

The cost of a child abuse and neglect case to children's services in England

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- In the UK, 5.9% of children under age 11 and 18.6% of children aged 11-17 have reported severe abuse or neglect in their lifetimes (2011)
- Victims are at risk of recurrent victimisation
- Victims are more likely to become perpetrators when they have children

The nature of the problem

It is difficult to determine the real prevalence of child abuse and neglect because we know that it is underreported, particularly by young people at the time the maltreatment is occurring.

- Children who are abused or neglected experience severe trauma
- The effects of this last a lifetime, including:
 - Physical changes to the developing brain
 - Long-term mental health problems
 - Physical illness

Human costs of child abuse and neglect

Of course, when thinking about the costs of child maltreatment we first think about the human costs, which are the primary reasons why we try to prevent and reduce abuse and neglect.

- Intensive services required to safeguard children and improve their well-being
- These costs have not been estimated for the UK on per-case basis
- Resources could potentially be saved to increase capacity

Financial costs

There are also many financial costs incurred when children require intensive services to safeguard them and improve their well-being. Although many individual services have costs attached to them, the costs of an entire child abuse and neglect case has not been calculated in the UK. If we put these costs together, we can more clearly understand the amount of resources that could be saved by investing further in prevention, thereby increasing the capacity of social services to help more children in need.

•We have estimated the cost of the average child protection case by:

1. Calculating the cost of individual legal and social work services
2. Taking into account the likelihood of receiving each service

Method

- Step one: understand how the social care system works
- Complex picture
- Children take different pathways through the system depending on needs and circumstances
- Each key step was identified and costed using published data

Mapping the system

I am going to walk through each step and describe how we approached it to estimate costs

- A brief assessment of the needs of each child who has been referred to social care
- Cost includes the initial referral that precedes the assessment
- Weighted by the proportion of children inside and outside of London who were identified as having abuse or neglect as their primary need
- Average cost: £487 (2010 pounds)**

Initial Assessment

We understand that there will no longer be a distinction made between an initial and a core assessment in England and there are currently six local authorities in England who are trialling a continuous assessment process.

- Where a child is suspected to be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm
- Local authority determines what action is needed to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child
- In-depth assessment of the child's needs
- May include a strategy meeting, interview, and a core assessment
- Average cost: £1,311 (2010 pounds)**

Section 47/core assessment

The average cost of this process, taking into account the probabilities of each component, was calculated.

- Children deemed at risk
- A written record and working tool for parents, carers and professionals
- Calculated using the average cost of a child on a CPP over 6 months
- Adjusted to reflect the average time that children are subject to a CPP (10.6 months)
- Average cost: £3,293 (2010 pounds)**

Child protection plan

- Children may become 'looked after' by a local authority
- In care homes or foster care
- Calculated using the per week estimate for children with CAN as their need category
- Average cost based on the average duration of latest period of care for looked after children (2.381 years)
- Duration based on children who ceased to be looked after in FY 2011, weighted by legal status
- Average cost: £92,611 (2011 pounds)**

Being looked after

We assumed that the unit cost of being in care was the same regardless of legal status

- Adoption involves several types of costs
- Inter-agency fees
- Cost of post-adoption care
- Application to courts
- Average cost of adoption to the local authority is used; only includes inter-agency fees and overheads
- Average cost: £35,340 (2007/08 pounds)**

Adoption

It was not possible to estimate an average cost of post-adoption care, and the cost of the application to courts is incurred by the adoptive family, so it is only the inter-agency fees and overheads that are included in the costs to local authorities of adoption in this model.

Local authorities (LAs) and voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) arrange adoptions in England. LAs place children for adoption with their own approved prospective adopters (an 'internal placement') or with approved prospective adopters provided by another local authority or by a VAA (an 'external placement'). VAAs also place a very small number of children relinquished into their care for adoption. Where an external placement is made, an inter-agency fee is charged.

- Various legal expenses may be incurred by the local authority

- Application fees for Interim and full Care Orders, Emergency Protection Orders, Child Assessment Orders and voluntary agreements for placements.

- Costs of PLO proceedings

- Average cost was calculated by weighting by the number of children looked after in 2010-2011.

- Cost of PLOs was weighted by the proportion of different types of orders in and out of London

- Average cost: £702 (2011 pounds)**

Public Law Outline (PLO) and other legal fees

The PLO process is one in which the courts, parent partnership services, legal advisors, and other legal council become involved in public law proceedings.

- Number of children receiving each service
- Probability of receiving each service
- Multiplied the probability by the per-case cost of each service

Calculation

- Average expected cost of a substantiated child abuse and neglect case: £11,222 (2011 pounds)
- Average cost when the child also becomes 'looked after': £101,459 (2011 pounds).

Results

- Not possible to identify repeat assessments or s47s in one year, leading to underestimate of unit costs
- Does not include children classed as 'looked after' but remaining with parents (5.8% of children)
- Used duration of latest period of care, rather than total time in care
- Cost of adoption does not include post-adoption support
- Cost of legal fees used number of children looked after by legal status rather than number under a Child Assessment order due to confidentiality concerns
- Overall, these limitations mean that these estimates are conservative**

Limitations

It is mandatory to offer post-adoption support, but not to provide it and it was not possible to identify the number of families that receive post-adoption support, the level of support, or the period over which the support is paid.

- Limited to local authority costs
- Full costing needed
- Could include costs of court services, family court advisors, victim support, costs of voluntary organisations, and opportunity costs

Full costing needed

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- Costs can be used when planning an commissioning services
- Estimating the expected savings if CAN cases are prevented
- Cost-benefit analysis of interventions to prevent CAN
- High human and financial costs support argument for increased investment in prevention

Conclusions

According to a recent report by the NSPCC in the UK, there has been a marked increase in the rhetoric around early intervention, but in reality, the investment in early intervention has decreased (for example, the early intervention grant for local authorities has been decreased by 19% since 2010) while spending on more 'reactive' services such as residential care, fostering, and looked after services has increased by 5% in England since 2009. Over the same period, since 2010, 84 reports on early intervention have been published by the UK and devolved governments and charities.



Thank you!

For more information please visit:

www.dartington.org.uk

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