

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Goldsmiths, University of London		
Unit of Assessment: 20, Social Work and Social Policy		
Title of case study: Social Work with Affluent Families: changing policy and practice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015-2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Claudia Bernard	Professor of Social Work	1994-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Professor Bernard has created a policy and practice change partnership with a London borough, the City of London Corporation, from which to identify, test and disseminate change in social work policy and practice. By showing how social work is frequently manipulated by middle-class families, the researchers' findings have directly resulted in new policies for social work with affluent families in this borough and in 5 further London boroughs, with 12 more nationally actively considering policy change. This directly affects 4850 social workers working with children and families across London. Impacts are also qualitatively evaluated through case studies examining the effects of policy change in 12 local authorities. These are being shared across all 343 local authorities in England. In addition, the regulatory body for independent schools is using the research in their training of 720 inspectors, working across 5000 independent schools in the United Kingdom (UK).</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>The research began with the deliberate development of an impact partnership with the City of London Corporation, undertaken by Bernard. In 2016, funding was secured from the City of London to conduct a scoping review which sought to find out what was known about child neglect in affluent families. The study found that most child protection social work is perceived to be motivated in contexts of poverty and the focus on affluent families is therefore impactful in itself. Following the scoping review Bernard was commissioned to undertake a further national study to examine how social workers engage parents from affluent backgrounds across the child protection system. The study sites were selected using the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government's <i>Open Data Communities</i> platform. Indices of deprivation (<i>Income, Health, Education, Housing, Crime etc.</i>) were used to select five counties and seven local authorities which represent the wealthiest areas in England. In depth interviews and focus groups were used to gain an understanding of social workers' experiences of intervening with affluent parents when there were child protection concerns. A total of 30 expert stakeholders were also interviewed: frontline social workers, managers and policy-makers charged with a child protection remit across twelve of the wealthiest local authority areas in England. From a thematic analysis of the data the research found that neglect in affluent families can be difficult to recognise and address, posing challenges for effectively safeguarding children at risk in affluent families. Social workers have difficulties in maintaining their focus on children because of the way that affluent parents use their financial and social capital to manipulate the statutory child protection system. The project resulted in a scoping report, a policy report, two peer reviewed journal articles and a professional practice article (R1-R6).</p> <p>Bernard's study has implications for how social workers understand and work with affluent families when there are safeguarding concerns. Though class pervades much of social work with families, the stratification of class is not explicitly named or explored in training events in working with</p>		

resistant families, for instance. A striking example from the study is that even in those local authorities where a good proportion of their interventions involved affluent families, training events on working with difficult or resistant parents only used case scenarios depicting poor and working-class families, thus reinforcing the idea of neglect as a social and economic disadvantage phenomenon. In effect, social class as it frames the lens through which neglect is analysed needs to be a central issue in practitioners' discussions and reflections on child neglect.

The findings were noticed by the UK Independent Schools Inspectorate via an alert from the NSPCC Knowledge and Information Service on 21 May 2018. This led to their request to work with Bernard to develop new policy on child protection in their settings. The earlier work was therefore followed up by a roundtable discussion with designated safeguarding leads in independent fee-paying schools which gave rise to a qualitative study *Understanding and Facilitating Policy Change and Practice Implications for Child Protection Social Work with Affluent Backgrounds*. In this study the researchers (Bernard and Henri) conducted interviews and focus groups with safeguarding leads and principal social workers from the 12 Local Authorities (who participated in the original research) to understand the ways in which impacts were achieved there, and the policy and practice processes which underpinned it. The aim was to enable organisations to progress learning and development in children's services to effectively engage affluent families. This study reported in 2020 with a policy report and a peer-reviewed journal article.

3. References to the research

R1. Bernard, C (2016) *Understanding and Responding to Abusive and Neglectful Behavior of Parents in Affluent Families: A Scoping Review*, Goldsmiths, University of London & City of London Corporation. [Report] [Available on Request]

R2. Bernard, C (2016) *Neglect Research Executive Summary*, Goldsmiths, University of London & City of London Corporation. [Report] [Available on Request]

R3. Bernard, C (2018) An Exploration of How Social Workers Engage Neglectful Parents from Affluent Backgrounds in the Child Protection System [Report - Neglect in Affluent Families](#). Goldsmiths, University of London & City of London Corporation. [Report] [Available online]

R4. Bernard, C. & Greenwood, T. (2018) Recognising and Addressing Child Neglect in Affluent Families. *Child and Family Social Work*. *Child & Family Social Work*, 1-8. [Article] <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12619> [Submitted to REF 2]

R5. Bernard, C. (2019) Social Workers' Experiences of Intervening in Child Neglect Cases in Affluent Families *Seen and Heard*. 29 (1): 37-42. [Article] [Available on Request]

R6. Bernard, C. & Greenwood, T. (2019) ['We're giving you the sack'—Social Workers' Perspectives of Intervening in Affluent Families When There Are Concerns about Child Neglect](#). *The British Journal of Social Work*, bcz003, [Article] <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcz003> [Submitted to REF 2]

4. Details of the impact

The impact comes about in the context of a partnership deliberately established to achieve change in the academic field of social work (by drawing attention to social work with affluent families) and in social work practice. Following long-standing commitments to action research, which challenges the tendency towards interesting but unused findings, this work set out to create spaces for policy-change in co-production with agents of change. It is impactful in that this is the first piece of research in the UK that has looked at child abuse in affluent families and therefore extends the academic field to include a focus on the top of the class ladder and not only poverty.

As the primary aim has been to integrate research into policy and practice, Bernard's investigation has been closely followed by City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Board (CHSCB) (Annual

Report, 2016-17, p34) and has been instrumental in the development of the Children and Young People's plan 2018-2021, providing the evidence base for the City of London to "train its staff to recognise and respond to neglect in affluent families" (p7) **(S1)**.

As well as playing a direct role in the development of the City of London's children's social care policies, the research has led to broader changes in the sector. While widespread media coverage **(S2)** is not impactful in itself, it stimulated significant public debate on Twitter (between 14-18 May 2018) which ensured the work achieved a wider audience, resulting in invitations to present findings to a number of child welfare related organisations including the London Boroughs of Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea, Westminster, Bromley, the Professional Association of Children's Guardians, Family Court Advisors and Independent Social Workers, Homerton University Hospital NHS Trust, and Wokingham Borough Council Children Safeguarding Board. Sharing the research messages beyond academic spaces, and beyond the City of London, has resulted in the active implementation of the research into new policies and practices in children's services in the Royal Borough of Kingston, London Borough of Richmond, and Wokingham Borough Council. As one independent consultant, who offers training three times per year to all staff in the Achieving for Children (AfC) areas (Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead), confirms: "the research was helpful in providing a structure to the training framework as I was able to use the research findings to define the key learning outcomes" **(S3)**.

The impact is significant because it provides the social work field with new ways of thinking about child maltreatment. The boroughs of Kingston, Richmond and Windsor and Maidenhead **(S3)**; Hackney, Lewisham **(S4)** Hammersmith & Fulham, Westminster, and Kensington & Chelsea have all used Bernard's findings in their briefings and training about safeguarding to help extend policy makers and social workers understanding of neglect.

The change and benefits of the research extend beyond social services departments. For example, in the fee-paying independent schools' sector, the City of London Boys' School, St Paul's School, Charterhouse Square **(S5)**, and City of London School for Girls are using it to refocus and extend their pastoral work, inform their training and development to help staff improve their knowledge of safeguarding (Designated Safeguarding Lead Roundtable, 20 March 2019). The Charterhouse School's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy (2018) cites Bernard's research, noting for the first time: "Neglect is not a function of social and economic disadvantage, although in affluent families it can be difficult to recognise and address" **(S5)**.

Additionally, the Independent Schools' Inspectorate (ISI), whose remit is to inspect schools and ensure they have good safeguarding systems in place, has incorporated the findings in the mandatory training of Inspectors. The Department for Education's accredited Independent Safeguarding Consultant confirms that the research to deliver the safeguarding seminars for the Independent Schools' Inspectorate, the Council of International Schools and the Boarding Schools' Association in the UK, Dubai, Singapore and Armenia **(S6)**. She testifies that Bernard's findings "empower colleagues to be more confident in challenging affluent families and be prepared for the response as mentioned in the research. Prior to the valuable findings, colleagues often doubted their decision making with child protection with such families as they were challenged or dismissed." Furthermore that, "I have seen a significant increase in the confidence of Designated Safeguarding leads in Independent schools since this research has been published. In addition, have seen an increase in child protection referrals relating to affluent families made to Children Social Care and to support services" **(S6)**.

Legal advocates, and other professionals working with children and families are also using the research in their 'new research messages' digests for professionals, including *Children & Young People Now*, *Independent Social Workers and Psychologists*, *Child Protection Resource*, and *Willis Palmers Law*.

Overall, beneficiaries of the work include social work leads in local government **(S7)**, who have a new policy and practice focus in this neglected area; social work practitioners, for whom new policies frame new resources and permissions to act; and teachers and inspectors in the

independent schools' sector, who now have a space and a resource for recognising, let alone tackling, child protection. As stated by the Assistant Director of Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) and Chair of the Principal Social Workers Network in England:

“The research findings and evidence has been helpful in prompting a re-examination of neglect thresholds and how we understand and act upon this in practice: 1) It supported us to think more about struggling young people who are isolated and may have complex safeguarding needs but due to attending private schools or availability of material resources, these challenges may not be immediately visible. 2) It has supported practitioners to develop vocabulary to speak about and identify cases of neglect within affluent homes. 3) It has also supported a space to speak about and consider how neglect impacts the lives of children from affluent families and the ability to draw upon Bernard’s research as the evidence base” (S7).

Above all, the beneficiaries include children in affluent families who are at risk of neglect or harm.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1. [Reports] CHSCB (2018), [Annual Report 2016/2017](#), see page 34; City of London Corporation (2018), [City of London Corporation Children and Young People’s Plan \(2018-2021\)](#), see page 7. [Grouped Source]

S2. [News items] BBC News (2018), [‘Rich families ‘use privilege’ to opt out of child services’](#), 14 May, BBC; Alina Polianskaya (2018), [‘Richer parents more likely to use ‘connections’ to avoid social worker intervention, finds child neglect report’](#) 14 May, *Independent*; Rachel Connolly (2018), [‘Social Workers feel less able to investigate child abuse in wealthy families, according to study’](#), 15th May, iNews. [Grouped Source]

S3. [Testimonial] Letter from Independent consultant, Ted Daszkiewicz, commissioned by Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead Council to deliver training to their workers, highlighting the benefits of the research.

S4. [Resource] Under the Information & Resources section of Lewisham Safeguarding Board website, Bernard’s Report is listed as a resource; see, Lewisham Safeguarding Children Partnership, [‘Information – Resources, Research Papers’](#).

S5. [Report] The Charterhouse School Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy refers to the research as part of the list of “Relevant documents to which this policy must adhere or ‘have regard’”; Charterhouse School (2018), [Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy](#), (v5. February 2019) see page 10 and 36.

S6. [Testimony] A letter from Ann Marie Christian, Safeguarding and Child Protection Consultant who delivers training with the Independent Schools Inspectorate, The Boarding School Association, NSPCC, and the Independent School Portal highlight the benefits of the research.

S7. [Testimony] Claudia Megele, Assistant Director of Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) and Chair of the Principal Social Workers Network in England has provided a letter highlighting the benefits of the research for practitioners and managers.