to tackle everything' (40 – 55 year olds, ABC1s, Glasgow)

Conversely, there are those in other areas who feel that due to government cuts there is no longer the support within the community that existed in previous years and that subsequently there may be more of a role for *'voluntary organisations'*.

'The government's taking more and more money off the community, that's what's happened to community centres, ever since Scotland got its own Parliament.' (40 – 55 year olds, C2DEs, Aberdeen)

'There's an area where voluntary organisations could do something but that's not one of the areas because not many voluntary organisations would choose to be involved in that particular area because it's an area of contention and people who step in there are actually begging for trouble, that's about the size of it. So voluntary organisations as a rule don't fall into that kind of slot I don't think. Salvation Army and people like that, they've got a different area.' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

It is felt that what support is made available in the community – whether this is provided through voluntary or more formal organisational provision - it is deemed imperative that this is co-ordinated through ‘*professional*’ and ‘*trained*’ personnel.

‘I think even if somebody was set up in the community, somebody that’s trained, not just somebody that says they’ll help but somebody trained that knows what they’re on about, but again who’s going to pay for it. If it’s voluntary then there’s not many folk willing to put out the time.’ (30 – 39 year olds, C2DEs, Glenrothes)

‘They’re much better off appointing somebody an awful lot older that’s had the experience and knows about children, than these youngsters coming out of uni.’ (55+ year olds, C2DEs, Kilmarnock)

Agency Responsibility

As previously illustrated, the majority of respondents are confused about the level of agency support available with some citing problems of access as an issue, while others feel that there is a proliferation of agencies providing support therefore causing confusion as to the appropriate agency from which to source support.

‘I know there’s – what is it – Gingerbread, they’re help for single parents or centres for kids meeting parents that they don’t live with and things like that, but I don’t know if the NSPCC do anything here or if Childline have anything specific here. Nobody knows.’ (30 – 39 year olds, C2DEs, Glenrothes)

‘There’s only Childline isn’t there?’ ‘I think that’s what they’re there for is to raise money to try and help – I don’t know where the money goes right enough, but I mean they haven’t got the same authority as a social worker has.’ (55+ year olds, C2DEs, Kilmarnock)

‘In the likes of Childline, you’ve got the social work going in, you’ve got the Children’s Panel going in, I mean I would say that’s too many pokers in the fire. One would be saying one thing one would be saying another, and another would be saying another – they’re not coming in agreement- they should be for the kid, for the child.’ (55+ year olds, C2DEs, Kilmarnock)

‘I think there are too many agencies for irrelevant things. I think there’s too much bureaucracy. I think it’s just taken out of proportion. You don’t know where to go –for help. What help is provided, and who it’s for?’ (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

On the other hand, irrespective of the level of support currently in existence, many are reticent about approaching agencies as they are apprehensive of the potential outcome particularly if they have *'got it wrong'*.

'But it must be a very serious situation if you know a child is being abused, sexually abused. You then inform the social services or the police, it's a criminal offence so you have got to substantiate what you think and you could be the one responsible for the social services deciding to take the child away.' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

'That's right. To say nothing of the possibility that if you've got it wrong the question of libel. It's a possibility.' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

'The last thing you would want is this child to maybe be taken away from its parents, because children are funny as well. You find that a child who maybe has a father who's an alcoholic, he stills loves that dad for some reason, even though the dad's bad, so that'd be the worrying thing to you that this child is going to get moved out to the home and even though he's getting abused, he might want to stay – you don't know.' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

'I take your point that you feel that if you get in touch with the social services people, that there's this point that the child will be taken away from parents and that is an awful responsibility really. If you happen to have made a mistake in your assessment.' ((55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

Information Needs

Current Source of Information

Respondents were asked to cite where they thought one could currently access information on the child protection process. The main sources mentioned included:

- Citizens Advice;
- Doctor's surgery;
- Internet;
- Telephone book (social services);
- Information complexes;
- Education in schools;
- Council offices;
- Police offices; and
- Local government websites.

Although this would appear a relatively long list, many find it difficult to know where they should source and access information on the provision of child protection service support.

'I actually was helping someone trying to look up a telephone number for one of these type of agencies and it was a nightmare, go to yellow pages, look at this bit, go to that bit, go to another bit. Now these things surely are important numbers.' (40 – 55 year olds, ABC1s, Glasgow)

'I would look under social services and take it from there. They have various numbers you can contact, we all have it on calendars at home. That's a good point you made about someone in between, a mediator, to try and help, I think.' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

'I would go to my doctor and I would tell him about it, if it was my sister, I would tell him about the situation and see what he advised because I know that it's between me and my doctor and it shouldn't go any further' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

'I think if you need something like that, I know personally if I had to go into the doctors' surgery about child abuse I'd be embarrassed to ask about it and I would be ashamed because they think oh are you abusing your kids, have you let that happen to your kids or is it you that is happening to, do you know what I mean. So that's what I mean whereas if they are lying about on the table, you know what to pick up. I know in my doctor's surgery I would have to go and ask for it in my doctor's surgery because I know for a fact they're not lying there.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

Recommended Sources of Information

In general, awareness levels as to where one can source information should one need to were relatively low. Consequently, when asked to recommend where the information should be accessed respondents made the following suggestions:

- National telephone number (i.e. advertising on T.V. and radio);
- Doctor's/dentist's surgeries/hospitals;
- Newspapers/magazines;
- Local publications/organisations;
- Through schools;
- Libraries;
- Post office (i.e. public notice board);
- Banks;

- Shops (posters);
- Local flyers;
- Citizens Advice.

National Advertising Campaign

Of all the things cited, a national advertising campaign citing a '*national number*' was the most popular suggestion made by the majority of respondents.

'Not everybody's got that. Whereas if you get a national number that's easy to remember, easy to find and you know, I don't have last night's paper, but I know it's in the phone book or I know it's here, there, and it's well advertised.' (18 – 29 year olds, ABC1s, Aberdeen)

'Even a national number that can give you help either right away or in turn if it suits you better put you in touch with somebody in your immediate area where you can go and get help if you want to face-to-face.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

'If you phoned it up they would give a local number to contact or put you through in touch with someone that could speak to in your area.' (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

'Maybe adverts on the telly and that's specific charity instead of at Christmas and all the toys.' (30 – 39 year olds, C2DEs, Glenrothes)

Doctor's Surgery

After a national campaign, distribution of information leaflets through doctors' surgeries was another highly popular option cited.

'I don't think there's enough, you know if you are sitting in a doctors surgery or something they've got all these woman magazines and all this, they should have wee leaflets so that when you're sitting just to lift it and have a wee look at it because at the end of the day you never know when you'll find yourself in that situation.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

Internet

'The number's probably the best thing I mean leaflets in doctors' surgeries and police stations.....they're not the kind of things that you go in and just pick up a leaflet and walk out, so it doesn't really work that well. Maybe nowadays the internet - a lot of people sit and scroll through pages and pages of information.' (18 – 29 year olds, ABC1s, Aberdeen)

'If you've got access to the internet, if you were to go online and search for a child protection agency or whatever, along those lines, it should be an 0800 number, should be free to access it rather than you pay your subscription to the internet monthly, you know you are just paying your time that you're on it. It should be like a mobile phone where if you get free minutes at night it should say well that website is a free website access, something along the lines. Because more and more households have got computers, they've got the access to the internet and that's the way every household will be in the future.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

Schools

'Communities feel if they do have children at school then kids get stuff sent home with them. You might never read it but it's a leaflet stuck in your drawer and you never know, you might think one day...' (30 – 39 year olds, C2DEs, Glenrothes)

Billboards

'All that money they spend putting up billboards - don't smoke - or for cars, or whatever, once every so often in town you should maybe have Childline number or you know because you don't miss they things.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

Advertising Directly to Children

'Advertise on packets of crisps that children are eating advertise on sweets.' (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

Key Priorities for the Scottish Executive Child Protection Review Team

When asked to make recommendations as to the key priorities which Scottish Executive should focus on, it was generally conceded that there was no easy solution.

'There's no really easy cure is there. There's no way of finding out a real cure to sort out these problems.' (55+ year olds, ABC1s, Glenrothes)

In light of the issues which were raised during the discussion, in particular, with regards lack of awareness where to source and seek assistance, it was felt vital that this process was somehow made easier.

'I'd just think it should be easier, if you see somebody breaking into a house you know to go to the police, if you're concerned about a child you don't really know what to do, but you need to make it a nice simple easy route so that we can just do our bit.' (30 – 39 year olds, ABC1s, Kilmarnock)

A common theme, however, was that schools and teachers should have an important role to play in any future strategy devised.

'I think probably more school, more like secondary school information because that's who would probably sink into more because at school you kind of take things in because you have to, even if somebody babbles on you still take something in. When you're home and you mention it to your parents or oh well, social services were there and talked on that today.' (18 – 29 year olds, ABC1s, Aberdeen)

'They are maybe needing a different type of teacher to be going in as well, more on the counselling line or like a back up for the teacher in the class that can just sit back and say right well, I can see this is going downhill or give the teacher support as well.' (30 – 39 year olds, C2DEs, Glenrothes)

The other issues raised included:

- Ensuring centralised co-ordinated working partnerships across agencies;
- Accessibility of social work department;
- Investment (i.e. in the community)

'A local resource centre for kids and parents, a localised resource centre, I think maybe a couple of nights a week that are subsidised by the Executive or the government that the kids have got somewhere that's a sort of drop in place for them'. (30 – 39 year olds, C2DE, Glenrothes)

'More money in community centres'. (40 – 55 year olds, C2Des, Aberdeen)

'Become more visible'. (40 – 55 year olds, C2Des, Aberdeen)

'Social services should be accessible'. (40 – 55 year olds, C2Des, Aberdeen)

'The social workers, schools, nurseries. Every agency there is to do with child protection, get them together and they all work together. So that it's not just wee bits and pieces here and there, it's all the one.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

'Why not take that £260 million and put it into child protection, homelessness in Scotland, whatever, that money could be put to a hell of a lot more use.' (18 – 29 year olds, C2DEs, Glasgow)

Implications

It is apparent from all respondents, irrespective of age, gender or background that it is generally felt that we live in an increasingly violent society, although admittedly many feel that it is not so much that violence and crime has increased but that awareness has been heightened as a result of media coverage over the last few decades. The impact which the media has on people's views on child protection and how it impacts on how they react to particular situations is a continuing theme throughout the research.

The research has revealed that, in general, the public's awareness of '*child protection*' is dictated primarily by what they have seen or heard through media coverage. People still recollect and cite the instance of the James Bulger case and the incident in the Orkney Islands. Where exceptions exist, i.e. where respondents are more familiar with the child protection process and subsequent systems which are in place, these are among those who are employed as teachers, or in the police as some of the respondents participating in the research, indeed were.

It is apparent that awareness raising of the outcomes of cases through the media does result in the general public becoming more vigilant and subsequently prompting and motivating the public to take appropriate action. It is heartening to note that the public's view is that '*I think that most people would intervene*'. Traditionally this will be to:

- speak to a neighbour or relative to make them aware that their actions have been noticed;
- contact the appropriate organisation, e.g. school, police or social work.

Unfortunately, media attention on this issue also has a more adverse effect on some members of the general public, in particular, the 50+ male population who are reticent to act in view of how it might be perceived if they were seen approaching a young child and therefore deem it more appropriate and easier if a woman was to intervene. Similarly, the media coverage of '*Childline*' is also perceived to have had a detrimental effect on parenting, particularly in disciplinary procedures in the child's upbringing as parents are constantly being threatened by their offspring with '*Childline*'.

It would appear that the public's awareness of who provides support in child protection is fairly limited, '*you don't know where to go for help. What help is provided and who it is for*'. Awareness of support mechanisms is restricted to '*social work/services*' and the '*police*', followed by '*Childline*'. Added to this, it seems that there exists the negative view that intervention by these agencies is '*heavy handed*'. It would appear, however, that respondents feel that there is also an important role for schools to play. In particular, it is felt that schools should play a pivotal role, particularly as the public feel more comfortable about approaching the school if they are aware of a problem rather than the social work department.

There is further a distinct lack of awareness as to who the public should approach and/or where they can access and source information. One of the key messages which has evolved from the research is that the whole process '*needs to be made easier*'. This has implications for any strategy devised by the Scottish Executive with regards any awareness raising initiatives implemented. This leads onto another key message emanating from the research which is **accessibility**. The consensus among respondents was that there was a need for a **national campaign** to raise awareness of both the issue and equally importantly to advise where the public can find out more information. This resulted in the suggestion of a '*national number*' being promoted. The purpose of this would be that it would enable people to have a first point of contact which in turn would enable them to access and be referred to a relevant local contact. There is inevitably the concern by some that this will be abused in a similar manner to the campaign which was launched on behalf of Childline.

Finally, it is apparent that in the public's view there is a greater need for more **centralised partnership working** to ensure a more effective service provision. As it currently stands, the public feel that there are '*too many agencies for irrelevant things*' which subsequently leads to the negative perception that '*nothing is getting done*'. It was further considered vital that any strategy adopted by the Scottish Executive should involve more localised initiatives involving the local communities, in particular, the distribution of information leaflets through schools and doctor's surgeries. It is considered important that the former becomes involved in the provision of information to children and that children will feel more confident about approaching teachers if they have a problem which will in turn be referred by the teacher to the appropriate organisational body.

As anticipated, the public feel that '*child protection*' is an area which requires increased funding to ensure that a more efficient service provision is provided.

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Checked & Approved:

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Appendices

for

Appendix 1: Topic Guide

Appendix 2: Quota Sheets

for

Appendix 3: Recruitment Questionnaire
