

<b>Institution:</b> University of Sheffield		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> C-21 Sociology		
<b>Title of case study:</b> How inequality determines child welfare interventions: new understandings for policy and practice		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2015–2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Professor Morris	Chair in Social Work	Sept 2015–present
Dr Mason	Lecturer	2013–present
Dr Webb	Research Associate	2015–present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016–2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This UK study revealed profound and previously undocumented links between children’s chances of entering public care and protection systems and their socioeconomic circumstances. These findings have directly influenced policy and practice discourses and driven changes in the development of responses to children in need of care and protection. The research stream led by Sheffield focused on practice and has been instrumental in changing national policy, the training of social workers, and the development of new services and practices in agencies and local authorities. In doing so it has placed recognition of the impact of socioeconomic circumstances at the heart of debates about child welfare interventions.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> Unequal rates in outcomes in health and education are routinely understood as a product of socioeconomic circumstances. However, this same inequalities lens has not been applied to the rates of children entering care or in need of protection, despite these interventions being life changing for children. This research was the first UK study of its kind. Our findings identified previously unacknowledged inequalities in care and protection interventions, across the UK nations. By evidencing: (i) a significant relationship between socioeconomic circumstances and child welfare interventions; (ii) detailing variations across and within the UK nations, and (iii) offering new in-depth understandings of social work responses to family socioeconomic circumstances, this research led to substantial changes in policy and practice.</p> <p><b>Research:</b> The empirical base for this case study is the Nuffield funded Child Welfare Inequalities Project (CWIP). This interdisciplinary study involved seven UK universities and received over £600,000 in funding. Morris, Mason, and Webb (Sheffield) led the mixed methods case studies work stream and actively contributed to the other two work streams. Morris was part of the senior leadership team. The research involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An international evidence review of the relationship between child abuse, poverty and neglect (<b>R1</b>) (led by the University of Huddersfield).</li> </ul>		

- A quantitative work stream: linking Indicators of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) with rates of care and protection (led by the University of Huddersfield).
- A mixed method work stream: six comparative case studies in England, Northern Ireland, and Scotland, examining unequal child welfare intervention rates through the lens of social work practice (led by the University of Sheffield).

**Findings:** Our research revealed that: (i) children in the most deprived parts of the UK are over 12 times more likely to be the subject of state intervention, compared with those in the least deprived parts; (ii) deprivation was the most significant driver of these unequal rates; (iii) social workers paid little attention to family's socio-economic circumstances in their planning and decision-making.

The Sheffield contribution was essential in establishing that variations in professional practice could **not** explain the unequal intervention rates observed in the linked data. This allowed robust validation of the quantitative finding of the link between wider socio-economic factors and care and protection interventions (**R2**). Extending this analysis by exploring supply and demand, Webb's and Bywaters revealed that the most deprived LAs had experienced the greatest reductions in children's services funding (**R3**).

Unequal intervention rates *between* the four nations were also revealed by the research. Northern Ireland (NI) for example, is the most deprived UK nation whilst ranking lowest in terms of intervention rates. Sheffield led case studies explored this counterintuitive finding and identified key factors influencing NI intervention rates (**R4**). This produced further evidence of the complexity of the relationship between intervention rates and socioeconomic factors.

Alongside generating advances in mixed methods research (**R5**) this research is underpinned by highly cited academic outputs that offer critical conceptual and theoretical developments (**R6**). Overall, the CWIP evidenced for the first time that the chances of growing up in one's birth family are significantly reduced by poverty, raising substantial moral and political questions for child welfare systems, policies, and practices.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- R1.** Bywaters, P., Bunting, L., Davidson, G., Hanratty, J., **Mason, W.**, McCartan, C. and Steils, N. (2016). The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: an evidence review. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/relationship-between-poverty-child-abuse-and-neglect-evidence-review>.
- R2.** **Morris, K., Mason, W.**, Bywaters, P., Featherstone, B., Daniel, B., Brady, G., Bunting, L., Hooper, J., Mirza, N., Scourfield, J., & Webb, C. (2018). Social work, poverty, and child welfare interventions. *Child & Family Social Work*, 23(3), 364–372. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12423>
- R3.** **Webb, C. J. R.**, & Bywaters, P. (2018). Austerity, rationing and inequity: trends in children's and young peoples' services expenditure in England between 2010 and 2015. *Local Government Studies*, 44(3), 391–415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2018.1430028>
- R4.** **Mason, W., Morris, K.**, Featherstone, B., Bunting, L., Davidson, G., McCartan, C., Bywaters, P., & **Webb, C.** (2020). Understanding out of Home Care Rates in Northern

Ireland: A Thematic Analysis of Mixed Methods Case Studies. *The British Journal of Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcaa075>

**R5. Mason, W., Morris, K., Webb, C.,** Daniels, B., Featherstone, B., Bywaters, P., Mirza, N., Hooper, J., Brady, G., Bunting, L., & Scourfield, J. (2019). Toward Full Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in Case Study Research: Insights From Investigating Child Welfare Inequalities. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 14(2), 164–183.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689819857972>

**R6.** Featherstone, B., Gupta, A., **Morris, K.** and White, S. (2018). *Protecting Children: A Social Model*. Bristol: Policy Press. <https://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/protecting-children>

#### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Given the contemporary social and political context it is extremely difficult to gain traction with findings that challenge entrenched priorities. As such, our strategy was: (i) to reframe the policy debate, by introducing child welfare as a matter of inequality; and (ii) to influence social work practice at national and local authority (LA) levels.

##### Changing understanding

Our media and public engagement strategy allowed extensive research dissemination and reach. The research attracted widespread media coverage, featuring on BBC prime time news and webpages, Radio Four, the Guardian and relevant professional publications (S1).

In Parliament, the research team presented evidence to the 2016/17 APPG Select Committee on Children. Morris' evidence was quoted in their report, setting out the recommendations for policy changes (S2). Questions directly drawing on CWIP have been asked by MPs in the House of Commons (S3) and, for the first time, Ofsted (2017) included deprivation as a consideration in their assessment of Children's Services (S4). These examples demonstrate a fundamental shift in understandings of the link between poverty and children's services that are directly attributable to CWIP.

The national Care Crisis Review, coordinated by Family Rights Group, was established in 2017 in response to growing concern about the rising number of children in the care system. Findings from CWIP were heavily drawn on in the analysis of drivers for intervention rates and in the development of Inquiry outputs (S5), with Morris appointed to the Steering Group as an Advisor.

Internationally the research has also resulted in the formation of a child welfare anti-poverty network.

##### Policy change

Our impact strategy has placed child welfare inequality on national policy agendas across the UK. This policy shift is embodied through: (i) the positioning of child welfare inequalities in policy recommendations and statements; and (ii) the commissioning of related guidance and research by national UK governments.

- Morris, alongside CWIP partners presented evidence to the Association of Directors of Children's Services (2017/ 2018), significantly influencing their national policy statements and informing their analysis of the issues and changes required in child protection and care (S6).

- In Northern Ireland, the Department of Health commissioned and produced a national Anti-Poverty Practice Framework for social work (S7) that brings poverty into the foreground of social work practice, responding directly to the CWIP case study findings.
- In Scotland the Neglect Strategy has been amended in light of the CWIP findings, specifically the need to move away from holding parents responsible for material and environmental conditions (S8).

## **UK practice & service change**

### ***National organisations***

The team has worked closely with the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) to support changes in social work policy and practice. BASW produced a podcast on CWIP, shared with their 20,000 membership. This has accompanied the joint production of practice guidance for BASW members (Sept 2019, S9) that draws directly from the case studies to encourage practice considerations of family socio-economic circumstances in case planning.

A CWIP app (CWIP App [www.cwip-app.co.uk](http://www.cwip-app.co.uk)) was developed by Webb (Sheffield), enabling social workers to visualise and understand how LA data relate to core CWIP findings. The app was actively promoted by BASW. Adoption of the CWIP App has been high, being used by every local authority in England. Over 500 hours of active use have been logged (by 28-Sep-2020). This work was cited in evidence given to the Comprehensive Spending Review by Children England (S6).

The national DfE funded the 'practice supervisors' programme (which works with over 100 local authorities and national children's services partners) commissioned a resource to address issues of poverty and deprivation, drawing directly on the case study findings. This resource forms part of an open access repository of practice resources (S9), used by over 200 social work supervisors in routine practice supervision across England.

### ***Local authorities***

The CWIP team led over 50 practice-focused sessions in LAs, with staff reporting routine practice changes to 'poverty proof' their approaches. The research has been extensively used in training social workers, and their practice managers (S10).

Morris and Featherstone led five workshops for local managers across England, including over 100 staff. As a result, Morris and Featherstone have worked directly with multiple LAs, changing policy and practice by training frontline managers and staff. For example, in Barnsley Morris and Featherstone have worked alongside senior managers and frontline staff to revise their neglect strategy and to poverty proof their practices (S10). This includes assessing socio economic conditions explicitly, the formation of a LA wide Poverty Task and Finish Group to drive forward practices that address the consequences of poverty.

### **Further studies**

- In Wales a national study has been commissioned (2018) by the government to replicate the English, Scottish and NI case studies, with Mason and Morris as advisors.
- Internationally the research has resulted in comparable work in New Zealand and Norway.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- S1.** Bundle of media clippings where CWIP has been reported.
- S2.** Storing Up Trouble: A postcode lottery of children's social care (p.32).
- S3.** Correspondence with Emeritus Professor of Social Work, UEA), supported with excerpt from Hansard transcript.
- S4.** The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2016/1 (p.70).
- S5.** Testimony from Chief Executive, Family Rights Group.
- S6.** ACDS Fair funding review: a review of relative needs and resources (p.3) plus a letter of support from ACDS President and evidence to the CSR from Children England.
- S7.** Anti-Poverty Practice Framework for Social Work in Northern Ireland (CWIP cited from the outset) plus a supporting testimony from Chief Social Worker for Northern Ireland.
- S8.** Email correspondence with Child Protection Lead Officer, East Lothian Council and Chair, Scottish Safeguarding Children Boards.
- S9.** Director, Research in Practice testimony supported with email correspondence with Head of Policy and Research, British Association of Social Workers.
- S10.** Testimony from Assistant Chief Officer, Children's Services and North East Operations combined with mail correspondence with Head of Service, Children and Family Social Care, Barnsley Council; Senior Manager, Children's Social Care East, Lancashire County Council; and the Barnsley Report.