

Institution: University of Edinburgh		
Unit of Assessment: UOA20 Social Policy and Social Work		
Title of case study: Integrating Children's Rights into Gender Based Violence Policy		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr Claire Houghton	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Lecturer in Social Policy and Qualitative Research	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2015-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Houghton's participatory research with children and young people (CYP) has led to a greater awareness of support needs and a substantial shift in Gender Based Violence (GBV) policies, legislation, and services in Scotland. For the first time, there is explicit inclusion of CYP in GBV policies and action plans creating greater protection for CYP from harm. Specifically, Houghton's research collaborations led to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advancement in the Scottish Government's "Equally Safe Strategy", for the first time there is explicit inclusion of CYP, including revisions in the position statement, definitions, objectives, and priorities. • Substantial developments in the Scottish Government's "Equally Safe Delivery Plan" (2018) to now include new participatory approaches, services, and protections for CYP. • Inclusion of CYP in the new Domestic Abuse Scotland Act (2018) including groundbreaking "Statutory Aggravation" and "Non Harassment Orders" offering protection for CYP. For the first time the criminal law recognises the adverse effects on children of domestic abuse. • Transforming practices for police officers, court officials, and service providers to improve service provision and CYP participation. 		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Houghton has developed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) model for working with young survivors of gender based violence (GBV). This model (3.1) seeks not only to give children a voice but also to enable them to exercise agency and power in policy-making structures by engaging CYP in action research. Through this approach, Houghton works with CYP to examine experiences of GBV and to guide CYP in engagements with politicians and policy-makers. Her associated participatory ethics approach (3.2), co-developed with young survivors, has advanced existing research and engagement practices and ensures participation is ethical, safe, empowering, and emancipatory. Using this model, between 2015 and 2018, in collaboration with government and third-sector organisations, Houghton led two pioneering action research projects with CYP and policy-makers in Scotland:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. VAV-IMPACT (2015-2017): Funded via an ESRC Impact Accelerator Grant and a Scottish Government grant, the Voice Against Violence (VAV) IMPACT project involved Houghton and young survivors of domestic abuse working with policy-makers to set national priorities and embed participation of CYP in GBV policy-making. The project advised on the inclusion of research findings in government strategy, specifically that: 		

CYP are co-victims of domestic abuse, interventions need to link the safety and support of women and children, and CYP need to be visible in policy and practice (3.3).

2. EVERYDAY HEROES (2017-2018): Funded by the Scottish Government, Houghton (PI) led this action research project involving CYP from across Scotland working to research gender equality and GBV. The Everyday Heroes team consisted of CYP experts from the IMPACT project, Barnardo's Scotland, Scottish Women's Aid, Rape Crisis Scotland, and the Scottish Youth Parliament. 125 young people identified improvements to justice and services for gender-based violence survivors (e.g. domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault). They co-researched the justice system and proposed policy ideas to enhance gender equality. Working with the Scottish Youth Parliament, an additional 439 young people took part in a Scotland-wide survey about gender inequality. Using Houghton's participatory model 20 'Young Advisors' co-designed the project, its tools and analysis, and presented their findings to the Cabinet Secretary and senior policy-makers at Parliament (3.4).

The Everyday Heroes project produced 29 key research findings including (but not limited to) a need to: improve training for police, social work and health professionals on supporting CYP in GBV situations; increase and improve access to services; redesign information and spaces; increase and improve CYP involvement in decision-making about their lives; increase access to consistent specialist support throughout justice process; better implement the right to have CYP's views heard and given due weight in decision-making; provide robust training for professionals to improve early intervention and reduce trauma; and ensure CYP have choice and control over when, how, and if they have contact with an abuser. The CYP participants identified the importance of 'speaking truth to power' and recommended involving CYP in reviews, research, and evaluations that affect their lives, establishing CYP reference groups in the justice system, and increasing the participation of CYP in policy-making processes (3.5, 3.6).

3. References to the research

- 3.1 Houghton, C. (2018) 'Voice Agency, Power: A Framework for young survivors' participation in national domestic abuse policy-making' in Holt, S., Overlien, C. and Devaney, J. (Eds) *Responding to Domestic Violence: Emerging Challenges for Policy, Practise and Research in Europe*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers ISBN 9781785922619 (Can be supplied by HEI on request)
- 3.2 Houghton, C. (2015) 'Young People's Perspectives on Participatory Ethics: Agency, Power and Impact in Domestic Abuse Research and Policy-Making' *Child Abuse Review*, vol. 24, pp. 235–248. DOI: [10.1002/car.2407](https://doi.org/10.1002/car.2407)
- 3.3 Houghton, C. (2016) 'Children and young people experiencing domestic abuse: their priority issues' Impact Briefing Series. June 2016, CRFR (Can be supplied by HEI on request)
- 3.4 Everyday Heroes (2018) 'Executive Summary: A call for action on gender-based violence and gender equality from children and young people'. Published online: <https://everydayheroes.sps.ed.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Executive-Summary.pdf>
- 3.5 Everyday Heroes (2018) 'Service Responses Report'. Published online: <https://everydayheroes.sps.ed.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/everyday-heroes-briefing1-Services.pdf>
- 3.6 Everyday Heroes (2018) 'Justice Report'. Published online: <https://everydayheroes.sps.ed.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/everyday-heroes-briefing2-Justice.pdf>

4. Details of the impact

Houghton's research into children and young people (CYP) and Gender Based Violence (GBV) affects thousands of lives. Despite issues of underreporting, Police Scotland recorded over 60,000 incidents of domestic abuse in 2018-2019. In the most recent Scottish Crime

and Justice Survey (2017-2018), 62% of respondents who had experienced domestic abuse said that children were present during the most recent incident. Houghton's participatory action research, which has underpinned numerous advisory positions and collaborative activities from 2015-2019, raised awareness of children's rights and experiences. Her model has been "*trail-blazing*" for bringing CYP into policy-making processes (5.1, Director of Justice, p.4) and has led to a major policy shift to incorporate CYP experiences and advance policies, laws, and protections for CYP in Scotland.

Changing attitudes towards children's rights and inclusion in GBV policies

Through the VAV-IMPACT research project Houghton (and CYP co-researchers) substantially changed policy-makers' understanding in relation to CYP and GBV. Initially, the VAV-IMPACT project responded to the Scottish Government's consultation on their draft 'Gender Based Violence Strategy' (Equally Safe, 2014), outlining how this version did not acknowledge CYP in GBV nor reflect their experiences and needs. Using Houghton's participatory model, the project then worked closely with Scottish Government policy-makers to share research insights and revise the strategy. The Scottish Government's Equality Unit also contracted Houghton as an Expert Advisor to redraft the strategy and guide the Joint Strategic Board on issues of CYP (5.2).

These actions led to a significant reframing of GBV policies and the inclusion of CYP and children's rights in national strategies and plans for the first time. The 2016 version of the "**Equally Safe Strategy**" now included a definition of GBV that acknowledged that CYP "*are directly or indirectly harmed through violence and abuse perpetrated by adults in their lives.*" (5.3, p.4). Furthermore, throughout the strategy reference to "*women and girls*" was replaced with "*Women, Girls, Children and Young People*"; there was an entirely new section on CYP (referencing Houghton's research), two new objectives that specifically referenced CYP, and revised objectives that now incorporated CYP (5.3, p.2-4).

The Director of Justice characterised the 2016 version as "*significantly better*" than their earlier draft (5.1, p.4) with the then Joint Head of Equality Unit stating "*Dr Claire Houghton's expert advice and action research resulted in significant changes to Scotland's Equally Safe Strategy. A revised version was produced in 2016 to reflect her project's findings and the expert advice provided by both Dr Houghton and the young survivors with whom she worked. Dr Houghton's evidence on the importance of including children/young people ensured both that the strategy was redrafted to incorporate a strong focus on children's rights and that the refreshed gender-based violence definition explicitly included children and young people of all genders as victim/survivors of gender-based violence stating that children see themselves as victims of coercive control, acknowledging the harm it caused living with and leaving abuse and challenging the 'cycle of violence' based on young survivors testimony*" (5.2).

The Scottish Government subsequently adopted Houghton's participatory model to include CYP in the development of the associated **Equally Safe Delivery Plan** by supporting the Everyday Heroes project (5.4, p.1). The project's collaborative approach ensured the findings were drawn upon to shape the development of services and actions. The final Everyday Heroes event in February 2019 involved numerous high level policy-makers, politicians, and COSLA representatives across relevant policy areas who championed the research and its recommendations (5.4, p.3). The Minister for Equalities and Older People highlighted the importance of Houghton's model, and committed to act on the recommendations, "*both in government and in my constituency because we can see very clearly when we work with children and young people to formulate policy we get something that's both motivational, inspirational and gives us what we need to move forward and to take those future actions that we need to change*" (5.5, p.10). Similarly, the Solicitor General committed to "*taking the necessary steps towards implementing all of these incredibly important recommendations... [including] the specific recommendation from Everyday Heroes about an online interactive platform*" (5.5, p.3-4). Subsequently, in 2020 the

Scottish Government commissioned YoungScot (the national organisation for young people) to co-create this platform with young people, with Houghton providing training on her participatory model (5.6).

Influencing and co-creating new legal protections

In 2015 the VAV-IMPACT project also submitted a consultation response on the draft **Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act** drawing on their research and experience (3.4, 3.5, 3.6) to question the inclusion of CYP protections. The project then worked closely with Scottish Government policy-makers to feed research insights and findings into their work (5.7, p.6). The Director of Justice stated that Houghton's participatory research approach and research findings made the bill writing team immediately rethink their initial approach (5.1, p.1).

Subsequently, from 2015-2017, Houghton substantially contributed to this policy-community by working in various advisory roles and formal expert groups. She worked closely with the Director of Justice to discuss the legal aspects of CYP in GBV (5.1), and highlighted children's rights and experiences in key stakeholder forums, such as the Equally Safe Justice Expert Group, the Equally Safe CYP Stakeholder Reference Group, and a new Equally Safe reference group of children's and feminist organisations on the new law (5.2). Through these forums, she worked with children's organisations to substantially advance protections for CYP (5.8, section 4.10). The Cabinet Secretary for Justice acknowledged the influence of these stakeholders in the parliamentary debate and vote (where the Bill passed with cross-party support) (5.9, e.g. p.81). As a result of this collaborative work, whereas the initial draft of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act did not include any reference to CYP, the final version (passed in 2018) now **provides new and greater protections for GBV adult and child victims:**

- Acknowledging the harm caused to CYP through GBV.
- Introducing a new "Statutory Aggravation" in relation to children, meaning that any children affected by domestic abuse will be considered in the proceedings and the perpetrator held to account for the effects of abuse on children.
- Modifying Non Harassment Orders (NHO) to now include children.
- Supporting the inclusion of children's views in legal processes.

The introduction of the 2018 Act garnered national media attention. According to Justice Secretary Humza Yousaf: "*Scotland is leading the way with this ground-breaking legislation, which uniquely recognises the effect of domestic abuse on child victims as well as adults*" (5.10, BBC article). The CEO of Scottish Women's Aid described it as "*fundamentally innovative*" and the "*world's gold standard*" (5.10, The Guardian article). The National Procurator Fiscal for Domestic Abuse stated that, "*[The Act] has a statutory aggravation for offences involving children and I think that's what's so important because for the first time it's recognising that domestic abuse doesn't just affect the immediate victim. It has a massive effect, a really devastating one, on children who can experience it. So the new act is really ground-breaking in recognising the impact on children*" (5.10, Scottish Legal News).

Transforming professional practice and public services

Houghton's research and engagement has led to pragmatic changes to the work undertaken by criminal justice public services:

1. Transforming how the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service understand domestic abuse, recognise children as victims, and acknowledge their right to be heard, through substantial revisions to the **Joint Protocol** with the police to change how police and prosecutors consider, engage with, and support CYP in relation to domestic abuse. The National Procurator Fiscal stated that, "*VAV-IMPACT challenged our thinking and practice about speaking and listening to children and using them as witnesses at court....In the first year of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 being in force, (from*

1st April 2019), 1,065 charges were reported by the police under this legislation to the Procurator Fiscal. A child aggravation was recorded against 251 (24%) of these charges reported and court proceedings were commenced in respect of 98% of charges with a child aggravation. If a person is convicted of a domestic abuse charge with a child aggravation, the court must record this and take this into account when sentencing the person. This legislation really helps to make the harm caused to children experiencing domestic abuse visible and enables the justice system to respond and reflect this in sentencing in criminal cases (5.11).

2. The Scottish Government provided more than GBP800,000 to Police Scotland for training and commissioned 'Safe Lives' charity to **train 14,000 police officers** in Scotland on the new law, including the changes to handling cases involving CYP. In 2018, Houghton advised Safe Lives on the inclusion of CYP in their training processes and the charity has included her research findings in training materials including an online tool (5.12).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 VAV-IMPACT meeting (transcript)

5.2 Joint Head of Equalities Unit, Scottish Government (testimonial)

5.3 Scottish Government: Equally Safe Strategy 2014 v 2016

5.4 COSLA committee report 2019

5.5 Everyday Heroes Final Event (transcript)

5.6 Young Scot (testimonial)

5.7 Scottish Government: draft Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment 2019

5.8 Progressing Human Rights for Children in Scotland report

5.9 Parliamentary debate (Scottish Parliament, 1st February 2018)

5.10 Media Coverage

- BBC Article: ['Ground-breaking' new domestic abuse law comes into force](#)
- Guardian Article: [Scotland set to pass 'gold standard' domestic abuse law](#)
- Scottish Legal News: [Public education campaign to spread awareness of new domestic abuse laws](#)

5.11 National Procurator Fiscal (testimonial)

5.12 Safe Lives Charity (statement)