

Institution: The University of Edinburgh

Unit of Assessment: 22 Social Work and Social Policy

Title of case study: 4: Bringing children's concerns to the development of alcohol policy and services, and sex education practice

1. Summary of the impact

Research providing novel insights into children's perspectives on families and relationships has had wide impact on policy and practice in Scotland. Through a partnership with ChildLine Scotland, research conducted into children's calls has:

- led to the development of voluntary sector services to support children affected by their parents' drinking
- provided key information used to raise the awareness of 'harm to others' in the change of alcohol policy to focus on reducing population-level alcohol consumption in Scotland (introduction of restrictions on sales and minimum pricing)
- been included in the training and education for parents, teachers and health improvement staff responsible for sexual health education of about 98,000 school-age children.

2. Underpinning research

Research was carried out by the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) in partnership with ChildLine Scotland, a voluntary organisation operating a confidential telephone helpline for children and young people. The establishment of CRFR, a consortium research centre based at the UoE since 2001, was seen by the Director of ChildLine as an opportunity to develop collaborative research. ChildLine had conducted limited investigation of their massive database of the issues raised by children in thousands of calls a year, and was keen to conduct more academically rigorous and independent research. CRFR academics were interested in this novel and unique opportunity to investigate children's unsolicited concerns and views.

The research was conducted in two distinct phases. Project 1 (Backett-Millburn – PI, Edinburgh 1996-2011; Jamieson - Co-I, 1978 -; and Jackson – Research Fellow) was funded by the ESRC from 2004-05 (£44k) and investigated children who called ChildLine because they were concerned about another member of their family (usually a parent). This project investigated the records of 9,363 calls. Issues of mental health, domestic abuse, drug and alcohol use emerged from this research. Parental alcohol misuse was the most frequent concern that young people presented, and in a high proportion of these calls children's main reason for contacting ChildLine was physical abuse. This project was graded as 'outstanding' by the ESRC. This research was published in 2005, but became particularly important after the election of the SNP Government in 2007, when there was a shift in approaches to alcohol policy.

Project 2 (Backett-Millburn – PI, Jamieson – Co-I, Newall – Research Fellow, 2005) built on the methodological learning from project one, and was funded by the Scottish Government to investigate children calling ChildLine about sexual health issues (2005-06; £35k). The unsolicited nature of calls on this topic was considered particularly important given the sensitive nature of sexual health issues and ongoing concerns about Scotland's poor levels of sexual health and wellbeing. In this project 14,244 calls were investigated, where children and young people aged 5-18 years expressed a wide range of concerns about their sexual health and wellbeing, from seeking explanation and clarification about 'normal' development and sexual terminology to support and advice on pregnancy, relationships, sexual identity and sexual abuse. This research identified that children were concerned about these kinds of issues from a very young age, and that there was a need for basic facts-of-life type information in order to alleviate worry and concern. For some children and young people a lack of basic information left them vulnerable to harm and abuse as they were unable to understand what was happening to them. The findings were launched in March 2007 and have been widely used by sexual health practitioners and a range of professionals who work with children and young people in school and care, and with parents to reinforce their role in educating their own children.

3. References to the research

Backett-Milburn, K, Jackson S (2012) Children's concerns about their parents' health and well-being: researching with ChildLine Scotland. *Children & Society* **26(5)**: 381-93, DOI: [10.1111/j.1099-0860.2010.00349.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1099-0860.2010.00349.x).

Jackson S, Newall E, Backett-Milburn K (2013) Children's narratives of sexual abuse. *Child & Family Social Work*, DOI: [10.1111/cfs.12080](https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12080).

Jackson, S, Backett-Milburn, K, Newall E (2013) Researching distressing topics: emotional reflexivity and emotional labor in the secondary analysis of children and young people's narratives of abuse. *SAGE Open* **3(2)**, DOI: [10.1177/2158244013490705](https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013490705).

Children's Concerns About Parents' and Significant Others' Health and Well-being: Final Report to the ESRC

<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/my-esrc/grants/RES-000-22-0490/outputs/Read/4273c82b-d745-431e-8bca-790bb7ce6e86>

Children and Young People's Concerns about their Sexual Health and Well-being: Final Report to the Scottish Executive (2007)

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/02/13111657/0>

Selected research grant support

Backett-Milburn K, Jamieson L, Morton S (UoE) and A Houston (ChildLine Scotland); Children's concerns about parents' and significant others' health and well-being, ESRC, 2004-05, £44k. Project assessed as 'outstanding'.

Backett-Milburn K, Jamieson L, Morton, S and A Wales; Children and Young People's Concerns about their Sexual Health, Scottish Government, 2005-06, £35k.

4. Details of the impact

Strategies to engage with relevant beneficiaries by both CRFR and ChildLine have led to significant and far-reaching impacts on policy, practice and the development of support for children and families.

For both projects, strategies to ensure wide uptake started with initial discussions with practitioners to draw out policy and practice implications which were then communicated alongside the research findings.

For project 1, uptake was facilitated through engagement with 164 policy-makers and practitioners, including:

- discussion with children from the Children's Parliament to include reflections on policy and practice solutions with the research findings
- letters sent to Directors of Social Work and Education drawing out the implications
- findings presented to internal Scottish government meetings. Press coverage included TES, Scotsman, Sunday Herald, BBC TV and radio, and local press.

For project 2, over 166 practitioners and policy-makers attended discussion events and ChildLine worked with a group of young people who communicated findings through drama performed at the launch conference, and made into a short film. Findings were:

- presented to the Cross-Party Group on Sexual Health
- sent to Directors of Education and Social Work in Scotland
- covered in the Times, Herald and Scotsman newspapers.

ChildLine continued to draw on the findings from both projects in responses to policy consultations on alcohol, the age of consent, and sexual health policy. Impacts from the research have been investigated through an ESRC funded PhD project (2008-12). [5.4] [5.5]

Project 1: impacts relate mainly to alcohol services and policy. It was seen particularly as a useful tool to raise awareness of the impact of parental alcohol use on children:

“It was incredibly helpful ... It highlighted alcohol as a ‘hidden’ issue in families. .. there were many more families out there that our services were not reaching” (Research Officer, Barnardos). [5.1]

Significant impacts from project 1 include:

- Change in funding policy of Lloyds TSB Foundation Partnership Drugs Initiative to include children affected by alcohol from 2008, due to influence of ChildLine Director on board of trustees [5.6] [5.9]
- Development of further research on children and alcohol by Barnardos and by Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems in 2009 and policy-influencing activities which have raised the profile of children affected by parental alcohol use in the policy process (testimonial from Evelyn Gillan [5.8], document [5.3])
- Contribution to change in Scottish policy on alcohol: the research was referenced in key policy documents [5.2] as part of the SNP’s new approach to alcohol policy taking a ‘whole population approach’ (2008 onwards). The specific utility of the research is described by the lead policy-officer: “Thinking about the - often hidden - impact on children and families was a key part of the jigsaw... The ChildLine work was helpful in helping to expose some of the nature and extent of the harmful effects of alcohol misuse on those other than the drinker” (Alison Douglas, Former Head of Alcohol Policy, Scottish Government) [5.2].

Project 2: the research contributed to changing attitudes among those responsible for delivering sex education to children and young people.

- The research became widely known and used in Health Board networks in Glasgow due to the networking of ChildLine’s policy officer. It was also taken up by a key Health Board employee with responsibility for the implementation of the Sexual Health Strategy who presented the findings to six health boards (2007-10). The research increased practitioners’ confidence in presenting the needs of children and young people, as described by one health promotion officer: “It made me much more confident in presenting information as it was backed up by solid evidence from children themselves who had phoned ChildLine. You can’t dispute this” (Principal Health promotion Officer, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde) [5.7]
- A particularly significant development that has led to wide reach (see below) of the findings was that they were made into a quiz to use in training parents [5.1]. The parents in this programme commented that the ChildLine data made them change their attitudes towards their role in their child’s sex education (Evaluation report published 2009).
- The research was included in sexual health for parents, teachers, health improvement staff, and youth workers in one area (2008-13), impacting on all (more than 98,000) children of school age in this area [5.1].
- A review of call-taking on sexual health issues by ChildLine Scotland resulted in an improved service for the thousands of children calling on sexual health issues every year [5.1].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

PDFs of all web links are available at www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/REF2014REF3B/UoA+22

5.1 The research in this case study was subject of an impact assessment as part of an ESRC funded PhD. This investigated wide ranging uses and impact from the CRFR/CL research. Morton (2012) ‘Exploring and Assessing Research Impact.’ PhD, Social Policy, UoE, available from University of Edinburgh Library. Quote from Barnardo’s research officer taken from p150.

5.2 Reference to policy documents demonstrating research referenced in the development of alcohol policy. CRFR research listed as reference in Section J and mentioned in paragraph 210: Changing Scotland’s Relationship with alcohol: A discussion on our strategic approach, Scottish

Government June 2008, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/06/16084348/0>;
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/06/16084348/19>.

Former Head of Alcohol Policy, Scottish Government, corroborated the significance of this work in the development of that policy as quoted in section 4.

5.3 Untold Damage: Children's accounts of living with harmful parental drinking (November 2009) SHAAP- Illustrating research commissioned on back of CRFR/ChildLine work (see introduction) and used in policy-influencing work to raise the profile of children affected by parental drinking: <http://www.shaap.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Reports%20and%20Briefings/Untold%20Damage%20full%20report.pdf>.

5.4 ChildLine response to consultation on Alcohol demonstrating use of the CRFR/CL research in policy process <http://archive.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/hs/inquiries/AlcoholBill/documents/028ChildLineinScotland.pdf>

5.5 ChildLine Scotland: Response to the Sexual Health and Relationships Strategy 27th February, 2004 and 2007 – demonstrating use of project 2 to influence policy process:
Recommendations of the Scottish Law Commission Report on Rape and Sexual Offences
Response on behalf of ChildLine Scotland and CHILDREN 1st May 2006
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/1099/0059828.pdf>

Testimonials:

5.6 Former Director of ChildLine now Chief Executive of Children 1st – able to corroborate use of research in development of alcohol policy and ChildLine services, and in development of Lloyd TSB funding criteria (see 5.9)

5.7. Principal Health Improvement Officer - Sexual Health NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde – able to corroborate use of research in development of sex education policy and practice and quoted in section 4.

5.8 Chief Executive, Alcohol Focus Scotland (formerly Director of Scottish Action on Alcohol problems)- able to corroborate use of research for policy-influencing activities

5.9 Link demonstrating that Lloyds TSB funding criteria now include alcohol:
<http://www.ltsbfoundationforscotland.org.uk/index.asp?tm=16&cookies=True>